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News release

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Some progress at Comhairle nan Eilean Siar but more needs to be done

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) has made progress over the past year in areas such as finance and performance management but needs to improve its workforce management and other aspects of its work.

A report published today reviews developments at the comhairle since the Accounts Commission reported on its performance in November 2011. At that time, the Commission had 'serious concerns' about the slow pace of improvement at the comhairle and asked Audit Scotland to produce a follow-up report in a year's time.

In its findings, the Commission notes improvements in the comhairle's arrangements for managing performance and finance. The performance management system has the potential to support elected members to monitor and scrutinise the comhairle's performance and impact more effectively.

However, the Commission notes 'with concern' that some areas have not progressed. The comhairle needs to improve how it manages its workforce, including improving the completion of staff appraisals and addressing the rising number of sickness absences. It is also concerning that the comhairle still cannot effectively gauge customer satisfaction.

Chair of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said: "We recognise the progress made by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in some areas. We are encouraged by improvements in finance and managing performance. The new performance management system has the potential to really assist councillors, and this potential is not yet being fully realised.

"However the lack of progress in other areas causes us concern. Significantly, the comhairle needs to improve how it manages its workforce and deliver the improvement plan it put in place in response to the findings of a staff survey. The comhairle needs to increase the pace of change and momentum of improvements; with this in mind, we have asked Audit Scotland to monitor progress at the comhairle and report back to us within 18 months."

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Notes to editors

1: Today's findings follow the Accounts Commission's consideration of the Best Value follow-up audit report compiled by Audit Scotland. The Commission has reported on Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in [November 2011](#) and [August 2006](#).

2. The issues identified in this report will inform the next Assurance and Improvement Plan for the scrutiny of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. Local audit and inspection teams will continue to monitor progress. The Assurance and Improvement Plan enables audit and inspection bodies to work together to target and streamline their work for each council, across Scotland. This involves improving the planning and scheduling of scrutiny activity; developing a single corporate assessment and implementing a shared risk assessment framework.

3. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people. The Audit of Best Value is undertaken by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission. It responds to the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, which gave councils power to promote or improve the well-being of their area and the people living within it and responsibilities including:

- making arrangements which secure Best Value, defined as continuous improvement in the performance of the authority's functions, having regard to efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equal opportunities.
- discharging their duties in a way which contributes to sustainable development
- maintaining a community planning process

- making arrangements for reporting to the public on their performance.

4. The Accounts Commission for Scotland checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend public money properly and effectively.