

News release

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Improvement at Dumfries and Galloway needs to continue

Dumfries and Galloway Council has made good progress and needs to take this further to meet the challenges it is facing, says the Accounts Commission.

A report published today by the local authority watchdog contrasts with a 2009 report which identified serious weaknesses in leadership, management and services.

It now has a clear strategic direction, more effective leadership and better systems for planning, monitoring and continuous improvement.

Dumfries and Galloway is the third largest council area in Scotland. Predominantly rural, it has the lowest wage economy in the country and the working age population is projected to fall against a national increase. The council is the largest employer. Its priorities reflect the needs of the local area and it has maintained these over five different administrations.

Since 2010/11, the council has made £86 million of savings and generally maintained or improved services to the public. It will have to make a further £79 million of savings by 2022/23. The council needs to quickly agree and implement its savings and improvement plans.

The report notes that the council has taken steps to learn lessons from the DG One leisure centre failure. However, it is currently facing more capital project problems with the North West Community Campus in Dumfries.

The improvements at the council have not been consistent across services. Information on service performance needs to improve so that councillors and the public have a clear understanding of trends in the council's performance. The council does not have a council-wide workforce plan and it is important that it puts this in place.

In its findings, the Commission says it is pleased at the good progress made. The council now needs to increase the pace of change to meet substantial financial challenges. Clear leadership is required by councillors and officers to take difficult decisions. Its strong record in community engagement provides an opportunity to work effectively with citizens and communities on shaping future services.

The Commission said it would continue its interest on lessons learned by the council from DG One and on developments relating to the North West Community Campus.

Ronnie Hinds, deputy chair of the Commission, said: "The council has made significant improvements over the last nine years.

"But it faces hard choices about how it provides services in the future as budgets tighten. Meeting this challenge will require clear officer and political leadership and strong corporate management of its services and its transformation programme."

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Notes to editors

1. The 2009 Best Value report on Dumfries and Galloway Council is available [here](#).
2. The Controller of Audit has prepared this report for the Accounts Commission. It is the seventh of the new-style [Best Value Assurance Reports \(BVAR\)](#), which aim to offer a rounded and comprehensive analysis of a council's performance. The new reports cover how effectively councils are managing changes in services; involving the public in decisions; ensuring enough skills and time to deliver clear priorities; and providing clear information so the public can gauge improvement.
3. Until now, some councils may not have had a Best Value audit for a decade or more, whilst others have had several. In future, we aim to ensure all 32 councils will have a BVAR at least once every five years. All councils will continue to have their accounts independently audited annually, leading to a published audit report.
4. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Accounts Commission for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
 - The Accounts Commission is the public spending watchdog for local government. It holds councils and various joint boards and committees in Scotland to account and help them improve. It operates impartially and independently of councils and of the Scottish Government, and meets and reports in public
 - Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland.