

Address:
110 George Street
Edinburgh
EH2 4LH

Telephone:
0845 146 1010
Fax:
0845 146 1009

Website:
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk



Press release

Embargoed until 00.01 hours, Thursday 6 September 2007

Clackmannanshire Council faces some significant challenges

In its first report on Best Value at Clackmannanshire Council, published today, the Accounts Commission for Scotland says the council faces a number of significant challenges specific to its situation and its progress towards Best Value has not matched its aspirations.

Accounts Commission Deputy Chair Isabelle Low said: "Clackmannanshire Council is the smallest mainland Scottish council with the least staff and the least money to spend. But it still has to provide the same range of services as other councils. It has a number of successful service achievements to its name and has shown that it can work with others, particularly in the development of its community planning partnership.

"But its progress towards Best Value has not matched its aspirations because of its limited capacity, high numbers of priorities and lengthy improvement agenda. More effective leadership by elected members, sharper prioritisation and other improvements to corporate activity and services are needed. And because of scale and capacity issues 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."

The Accounts Commission's findings state that 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.

The Commission points to successful achievements in services such as child and adult care, recycling and dealing with planning applications and noise complaints. But there are areas where the council needs to improve, including educational attainment, aspects of housing management, respite care, food hygiene and trading standards inspections, cultural and community services and refuse complaints. And it needs to make urgent progress in implementing single status for its workforce and in the collection of council tax.

Isabelle Low continued "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 joint working."

For further information contact Anne McCubbin at Audit Scotland tel: 0131 625 1653 or Simon Ebbett tel: 0131 625 1652

Notes to Editors:

1. The report *The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning: Clackmannanshire Council* reflects the picture at the time our main audit work was conducted in August and September 2006. It took longer than usual to finalise this report due to the impact of local government elections in May 2007.
2. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975 and is independent of both central and local government. The Commission checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend £18 billion of public money properly and effectively.

3. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people.
4. The Audit of Best Value is undertaken by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission. It responds to the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, which gave councils a new power to promote or improve the well-being of their area and the people living within it and new responsibilities including:
 - making arrangements which secure Best Value, defined as 'continuous improvement in the performance of the authority's functions, having regard to efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equal opportunities.
 - discharging their duties in a way which contributes to sustainable development
 - maintaining a community planning process
 - making arrangements for reporting to the public on their performance
 - meeting new rules relating to trading.
5. Key Features of the Audit are:
 - The focus is on each council's performance over time rather than comparisons between councils. It takes account of differences in local priorities, constraints and opportunities and therefore league tables and scores are inappropriate.
 - All 32 councils in Scotland will be audited on a rolling programme.
 - Each audit results in a report to the Accounts Commission.
 - A report will be published after each individual audit.
 - In most cases Key Findings from the Commission will be published at the same time as the Report. However, the Commission also has the power to: Ask the Controller of Audit to carry out further investigations before reporting its findings; hold a hearing with council before reporting its findings; publish findings which include recommendations to the council and/or Scottish Ministers.
 - The council's external auditor will monitor progress and report through an annual review. If the council has made insufficient progress, the Commission will be alerted and it may ask for further action to be taken.

A full press briefing on the process and aims of Best Value is available on Audit Scotland's website:
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accounts/pdfs/BestValuebriefingnote.pdf