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News release

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Early signs of progress at Argyll and Bute but more work is needed

Argyll and Bute Council has responded constructively to a critical report but much more work is required to secure the improvements needed at the local authority, says the Accounts Commission.

A follow-up report published today charts what has been done since October 2013, when the Commission voiced serious concerns about risks to the council from political instability, inadequate leadership and scrutiny.

Though the Commission has noted the initial steps taken to address these concerns, it has urged the council to continue making progress on an action plan agreed by the local authority earlier this year. The Commission wants to be assured that scrutiny, working relationships, and political management have been strengthened as improvement work continues, and has requested a further review by Audit Scotland by the end of next year.

Whilst the leadership of the council is now more stable, the situation remains fragile. A newly introduced structure for the political management of the council provides a foundation for improved governance. Shared understanding of these arrangements and effective communication are required to ensure they fulfil their potential.

Scrutiny also needs to improve, and councillors must be willing to engage with that process.

Accounts Commission chair Douglas Sinclair said: "We welcome the steps the council has taken so far, but there is a very long way to go before necessary changes are embedded and the serious problems highlighted last year are fully addressed.

"Difficult decisions lie ahead, particularly with regards to reducing finances, which will undoubtedly test the improvements made by the council. The council must continue to work together - elected members and officers - to build upon the progress made to date."

"The Commission will continue to monitor developments at Argyll and Bute and has requested a further update on progress from Audit Scotland by the end of 2015."

For further information contact Kirsty Gibbins, Communications Officer, on 0131 625 1658 or by email to kjibbins@audit-scotland.gov.uk

Notes to editors

1. The Controller of Audit has prepared this follow-up report for the Accounts Commission.
2. The previous report from October 2103 is [available here](#). A delegation from the Commission visited Lochgilphead in February to discuss the report with councillors and officers.
3. 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.

4. 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.