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Press release

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Councils show commitment to whistleblowing

All Scottish councils have made progress in developing plans for whistleblowing so that staff and managers know what to do if they suspect fraud or corruption.

Over half a million people work within the public sector in Scotland, and it is important that they know how to blow the whistle. Leaflets produced jointly by Audit Scotland and PCAW (Public Concern at Work) have been issued throughout the public sector to tell employees and managers about their whistleblowing rights, roles and responsibilities.

One of the leaflets is for employees. It tells staff why they should raise concerns about potential fraud and corruption and how they can do this safely. It has a handy checklist of 'Do's and Don'ts' for anyone who has concerns and emphasises that free advice is available. A second leaflet for managers explains the role of whistleblowing, why it is important that public sector managers put whistleblowing policies in place and also provides useful pointers to help them do this.

Both leaflets also outline whistleblowing legislation and contain advice and useful contact details.

Bill Magee, spokesperson for Audit Scotland, says:

"Councils have made great progress in developing whistleblowing policies.

"Every public sector organisation needs to take whistleblowing seriously as it can both detect and prevent financial corruption and mismanagement. Having an easily accessible whistleblowing policy in place is an essential part of good governance and we look at this as part of our audits.

"The Public Interest Disclosure Act provides a special safe disclosure route for employees. But people should only need to use this as a last resort, the first step should be to use their own organisation's procedures.

"We are asking public sector organisations to be proactive, to distribute these leaflets as widely as possible and to consider other strategies for effectively communicating whistleblowing information to all their staff."

PCAW (Public Concern at Work) runs a free, confidential helpline for anyone concerned about wrongdoing at work, but who is unsure whether to or how to raise it.

Harry Templeton, Scottish Director, Public Concern at Work says:

"Scotland lags behind other UK regions in recognising the importance of creating a culture which encourages concerned individuals, aware of problems or hazards in their workplace, to effectively raise these bona fide public interest matters without fear of reprisals or adverse personal repercussions.

"No one likes bad news and especially if it's delivered by someone within their company, department or organisation. So for too long we often misguidedly thought it better to keep some things quiet and if that required us to 'shoot the messenger' rather than properly investigate the validity of the message; then so be it.

"That reaction can, and has resulted in unchecked predictable problems escalating to disasters or catastrophes which were avoidable. Subsequent investigations can identify culprits or allocate blame but prevention is surely better than cure or regret.

Audit Scotland provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission

“Ideally, if anyone becomes aware of a threat affecting the wellbeing of others the automatic reaction should be to bring the matter to the attention of those responsible in order that effective remedial action can be taken. There should be no fear involved or courage required. “

For further information please contact:

Audit Scotland's press office:

Anne Ryan on 0131 624 9970 or Mandy Gallacher on 0131 624 9974

Public Concern at Work's Scottish Director: Harry Templeton. Tel: 079 0400 2737

Notes to editors

1. Audit Scotland surveyed councils' progress on introducing whistleblowing policies for the reports *A job worth doing – raising the standard of internal audit in Scottish councils* (prepared for the Accounts Commission, published by Audit Scotland August 2001) and *A job worth doing – raising the standard of internal audit in Scottish councils. A follow up report* (prepared for the Accounts Commission, published by Audit Scotland July 2004).
2. The reports and accompanying press releases are available in the 'publications' and 'news' sections of Audit Scotland's website: www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
3. Audit Scotland has mailed 40,000 copies of its new whistleblowing leaflets to public sector bodies across Scotland, including local authorities, police and fire services, FE colleges and NHS Trusts. The leaflets are entitled 'Don't turn a blind eye. How should you react to suspected fraud, corruption or other wrongdoing?' and were prepared with the help of whistleblowing charity Public Concern at Work. The leaflet can be downloaded at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk or to request paper copies contact: Audit Scotland, 110 George St, Edinburgh EH2 4LH tel: 0131 477 1234 ; fax: 0131 477 4567
4. The Public Interest Disclosure Act provides strong protection for workers who blow the whistle on – or raise a genuine concern about – malpractice. The protection is most readily available when the whistle is blown internally. However the Act also protects a range of external whistleblowing and provides a special disclosure route for workers in the NHS and other government-appointed public bodies. The Act recognises the important role of Audit Scotland and sets out how it can be safely contacted. For more information go to: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/individual/pidguide-pl502.htm> or <http://www.pcaw.co.uk/legislation/legislation.html>
5. 4 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. Together they ensure that the Scottish Executive and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of around £16 billion of public funds.
6. Public Concern at Work is an independent authority on whistleblowing, providing free help to prospective whistleblowers, advice on whistleblowing laws and helping organisations create a culture where it is safe and accepted for staff to blow the whistle.

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