

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 12 March 2009

Fife Council has many of the building blocks for providing best value, but better performance information needed

The Accounts Commission says Fife Council has many of the building blocks in place for achieving best value. The leadership of the council now needs to maintain the momentum towards further improvement.

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

Chairman of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said:

"Fife Council has clear strategic direction and shows good self awareness. It has many of the building blocks in place for achieving best value. We welcome the recent increase in the pace of change and the evidence of recent significant improvements in services, particularly the good performance of the education service and the improvements in social work."

However, the Commission believes a number of improvements need to be made for the future.

John Baillie continued:

"We consider it essential that effective performance information is in place to underpin improvements in service delivery. Elected members should take more of a leadership role in driving forward the best value agenda at a strategic level and should participate fully in training and development.

"There is room for improvement in respect of workforce planning and a need for improved monitoring of the outcomes of partnership working. We would also encourage the Council to develop the working of its area committees and to make progress with shared services."

Fife is a unitary police authority and fire and rescue authority, one of only two such councils. This is the first time the Commission has considered police and fire as part of a Best Value Audit. It found a lack of clarity around the roles of elected members in relation to these services and says the council should review how it discharges its best value responsibilities with regard to police and fire and rescue services.

John Baillie concluded:

"We would urge the leadership of the council, both officers and elected members, to maintain the momentum towards further improvement."

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 or

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