

Accounts Commission calls for change to improve local government performance

The Accounts Commission, the public spending watchdog for local government, has said that councils in Scotland must change the way they operate. They recommend particularly that councils collaborate with partners to improve their services.

The commission said that during the pandemic councils worked well with partners and they must learn lessons from that time to cope with reduced budgets, a demographic which is ever-increasing, along with workforce pressures and declining performance in some areas.

The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) are urged to agree a New Deal for local government. By setting aside monies for national priorities councils are constrained from making decisions which best address local communities.

The commission observed that few councils work together to provide services jointly.

Tim McKay, Acting Chair of the Accounts Commission said: "The New Deal for local government, agreed between the Scottish

Government and COSLA, is long overdue. Putting this in place will give councils longer-term financial stability, supporting them to make decisions and make the fundamental changes that are urgently needed.

“Councils have gone beyond the point where making savings is enough. If the change needed doesn’t happen now, some services will continue to get worse or deeper cuts will be made. This will impact communities and individuals that are already at crisis point with the effects of inequality and persistently high poverty.

“Councils need to have open and honest conversations with their communities and staff about the future of council services.”

Political responses

Scottish Labour Local Government spokesperson Mark Griffin said “This stark report lays bare the scale of crisis facing local government after years of cuts and centralisation by the SNP and the Greens.

“A perfect storm of mounting pressures and dwindling resources has left Councils at breaking point, and lifeline services are under threat as a result.

“The SNP-Green government need to stop robbing funding from communities and work with Councils to deliver a sustainable future for services.

“Scottish Labour’s plans to empower local communities would push power out of Holyrood and deliver a fair funding deal so Councils can deliver the change their communities need.”

Scottish Liberal Democrat communities and economy spokesperson Willie Rennie MSP said: “Local government sits right at the bottom of the list for the SNP-Green Government, and those who

bear the brunt are the ones already struggling to make ends meet.

“When local services are cut, people wait longer for care services, children don’t get the support they need and cars get damaged by ever-larger potholes.

“Scottish Liberal Democrats want to see that tide of failure reversed. The government must kickstart that by scrapping its planned takeover of social care and finally giving councils the help they’re crying out for.”

All reports by the Accounts Commission and Auditor General published since 2000 are available on the [Audit Scotland website](#).