

Minutes of Meeting of the
Accounts Commission held in the
offices of Audit Scotland, 110
George Street, Edinburgh on
Wednesday 14 September 2005
at 10.30am

PRESENT: A MacNish (Chair)
A Alexander
J Baillie
J Couper
A Leslie
I Low
M Raj
I Robertson

IN ATTENDANCE: C Gardner, Deputy Auditor General and Controller of Audit
D Pia, Director of Performance Audit (Local Government)
R Nicol, Assistant Director of Performance Audit
G Neill, Audit Manager (Best Value)
W F Magee, Secretary

Item No

Subject

1.

Best Value Audit of Dundee City Council

1. Best Value Audit of Dundee City Council

With reference to paragraph 2 of the minutes of meeting of 30 August 2005 the Commission resumed consideration of the Controller of Audit's report on the Best Value audit of Dundee City Council. After consideration the Commission agreed to make findings on the report as contained in the Appendix to these minutes.

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND
BEST VALUE REPORT ON DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL
COMMISSION FINDINGS

1. The Commission accepts this report on the performance of Dundee City Council's statutory duty to secure Best Value and to initiate and facilitate the Community Planning process. The Commission recognises that the report gives a broad picture of the Council's performance based on the work of Audit Scotland and the findings of other scrutiny bodies such as Inspectorates and that it does not attempt a comprehensive review of all service delivery. We acknowledge the co-operation and assistance given to the audit process by members and officers of the Council.
2. The Commission recognises that Dundee City Council faces a series of complex challenges as a result of the social and economic circumstances of its area. The Council has shown that it has a commitment to regenerating the city and that, in some parts of its business, it is capable of achieving improved performance without always relying on additional resources. It has strengths in partnership working, has made good progress with Community Planning and benefits from a strong track record of working with local people. However, the Commission has concerns that there are issues which the Council must address if it is to be in a position to deliver Best Value.
 - The lack of an effective scrutiny process by elected members which is largely attributable to the fact that all 29 members sit on all 13 committees this makes the independence of view essential to the scrutiny process difficult, if not impossible, to achieve
 - The consistent focus on policy making in private session raises concerns about transparency
 - The need to improve strategic management in a planned way in order to achieve appropriate structures, both at elected member and officer level, and by not simply reacting opportunistically to personnel and political changes
 - The need to relate systematically the Council's policies and priorities to the resources available in order to strengthen its capacity to deliver Best Value
 - The adoption of blanket policy commitments which, taken with pressures on resources, from a declining population/tax base and growing demand for services, severely limit the achievement of Best Value for the people of Dundee
 - Corporate processes which do not adequately support performance management.
3. Overall, the picture is one of contrasts between areas of council activity that have modernised, are successful and are committed to improvement, and other areas which are lagging behind. The Commission is concerned that these issues which relate largely to the corporate centre of the organisation at member and officer level, need to be addressed to achieve continuous improvement in service delivery.

Performance issues highlighted in the report include –

- High staff absence levels, particularly among teachers

- Deteriorating performance in some aspects of children's services and adult social work
 - High cost of council tax collection coupled with a poor collection rate
 - Educational attainment below national and comparator authority averages
 - Slippage of the Public Private Partnership Scheme for new school building and school improvement
 - Measures of home care provision are in the lowest quartile of national figures
 - High percentage of roads that should be considered for repair and spending on structural maintenance.
4. The Commission welcomes the Council's recognition of areas in which improvements need to be focused and looks forward to receiving by 31 October 2005 an Improvement Plan from Dundee City Council which responds to the audit report and these findings. The Commission expects the Council's progress to be monitored through the normal audit process and will pay particular attention to this aspect of any reports by the auditor over the forthcoming years.

September 2005