

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Assistant Director - People
to Audit and Governance Panel
of 1 September 2021**

**Subject: Audit Scotland: Local Government in Scotland
 Overview 2021**

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Panel of the Audit Scotland report 'Local Government in Scotland Overview 2021'.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Panel:

2.1.1 considers the content of the Audit Scotland report attached as [Appendix 1](#), including the recommendations; and

2.1.2 agrees any further specific actions for the Panel or recommendations for Members generally.

3. Background

3.1 The Accounts Commission issued a report that had been prepared by Audit Scotland entitled 'Local Government in Scotland Overview 2021'.

3.2 The report is intended to inform the public and its representatives and, in particular, to support local government Councillors and senior Council officers in their complex and demanding roles.

3.3 The report highlighted the profound impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on all aspects of society, including the economy, jobs, and the physical and mental health of the public. As a consequence of this impact, the report highlights the key messages as being:

3.3.1 Relationships with communities have been vital;

3.3.2 Levels of service disruption have varied;

3.3.3 Some services were delivered virtually;

3.3.4 The workforce demonstrated the versatility to take on new roles;

3.3.5 There were significant changes in Council governance structures and process;

- 3.3.6 Councils continue to face significant financial challenges, and these have been exacerbated by the pandemic;
- 3.3.7 The Scottish Government has provided substantial additional financial support, but the nature and timing of funding has created further challenges for Councils. The Council will continue to focus on the need to ensure the Scottish Government provides sufficient additional funding to enable the Council's continuing response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- 3.3.8 Councils have started to plan for longer term recovery from the crisis; and
- 3.3.9 There has been some ongoing learning resulting from the emergency response to the pandemic.
- 3.4 The report considers the initial response phase of the pandemic from March 2020, and financial data correct as at the end of February 2021.
- 3.5 The report highlights that the Covid-19 pandemic has put into clear focus the pivotal role of Councils in delivering not only the day-to-day services that communities rely on, but also in responding to risks. It emphasises the essential importance of effective leadership, good governance and good financial management for all councils.
- 3.6 The report identified additional Covid-19 actions and responsibilities that Councils responded to such as:
- support to communities;
 - business support grant administration and distribution;
 - infrastructure amendments;
 - advice services;
 - staff redeployment; and
 - virtual service delivery.
- 3.7 The report recognises the significant disruption to education throughout the periods of lockdown resulting in an adverse effect on many children and young people. The move to home learning has been challenging for many families and has led to loss of learning and loss of school experiences.
- 3.8 Covid-19 has also had a significant impact on young carers, many of whom have had to take on additional caring responsibilities during lockdown. These young people provide essential care for their families, often 24 hours a day, and this can lead to challenges in maintaining their social, educational, and economic wellbeing, as well as their physical and mental health.
- 3.9 The report notes that the financial impact of Covid-19 has been substantial for many individuals and families. Over half of families in receipt of Universal Credit or Child Tax Credit in Scotland have had to borrow money since the start of the crisis.
- 3.10 The report also highlights the multi-layered approach Councils made to people shielding whereby checks were made to determine whether they needed assistance such as food or medical provision, digital support or financial help.

3.11 The distribution of digital devices to school pupils during lockdown periods to support distant learning was seen as a positive move made by many Councils.

4. Proposals

4.1 It is proposed that the panel considers the recommendations as set out in Section 2 of this report.

5. Legal and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Not applicable.

7. Human Resources Implications

7.1 Not applicable.

8. Risk

8.1 Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations

8.1.1 There are no risks associated with adopting the recommendations.

8.2 Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations

8.2.1 Rejecting the recommendations may impact on the reputation of the Council.

9. Equalities

9.1 The proposals in this report allow scrutiny of performance. The report does not involve proposals for policies, strategies, procedures, processes, financial decisions and activities (including service delivery), both new and at review, that affect the Council's communities and employees, therefore an equality impact assessment is not required.

10. Sustainable Development Implications

10.1 ***Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*** This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme or strategy or document otherwise described which could be considered to constitute a plan, programme, policy or strategy.

11. Options Appraisal

11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

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12. Link to Council Plan

- 12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to delivery of all of the Council's strategic objective 'Effective Leadership that Promotes Fairness' and the commitment that 'Councillors will provide effective governance and leadership'.

13. Results of Consultation

- 13.1 There has been no public consultation on the contents of this report.
- 13.2 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Peter Henderson, Portfolio Holder for Corporate, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

Background Papers **None**

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