

Minutes of the meeting of the Accounts Commission held in the offices of Audit Scotland, 110 George Street, Edinburgh on Wednesday 8 August 2007 at 10.30am.

PRESENT: A MacNish (Chair)
A Alexander
M Docherty
A Faulds
D Sinclair

IN ATTENDANCE: C Gardner, Deputy Auditor General and Controller of Audit
D Pia, Director of Public Reporting (Local Government)
W F Magee, Secretary
A McCubbin, Communications Officer
N Bridle, Assistant Director of Public Reporting (Best Value)
(items 6 and 7)
J Lincoln, Project Manager, Public Reporting (item 8)
K Whyte, Performance Auditor, Public Reporting (item 8)
M Alcock, Portfolio Manager, Public Reporting (item 9)
T Drury, Performance Auditor, Public Reporting (item 9)

<u>Item No</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1.	Apologies
2.	Minutes
3.	Chair's Introduction
4.	Deputy Auditor General
5.	Performance Audit Committee
6.	Best Value Audit of Clackmannshire Council
7.	Best Value Audit of the City of Edinburgh Council
8.	Sustainable Waste Management
9.	Police Call Management
10.	Commission Members' Expenses
11.	Future Meetings
12.	Chair

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of John Baillie, Owen Clarke, Jean Couper, Keith Geddes, Isabelle Low, Mahendra Raj and Iain Robertson.

2. Minutes

The minutes of meeting of 4 July 2007 were submitted and approved.

3. Chair's Introduction

The Chair referred to a number of matters of current interest including:

- Forthcoming interviews for the positions of Chair and member of the Commission
- The appointment of Catherine Coull as Secretary to the Commission with effect from 1 October 2007.

4. Deputy Auditor General

Caroline Gardner advised the Commission of arrangements which have been made for further discussion of the handling of the proposed study of Free Personal and Nursing Care with the relevant Cabinet Secretary. The Commission noted the position.

5. Performance Audit Committee

The minutes of meeting of the Performance Audit Committee of 24 July 2007 were submitted and noted and the recommendations contained therein were approved. In discussion of the minutes the Commission emphasised the importance of making clear the purpose and scope of the forthcoming report of the study on Improving the School Estate.

6. Best Value Audit of Clackmannanshire Council

There was submitted a report by the Secretary introducing the Controller of Audit's report on the Best Value audit of Clackmannanshire Council. The report was made by the Controller of Audit under section 102 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. The Controller of Audit and members of the Best Value audit team answered questions by the members of the Commission. Thereafter the Commission made findings as contained in the Appendix to these minutes. The Commission also agreed that Michael Docherty be appointed as a link member for this audit in place of Mahendra Raj.

7. Best Value Audit of the City of Edinburgh Council

There was submitted a note of a meeting of 30 July 2007 between representatives of the Commission and of the City of Edinburgh Council to follow up the Best Value audit of that council. A copy of the Council's Improvement Plan which was agreed by the members of the council on 28 June 2007 accompanied the note. After discussion the Commission agreed:

- i. to note the discussion with the City of Edinburgh and the Improvement Plan as submitted;

- ii. to require that the next Best Value audit of the City of Edinburgh Council be carried out in the normal cycle of Best Value audits, and
- iii. to request that the external auditor of the council give particular attention to the key issues arising from the Best Value audit and the meeting with the council in the course of the annual audit process.

8. Sustainable Waste Management

With reference to paragraph 8 of the minutes of meeting of 4 July 2007 there was submitted a report by the Director of Public Reporting (Local Government) introducing a redrafted final report of the study on Sustainable Waste Management, together with a separate key messages paper. In discussion reference was made to the finding in the report concerning the use of option appraisals in relation to recycling systems and the view was expressed that the recommendation concerning option appraisals should apply to all aspects of the process, not only recycling. Thereafter the Commission agreed to welcome the redrafted report and to approve it for publication.

9. Police Call Management

There was submitted a report by the Director of Public Reporting (Local Government) introducing a draft final report and separate key messages paper arising from the study of Police Call Management. The Commission was advised of the views of a number of members not present at the meeting. In discussion of the report a number of points were made:

- It is important to be clear about the scope of this study which is limited to the management of calls to police and does not cover incident management
- Emphasis should be placed on the lack of a national strategic approach by the Scottish Executive to the allocation of the capital investment in police call management
- There should be a clearer emphasis on governance issues, particularly the role of police authorities who have a strategic part to play in such issues
- Consideration should be given to including timescales in the recommendations.

Thereafter the Commission approved the report for publication subject to the above comments and the approval of the final text with the study sponsors.

10. Commission Members' Expenses

There was submitted a report by the Secretary advising the Commission of a new regime for the payment of expenses to members. The report referred to the stipulation by Scottish Ministers that Commission members' expenses and allowances are to be those payable to councillors in Scotland and referred to the introduction of new regulations for such allowances and expenses following the introduction of the new system for the remuneration of councillors from May 2007. The report outlined the new scheme and referred to the tax implications of the new mileage rate. The Commission noted the report.

11. Future Meetings

The Commission agreed:

- i. that the question of moving the regular meeting date for the Commission and its committees be continued pending the appointment of a new Chair, and

- ii. that the next meeting of the Commission due to be held on Wednesday 12 September be provisionally moved to Thursday 13 September.

12. Chair

Alan Alexander referred to the forthcoming retirement of Alastair MacNish as Chair of the Commission and, on behalf of the members, expressed appreciation for the leadership, tact and skill shown by Alastair in that role and for the significant achievements of the Commission during his term of office. Alastair MacNish responded and in particular thanked the members for their conscientious efforts and for their support.

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND
BEST VALUE AUDIT OF CLACKMANNANSHIRE COUNCIL
FINDINGS

1. The Commission accepts this report on the performance of Clackmannanshire 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 Council faces a number of significant challenges which are specific to its situation. They arise from the scale of the council, the social and economic circumstances of its area and its geographical location and transport links. The council's progress towards Best Value has not matched its aspirations due to its limited capacity, high numbers of priorities and lengthy improvement agenda.
3. To achieve Best Value the council needs to improve aspects of its corporate activity, including:
 - Effective leadership by elected members
 - Sharper prioritisation and clearer articulation of vision, priorities and policies with resource decisions
 - Consistent vision in corporate and community plans
 - Political structures which give clarity on roles and responsibilities
 - A coherent approach to competition in relation to service delivery mechanisms
 - Development of a Human Resources strategy.
4. The council has successful achievements to its name in a number of areas of service provision such as child and adult care, recycling, traffic light repair and dealing with planning applications and noise complaints. There are areas where it needs to improve, including educational attainment, aspects of housing, respite care, food hygiene and trading standards inspections, cultural and community services and refuse complaints. It also needs to make urgent progress in implementing Single Status for its workforce and in the collection of Council Tax.
5. The council has shown that it can work with others, particularly in the development of its community planning partnership. Because of issues of scale and capacity, it is vital that it now places the highest priority on more joint working, sharing management and service delivery arrangements with others, particularly other councils. We look forward to receiving an improvement plan from the council which addresses the questions raised in the Best Value report and these findings and sets realistic timescales for developing the joint working referred to above.