

News release

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Progress made, but challenges remain at Moray Council

Moray Council has made progress in some important areas to address financial stability and having plans in place to tackle poor performing services. Challenges remain, however, as it seeks to deliver strategic change. Progress also continues to be hindered by some poor working relationships among some councillors.

In today's follow-up report, the Accounts Commission says Moray Council has in place many fundamental components needed to deliver crucial improvements. This has been achieved during a challenging period, managing the impacts of Covid-19 well. Improvements include: increasing money set aside for unexpected costs; reprioritising transformation projects and improving how it understands and manages performance. But the Accounts Commission do not have assurance momentum to sustain and make change will be maintained.

Strong collective leadership expected from councillors is not being demonstrated. Councillors have a responsibility to work together, constructively, to improve the lives of local people. There needs to be effective decision-making and scrutiny of this decision-making. This remains a central issue in addressing tensions and poor working relationships between councillors, and between councillors and senior council staff. They should continue to seek external support to deal with this. The Commission is clear - the continuing lack of agreement on how this can be achieved is not acceptable.

Moray Council needs to continue to ensure it has the right skills and sufficient staff to achieve its aims, with clear plans to transform and improve services. There is a real risk the council will not be able to agree a sustainable financial model to implement this service delivery.

Tim McKay, Interim Deputy Chair of the Accounts Commission, said: "There has been progress at Moray Council, but all councillors have a responsibility to work together to successfully deliver strategic change in order to improve services and the lives of local people.

"With council elections taking place in May, both returning and new councillors need to use this report as a platform for change. We expect progress to be made within a year of these elections. Difficult decisions must be made collectively, above all for the benefit of those living and working in Moray."

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Notes to editors

1. The Accounts Commission will continue to monitor progress made and will report again after mid-2023.
2. All reports by the Accounts Commission and Auditor General 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.
3. The work for this audit was done during the current Covid-19 emergency. The Commission recognises the significant pressures under which local government finds itself in this current situation. Equally the Commission is of the firm view that the principles of sound financial management, good governance, public accountability and transparency remain vital.
 4. 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.