

Press release

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Councils report increasing amounts of waste recycled, but need to redouble efforts

An Accounts Commission report published today says that while the percentage of waste that was recycled and composted in 2003/04 rose to just over 12%, there is still a long way to go to meet the Scottish Executive target of 25% by 2006. Councils also have much to do to meet the target to reduce the amount of biodegradable waste going to landfill to 1.5 million tonnes by 2006. The figure rose again slightly last year to 1.8 million tonnes. The level of waste collected by Scottish councils is increasing.

The report also provides performance information on a range of other council services including food hygiene inspections, planning applications, road and traffic light repairs and noise complaints.

Accounts Commission Chairman, Alastair MacNish says:

"Councils provide a range of important services that impact on our environment and none more directly than waste management. It is good to see the investment in recycling schemes beginning to show dividends. However, there is evidence that as a nation we are generating more waste and this poses a real challenge for councils in the coming years."

The main findings of today's report are as follows:

- Councils collected 3.3 million tonnes of waste in 2003-04, 3% more than the previous year.
- Of this they recycled and composted 12.3%, an increase of 2.7% compared with the previous year. The target for councils is to recycle 25% by 2006.
- Councils sent 1.8 million tonnes of biodegradable waste to landfill. The target is to reduce this figure to 1.5 million tonnes by 2006 but the 2003-04 figure reflects a small increase from 1.78 million tonnes on the previous year.
- Across Scotland, the average gross cost of refuse collection per property was £52.59, a 4% increase on the previous year. The cost of refuse disposal was £58.43 per property, an increase of 6% which reflects increasing investment in waste management and re-cycling schemes.
- Over 94% of food hygiene inspections within the higher risk properties were carried out within the target times, a similar percentage to previous years. Twenty-five of the 32 councils carried out at least nine in every ten inspections within the target time.
- Councils received slightly over 10,300 noise complaints. They dealt with 2,300 at first point of contact to the satisfaction of the complainer. 8,000 required further investigation. Overall, 65% of complaints were settled within 14 days. In 2003/04, 64% of all planning applications were determined within two months, a 3% reduction on the previous year. Clackmannanshire was the only council to meet the Scottish Executive's target of 80%.
- Across Scotland, around 45% of the road network is either in need of repair or requiring further investigation. The proportion varied widely between councils from 23% in West Lothian to 62% in Edinburgh. Councils reported that they carried out 94% of repairs to faulty street lights within seven days, a 3% increase compared with the previous year. 93% of repairs to traffic lights were carried out within 48 hours, which continues the year-on-year improvement over the past six years.

Accounts Commission Chairman, Alastair MacNish continues:

“The Commission monitored a range of council services for the period 2003/04, including roads maintenance, environmental health and planning and found mixed progress to have been made across the board. We will continue to look for improvement in future years, particularly with regard to planning services where there was some slippage in the proportion of applications dealt with within the target time”.

A separate pamphlet relating to progress within Education & Children’s services was also published today and is available on the Audit Scotland web-site or by contacting the press office.

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Notes to Editors

1. The Accounts Commission is responsible for securing the audit of 32 Scottish councils and 34 joint boards, including police and fire services. The Commission investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Accounts Commission is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.
2. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland.
3. Since 1993/94 councils have been required by law to provide information on how well they are carrying out their activities. Under the Local Government Act 1992 the Accounts Commission has to decide what information councils provide. The information for 2003/04 is the eleventh annual comparison of council performance. It provides important benchmarks against which performance will continue to be measured in future years.
4. Information considered by an authority’s appointed auditor to be unreliable has been excluded from the Scotland figures.
5. This pamphlet, published today, relates to Environmental and Regulatory Services. It is the fifth in a series of six pamphlets comparing the performance, over a range of services, achieved by all 32 Scottish councils, eight fire brigades and eight police forces. A further pamphlet *Education and Children’s services* is published today. *Police and Fire services* was published on 10 December 2004. *Cultural & Community services* and also *Corporate Management* were published on 13 January. *Housing and Social Work Services* (this covers adult social work services) was published on 27 January. All of these reports are available on: www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

