

Minutes of Meeting of the
Accounts Commission held in the
offices of Audit Scotland, 110
George Street on Wednesday 9
February 2005 at 10.30am.

PRESENT: A MacNish (Chair)
A Alexander
J Baillie
J Couper
K Geddes
A Leslie
I Low
P McKinlay
I Robertson

IN ATTENDANCE: C Gardner, Deputy Auditor General and Controller of Audit
D Pia, Director of Performance Audit (Local Government)
D McGiffen, Director of Corporate Services (item 10)
W F Magee, Secretary

<u>Item No</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1.	Apologies
2.	Minutes
3.	Financial Audit and Assurance Committee
4.	Chair's Introduction
5.	COSLA
6.	Members' Training
7.	Deputy Auditor General
8.	Commission Strategy
9.	Local Taxation in Scotland
10.	Audit Scotland Finance and Performance Information
11.	Review of Statutory Performance Indicators
12.	Best Value Audits

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were intimated from Owen Clarke, Ann Faulds, Hugh Hall and Mahendra Raj.

2. Minutes

The minutes of meeting of 8 December 2004 were submitted and approved.

3. Financial Audit and Assurance Committee

There were submitted the minutes of meeting of the Financial Audit and Assurance Committee held on 2 December 2004. The Committee noted the minutes and approved the recommendations contained therein.

4. Chair's Introduction

Alastair MacNish referred to a number of matters of current interest –

- The proposed meeting with Tom McCabe MSP, Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform, will take place on 22 February
- There has been an exchange of correspondence with ACPOS concerning the Commission's publication of statutory performance indicators relating to the Police Service
- The Commission's sponsor branch in the Scottish Executive has intimated that the pay uprate of 2% for NDPB chairs and board members will not be applied to the remuneration of Commission members in 2004/5 because of the remuneration increase of June 2004
- He will attend CIPFA's Annual Dinner in London on 24 February 2005 to represent the Commission.

5. COSLA

The Commission agreed that Commission members should have the facility to attend elements of the COSLA Conference to be held at the St Andrews Bay Hotel from 13-15 April 2005 as an opportunity to engage with senior members and officers in Scottish local government.

6. Members' Training

Isabelle Low referred to the members' training day held on 8 February 2005 to prepare for public hearings on Best Value reports. The event was successful and highlighted a number of issues for consideration and these will be the subject of a further report by the Secretary at a later date.

7. Deputy Auditor General

Caroline Gardner advised the Commission of a number of matters of current interest

- The role to be played by audit in verifying the outcome of the Efficiency in Government Initiative is under discussion with the Scottish Executive. The Commission agreed that the finalisation of the remit of audit in this context be remitted to the Chair and the Deputy Auditor General in consultation
- By prior agreement the Scottish Executive announced that it will discuss with the Accounts Commission how it might provide assurance on local authorities'

arrangements for the control of parades and marches in line with the report by Sir John Orr.

8. Commission Strategy

There was submitted a report by the Secretary referring to the discussions at the Commission Strategy Seminar in December and enclosing a revised draft Strategy document. In discussion a number of points were made –

- Additional emphasis should be placed on the need for local authorities to work in partnership in order to deliver Best Value
- The paragraph on the intended outcomes of the Best Value audit should include a reference to the development of local authority action plans for improvement
- Consideration should be given to a bullet point summary at the beginning of the document, based on issues arising from the Strategy Seminar.

Thereafter the Commission agreed –

- i. members should pass on any detailed comments on the text to the Secretary individually;
- ii. the document, revised to take account of the comments above, should now be finalised and printed for distribution.

9. Local Taxation in Scotland

There was submitted a report by the Director of Audit Strategy advising the Commission that the Local Government Finance Review Committee, which includes John Baillie amongst its members, has issued a consultation paper to inform its work, seeking views on various options and the effects of each of them. A copy of the consultation paper was attached to the report.

After discussion the Commission agreed to make a response to the consultation paper on the areas outlined in the Director's report and requested that a draft of a response be prepared for its next meeting.

10. Audit Scotland Financial and Performance Information

The Director of Corporate Services circulated a revised report presenting financial and performance information for Audit Scotland to 31 December. She outlined the principal points of interest. The Commission noted the report.

11. Review of Statutory Performance Indicators

There was submitted a report by the Director of Performance Audit (Local Government) referring to the Commission's desire to review the approach to statutory performance indicators and advising that a consultancy firm has been commissioned to assist in that review. After a discussion concerning Audit Scotland's practice in benchmarking consultancy costs, the Commission noted the report.

12. Best Value Audits

With reference to paragraph 9 of the minutes of meeting of 9 June 2004 when the Commission agreed that a number of members be linked with individual councils in the context of the Best Value audit, the Commission agreed a revised list of members to be linked with councils as follows –

Council	Members	
North Ayrshire	Alan Alexander	Ann Faulds
Shetland	Keith Geddes	Owen Clarke
Inverclyde	Isabelle Low	Iain Robertson
Stirling	Keith Geddes	Peter McKinlay
West Lothian	Jean Couper	Alyson Leslie
Dundee	Alastair MacNish	John Baillie