

WORKING News release

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Well-performing West Lothian needs councillors to play more prominent role

West Lothian Council has maintained its strong performance but councillors need to play a more active role in the face of a £73.5m funding gap, says the Accounts Commission.

A new report published today by the local authority spending watchdog charts the council's progress since 2005.

The Best Value Assurance report notes the council's:

- strong vision;
- well-established processes for capturing local people's views;
- effective management of its finances;
- and its improved outcomes for local people, especially in education.

However, the report says the significant changes to service delivery needed to bridge the council's £73.5m funding gap over the next five years "may be difficult to deliver."

Earlier councillor involvement in identifying spending priorities would, the report says, have reduced the council's risk of failing to deliver budget savings on time.

In its findings, the Commission says councillors need to play "a more prominent role" in responding to budget challenges. And it calls for all elected members to be involved in effectively scrutinising the council's policy priorities and overall performance.

The watchdog also notes the need for greater transparency around the council's governance arrangements with West Lothian Leisure to ensure proper scrutiny of its finances and performance.

The report highlights that the council is facing Scotland's highest projected rates of increase in older people by 2039, particularly over-75s. The latter group is forecast to rise by 130.8 per cent compared to the overall Scottish figure of 85.4 per cent.

Graham Sharp, chair of the Accounts Commission, said: "West Lothian Council continues to maintain its strong performance and we are pleased that outcomes are improving for local people.

"As with other local authorities, the council faces substantial budget challenges. And for that reason it is crucial that all elected members play a more active role in scrutiny of policy priorities and performance."

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Notes to Editors:

1. The Controller of Audit has prepared this report for the Accounts Commission for Scotland. It is published alongside the [Annual Audit Report](#) for West Lothian council which goes into more detail on the matters raised.
2. Previous reports on West Lothian Council are available [here](#).
3. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
 - 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
 - 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.