

Minutes of the meeting of the Accounts
Commission held in the Offices of Audit
Scotland, 110 George Street, Edinburgh
on Wednesday 31 January 2007 at
10.30 am

PRESENT: A MacNish (Chair)
A Alexander
J Baillie
A Faulds
K Geddes
I Low

IN ATTENDANCE: C Gardner, Deputy Auditor General and Controller of Audit
D Pia, Director of Public Reporting (Local Government)
M Walker, Portfolio Manager (Best Value)
A McCubbin, Communications Officer
W F Magee, Secretary

<u>Item No</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1.	Apologies
2.	Membership
3.	Best Value Audit of the City of Edinburgh Council

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Owen Clarke, Jean Couper, Alyson Leslie, Mahendra Raj and Iain Robertson.

2. Membership

Alistair MacNish advised the Commission of Alyson Leslie's resignation from membership of the Commission with effect on 31 January 2007. The Commission noted Alyson's resignation with regret and agreed to thank her for her considerable contribution to the work of the Commission and to wish her well for the future.

3. Best Value Audit of the City of Edinburgh Council

There was submitted a report by the Secretary introducing the Controller of Audit's report on the Best Value audit of the City of Edinburgh Council. The Controller of Audit's report was made to the Commission under section 102(1)(c) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. The Controller of Audit answered questions from members. Thereafter the Commission agreed to make findings as contained in the Appendix to these minutes.

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND
BEST VALUE AUDIT OF THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

FINDINGS

1. The Commission accepts this report on the performance of the City of Edinburgh 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. Edinburgh is Scotland's capital and maintains a high national and international profile. The City has a thriving economy and an increasing working age population, in contrast to the national trend. Large numbers of people commute to work from outside Edinburgh and the City has a high number of visitors. While these factors can act to Edinburgh's advantage, they also place significant additional pressures on Council services. In addition, the Council has to manage significant contrasts within the City, between affluent and deprived areas.
3. Edinburgh displays many of the features of a Best Value council.
 - A clear and ambitious vision
 - Corporate planning arrangements which directly connect the vision to service planning and budgeting
 - Clear direction and accountability through modernised political management structures
 - Effective scrutiny arrangements at elected member level
 - Good corporate arrangements for asset management, risk management and performance information
 - Progress in equal opportunities and sustainable development.
4. With these sound corporate arrangements in place the Council should be in a position to secure continuous improvement in the delivery of services. This report demonstrates that there are many examples of good service delivery and that the council's investment in management processes is resulting in improvement where it is required, such as the housing service. However the Council still has work to do to secure improved outcomes for the people of Edinburgh in a number of areas –
 - Three out of nine significant trading operations failed to achieve statutory break even in 2006/6 and two others failed to meet the requirement to break even over a three year rolling period
 - Refuse collection, street cleanliness and road and pavement maintenance services need to improve . Firm plans should be established to test the competitiveness of the refuse collection service
 - Processing of planning applications is below the national target and the national average.
5. We welcome the Council's recognition of the areas in which improvement is needed and we look forward to receiving an Improvement Plan based on the improvement agenda set out in the report.