

News release on behalf of the Accounts Commission

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Faster reform needed to protect key services

Councils have been transforming how they operate and deliver services for many years.

Now reform is increasingly urgent – councils have never faced such acute challenges, putting budgets and workforce under severe stretch and strain. Councils and key partners must significantly increase the pace and scale of major changes if they are to protect vital public services.

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) and the Improvement Service have established an ambitious sector-led Transformation Programme. This represents a positive change to how councils work towards transformation. But work is at an early stage, and there are significant risks around workforce capacity and skills to realise ambitions, given the need to continue delivering vital services every day.

Councils cannot deliver the required reforms alone. It is essential that all relevant public bodies, including the Scottish Government, alongside community planning partners, third sector and communities, recognise the urgent need to collaborate to help deliver the change needed. A determination from both Scottish and Local Government to deliver on the commitments made in the Verity House Agreement is also critical. This will support the development and delivery of local government transformation, helping secure future local services and finances.

Jennifer Henderson, Accounts Commission member said:

“Local government has been transforming how they deliver services for years. But given growing demand and ongoing financial pressures, councils must now move with an ambition and pace we’ve not yet seen if they’re going to successfully address the financial sustainability, workforce and service challenges they’re facing.

“To protect vital services, to pivot to prevention and increase the pace of collaboration, councils must commit to and sustain their own transformation programmes, whilst collaborating with sector-led work.”

“Successful delivery of transformation programmes is essential to achieve financial sustainability and improve the lives of individuals and communities. Collaborating with others, both within and out with local government, will be a key part of the solution.”

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Notes to Editor:

1. This report is part of a series of outputs produced by the Accounts Commission, providing an independent overview of the local government sector. It provides an insight into how the sector is responding to a key challenge currently facing local government. The report follows on from: [Local](#)

[government in Scotland: Financial bulletin 2022/23](#), [Local government budgets 2024/25](#) and [Local government blog on benchmarking and performance](#). It also draws on local Best Value audit work and the Accounts Commission's wider work programme.

2. The Accounts Commission holds councils and local government bodies in Scotland to account and helps them improve. It operates impartially and independently of councils and of the Scottish Government and meets and reports in public.
3. 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.
4. All reports by the Accounts Commission and Auditor Scotland published since 2000 are available on the [Audit Scotland website](#).