

News release on behalf of the Accounts Commission - reporting independently on the performance of local government in Scotland.

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Renfrewshire must improve engagement with communities to rebuild trust

Renfrewshire Council faces significant challenges in rebuilding the trust of local people, following failings in providing school accommodation for Dargavel Village that will cost £60 million to rectify.

An Accounts Commission report on how the council has responded to an independent review of the issue says that since the primary school project, the council has now failed to engage appropriately or transparently with communities over the expansion of secondary school provision. This risks repeating past mistakes and further undermining public trust and confidence.

Audit work found that, overall, the council has effective governance arrangements in place, and an action plan to address the numerous specific failings identified in the independent review. However, the Commission says these actions must be implemented quickly and transparently, particularly those regarding leadership, scrutiny and governance, and that the council must show it is engaging better with its communities.

The Commission has asked auditors to urgently investigate a range of issues at the council by June 2024. It reserves the right to hold a public hearing if it is not satisfied with the findings.

Andrew Burns, Member of the Accounts Commission said:

“The multiple, negative impacts of poor decision-making, and a culture that meant warnings were not heeded, continue to be felt within the local community. This potentially affects the education of hundreds of children and will cost an estimated £60 million to rectify. Further, this will exacerbate an already tough financial situation for the council, and it will need to make difficult decisions about prioritising its spending.

“It appears to the community that no one has been held to account for these significant failings until now. We have therefore asked for assurance on a range of issues, and if we fail to get that we reserve the right to hold a public hearing into the council.”

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Notes to Editor:

1. Following its January meeting, Accounts Commission members have instructed auditors to focus on a number of key areas and report back by June 2024. These are:
 - The Council's review of its approach to community engagement.

- Its approach to consultation on the additional primary school at Dargavel, and other decisions on the school estate.
 - The Council's work on understanding the wider service impacts on the failings regarding school capacity.
 - The Council's reviews of scrutiny and risk management, and its leadership development programme.
 - The process followed and factors taken into account by the council in considering disciplinary action against senior staff, and its approach and policy on performance management and accountability.
2. Further detail on the Bowles Report can be found on [Renfrewshire Council's website](#).
 3. This report has been published under Section 102 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. Under Section 102, the Controller of Audit can bring matters arising from the audit to the attention of the Accounts Commission and the public as they deem appropriate. The Commission can also require the Controller of Audit to report on a specific issue or a council's accounts.
 4. 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.
 5. 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.
 6. All reports by the Accounts Commission and Auditor Scotland published since 2000 are available on the [Audit Scotland website](#).