

News release

Embargoed until 00:01 hours, Thursday 1 November 2018

East Lothian makes good progress as testing times lie ahead

East Lothian Council has improved significantly but faces big challenges with a rising population, says the Accounts Commission.

A new report today by the local authority watchdog looks back to a highly critical report in 2007 which highlighted various failings, including leadership, openness and financial planning at the council. East Lothian's population grew by nearly 20 per cent between 1997 and 2017, the fastest growing council area in Scotland, and is set to expand further, particularly among children and the over 75s.

The report says improvements have been made across the board in governance, leadership, scrutiny and transparency in decision making. Financial management is effective, and East Lothian has a good track record in delivering services within budget.

The council is working well with local communities and partners and needs to maintain that focus, given the challenges it faces. It also performs generally well compared to similar councils, although there are areas of underperformance in education. Renewed efforts have been made in recent years to address areas of concern, such as high exclusion rates and numeracy levels.

East Lothian has planned well so far for the anticipated population growth and the need to meet a £12.5 million funding gap over the next three years.

In its findings, the Commission said it was pleased by progress since 2007. Some improvement actions are at an early stage and will require continued momentum to achieve expected outcomes.

Strong leadership by councillors and officers will be vital in meeting substantial challenges the council faces. It needs to maintain the current pace of improvement, particularly in education services, effective scrutiny and improved reporting of performance to councillors and the public.

Graham Sharp, chair of the Accounts Commission, said: "East Lothian Council has come a long way since 2007 and now has a sound foundation to continue to provide good services.

"But it faces testing times ahead, not least from the rising demands from an expanding population"

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Notes to editors

1. The 2007 Best Value report on East Lothian Council is available [here](#).
2. The Controller of Audit has prepared this report for the Accounts Commission. It is the latest of the new-style [Best Value Assurance Reports \(BVAR\)](#), which aim to offer a rounded and comprehensive analysis of a council's performance. The new reports cover how effectively councils are managing changes in services; involving the public in decisions; ensuring enough skills and time to deliver clear priorities; and providing clear information so the public can gauge improvement.

3. Until now, some councils may not have had a Best Value audit for a decade or more, whilst others have had several. In future, we aim to ensure all 32 councils will have a BVAR at least once every five years. All councils will continue to have their accounts independently audited annually, leading to a published audit report.

4. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Accounts Commission for Scotland. 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.