

Minutes of Meeting of the
Accounts Commission held in the
offices of Audit Scotland, 110
George Street, Edinburgh on
Wednesday 16 November 2005
at 10.30am.

PRESENT: A MacNish (Chair)
A Alexander
O Clarke
J Couper
K Geddes
I Low
P McKinlay
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
W F Magee, Secretary

<u>Item No</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1.	Apologies
2.	Best Value Audit of Inverclyde Council

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of John Baillie, Ann Faulds and Alyson Leslie.

2. Best Value Audit of Inverclyde Council

There was submitted a report by the Secretary introducing the Controller of Audit's progress report on the Best Value audit of Inverclyde Council. The Controller of Audit's report was made to the Commission under section 102(1)(c) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. After discussion the Commission agreed

- i. to make findings as contained in the Appendix to these minutes;
- ii. to require the Controller of Audit to make a further progress report on the Best Value audit of Inverclyde Council as at 31 March 2006, and
- iii. not to seek a meeting with representatives of Inverclyde Council at this stage.

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND
BEST VALUE PROGRESS REPORT ON INVERCLYDE COUNCIL
FINDINGS

1. When the Commission made findings on the Best Value report on Inverclyde Council in June 2005 it required a further report by the Controller of Audit on immediate steps taken by the Council as at 31 October 2005 and the Commission accepts this report as fulfilling that requirement. The Commission recognises that the report gives a broad picture of the Council's performance based on the work of Audit Scotland and 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 accepts the conclusion of the report that the conditions are now in place to expect major change at Inverclyde Council. It also, however, accepts that greater assurance is required on the matters set out in paragraph 35 of the report.
3. In its findings in June the Commission set out its recommendations for the Council to recover and the challenges involved in this level of recovery should not be underestimated. Although the circumstances of the last five months may have limited the tangible progress that could be made, the Commission is concerned about the continued pressure on front-line staff and the need to deliver high quality services to the people of Inverclyde. It is difficult to see how the recovery process can be driven as it should under the present part-time Interim Management Arrangements.
4. It is vital therefore, that the Council increase the momentum of its drive for change. In particular, the Commission urges the Council to –
 - Immediately begin the process for the recruitment of a new Chief Executive and carry it to conclusion as quickly as possible consistent with sound recruitment practices
 - Immediately draw up a robust project plan with key milestones and timescales to cover the next 12-18 months, including measures to address the matters set out in paragraph 35 of the report
 - Ensure that the Interim Management Arrangements are strengthened to address all of the needs of the council at this time.
5. The Commission supports the council in its moves to address the issues but must see action on the important areas outlined above robustly and urgently taken. The Commission will continue to monitor the situation and requires a further report by the Controller of Audit on progress as at 31 March 2006 when it will give consideration to any further measures which need to be taken.