

Address:  
110 George Street  
Edinburgh  
EH2 4LH

Telephone:  
0845 146 1010  
Fax:  
0845 146 1009

Website:  
[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)



## Press release

Embargoed until 00.01 hours, Thursday 19 February 2009

### **Strong performance and leadership at South Lanarkshire Council, but scope for greater openness**

**The Accounts Commission says South Lanarkshire Council performs very well. However it needs to review and amend its arrangements to accord with best practice in openness and transparency.**

Today's report and findings are the first on Best Value and Community Planning at South Lanarkshire Council.

Chairman of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said:

"South Lanarkshire Council performs very well. The council displays many of the characteristics of best value. It benefits from strong leadership and clear direction. Services perform strongly and there are high customer satisfaction rates."

The Commission is also pleased by the council's clear strategic direction and priorities and its leadership on community planning, with many examples of partnership working showing positive results.

However, whilst recognising the council's achievements, the Commission is keen to see further improvements. John Baillie continued:

"Given the strong performance of South Lanarkshire Council in many areas, the lack of scrutiny taking place in public is surprising and disappointing. Openness and transparency are cornerstones of good governance and the council needs to review and amend its arrangements to accord with best practice."

Giving an example of where openness and transparency could be improved, the Commission says the council's audit committee arrangements fall well short of established best practice.

The council needs to determine the role it wants area committees to fulfil as this is currently unclear. In addition the Commission is concerned by the extent to which vacancies in senior posts have been filled by internal appointment, it believes that all recruitment to senior posts should be open to external competition in order to be able to demonstrate that the best candidate has been appointed.

John Baillie concluded:

"South Lanarkshire Council has many elements of a culture of effective continuous improvement and we consider it to be well placed to enhance its current good performance by addressing the issues highlighted in the best value report as needing to improve."

The council's improvement work will be monitored through the routine annual audits.

**For further information contact Anne McCubbin at Audit Scotland tel: 0131 625 1653 [amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk) or Fiona Deans tel: 0131 625 1651 [fdeans@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:fdeans@audit-scotland.gov.uk)**

#### **Notes to Editors:**

1. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975. The Commission checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend public money properly and effectively.
2. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people.

3. 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 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.
  
4. 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.
  - All 32 councils in Scotland are audited.
  - Each audit results in a report to the Accounts Commission.
  - A report is published after each individual audit.
  - In most cases Key Findings from the Commission are 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 monitors progress and reports through an annual review. If the council has made insufficient progress, the Commission is 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](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accounts/pdfs/BestValuebriefingnote.pdf)