

News release

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Highland Council must change to ensure it is financially sustainable

Highland Council must make significant savings and change the way it delivers services to ensure it can live within its financial means.

A report by the Accounts Commission, Scotland's local authority watchdog, says in recent years the council has had a poor record of delivering on savings. It must also increase the current pace of change to realise budget savings of up to £77.3 million by 2023.

At the same time, over the last five years, the performance of many services has declined against national indicators, notably education. The council must also get better at evaluating and reporting on its own performance. This will help Highland Council understand why service performance is falling and drive forward improvement that's necessary for the future.

There have been recent changes within the council, including restructuring the senior management team. With difficult decisions to make, it is essential that councillors continue to work together constructively and involve staff and local communities.

Andrew Burns, member of the Accounts Commission says, "This report makes clear the very challenging financial position faced by the council and changes to the way services are delivered are vital. It is reassuring that change is now happening more quickly and it is really important that this momentum is maintained. It will, however, be very challenging for the council to meet all of its commitments and priorities.

Given the urgent nature of the issues raised in our report, the Accounts Commission will maintain a close interest in the progress made by Highland Council."

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Notes to editors

1. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Accounts Commission. 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.
2. Best Value Assurance reports, prepared for the Accounts Commission, offer a rounded and comprehensive analysis of a council's performance. These 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.