

Accounts Commission

Statutory Report: Argyll and Bute Council

Commission Findings

The Commission accepts the Controller of Audit's report on Argyll and Bute Council.

The Commission is seriously concerned about substantial risks to the Council caused by the instability of leadership by elected members since the last council election. The Council's ability to set and maintain a clear strategic direction is at risk of being compromised and the Commission is concerned that this will, in time, negatively affect the services that the Council provides for the people of Argyll and Bute. We are also concerned about the negative effect that this is having on the Council's reputation.

The quality of leadership of the Council has been inadequate. We urge the elected members and the corporate management team to work together to provide stronger and effective leadership of the Council. Effective working relationships between elected members, and between members and officers, need to be based upon mutual trust, respect and transparency. Elected members need to achieve a more effective balance between focusing on local issues and priorities and the longer term strategic objectives of the Council and the best interests of the whole community of Argyll and Bute.

The Commission underlines the importance of the role of Monitoring Officer in supporting good governance. The role needs to be afforded trust and respect. Equally, members must have confidence in the comprehensiveness of information provided by officers to enable them to make considered decisions.

The Council's current political management arrangements are not fit for purpose. The role that the full Council plays is unsustainable and progress in securing effective scrutiny arrangements has been inadequate.

We are encouraged that the Council recognises the need to change its political decision-making structures: it is crucial that the conclusions awaited from the short life working group established in this regard are considered carefully by the Council. We await with interest to see how this is taken forward. Any new structure needs to be understood by all who fulfil a role in those structures, and all members need to engage fully in the new arrangements.

The challenges faced by Argyll and Bute Council are not unique. We are therefore pleased to note that the Council recognises the value in seeking support from external sources: we would urge that this continue to be exploited through, for example, the use of peer support. We underline the importance of training and development support for all members. Elected members and officers must work together to ensure fuller use of - and participation in - such support.

There is much work to be done by the Council and we note a further recent change in the Council's political leadership. The Commission expects urgent progress to be made in early course. We require a further report by the Controller of Audit on the progress made by the Council over the next six months.