ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Post-meeting note – Clackmannanshire Council section 102 report

Thursday 18 June 2026

Audit Scotland offices, 8 Nelson Mandela Place, Glasgow

Present:

Jo Armstrong (Chair)
Malcolm Bell
Nichola Brown
Andrew Burns
Andrew Cowie
Carol Evans
Jennifer Henderson
Angela Leitch
Christine Lester
Ruth MacLeod
Mike Neilson
Derek Yule

In attendance:

Sarah Watters – Director for the Accounts Commission
Nikki Bridle – Chief Executive, Clackmannanshire Council
Cllr Ellen Forson – Leader, Clackmannanshire Council

Meeting note

Using an option within its Response Framework, the Commission invited Cllr Forson, Leader of the Council and Nikki Bridle, Chief Executive to a private discussion. Below is a short summary of the key points discussed:

- The Chair emphasised the seriousness with which the Commission approaches its statutory responsibility to secure the annual audit of accounts. While acknowledging the challenges outlined in the report—including changes in audit leadership and council capacity—the Chair stressed the Commission's focus on future improvement and restoring audit delivery.
- The Chief Executive thanked the Commission for the meeting and noted some concern about both the presentation of the reasons for delays and how council capacity had been characterised by auditors in the public session. However, she accepted the need to focus on recovery. She highlighted that relationships with auditors remain positive, with a recent joint "lessons learned" session completed, where reasons for delays in both parties had been discussed to avoid them reoccurring. She also welcomed auditors'

proposals for greater continuity through a smaller, more consistent team and increased on-site presence which seek to address many of the concerns the council has with the audit approach.

- The Leader stated that members were informed of the issues in the Section 102 report but felt more could be done to raise awareness across the full Council regarding their significance and impact. She noted that budget decisions are made based on information considered robust and observed that in previous years there had been limited material differences between unaudited and audited accounts.
- The Leader committed to strengthening governance arrangements by reflecting on the operation of the Audit & Scrutiny Committee; introducing a standing agenda item on audit delivery at full Council to improve awareness and engagement; and supporting members to more actively hold officers to account. The Chief Executive supported this approach and committed to elevating audit matters to full Council.
- The Chief Executive outlined actions taken to stabilise finance staffing. While the position is currently stable, she acknowledged ongoing risks to resilience due to persistent recruitment and retention challenges. She cautioned against offering false assurance on resourcing and noted that, while the Council collaborates with external partners, this work needs to be accelerated to deliver short-term benefits.
- In response to concerns raised in the Annual Audit Report 2023/24 about the impact of capacity on quality, the Chief Executive expressed surprise as there had never been an issue with quality before. She did not believe that competency was a consideration but did acknowledge the need to ensure high-quality information to maintain timely audit completion.
- Commission members reiterated expectations that the Council prioritise recovery planning, ensuring sufficient resources are in place to engage effectively with audit teams from July onwards.
- The Chief Executive confirmed that an audit plan is not yet in place but noted a key joint meeting with auditors scheduled for the week commencing 22 June. She emphasised that recovery planning must take a multi-year perspective, reflecting the scale and complexity of the challenges, rather than focusing solely on 2024/25.