

EMBARGO: not for use before 0001hrs on Wednesday 5 February 2003

ACTION NEEDED TO REDUCE LANDFILL

A report published today by the Accounts Commission shows that too much waste is going to landfill and not enough is being recycled. Of the 3 million tonnes of household and commercial waste collected by councils last year 90% was sent to landfill and only 7.4% was recycled.

The Scottish Executive expects councils to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill by 300,000 tonnes over the next 3 years. This is the equivalent of the total rubbish thrown out by 300,000 households. At the moment councils do not have individual targets, but these are to be introduced later this year.

The Accounts Commission says that the public and councils need to work together to cut landfill and to reach the Scottish Executive's target of 25% of all waste being recycled or composted by 2006. The report reveals wide variation across councils in the amount of waste recycled in 2001/02 with levels varying from 21% in Dundee City to as little as 2% in Eilean Siar.

Chairman of the Accounts Commission Alastair MacNish says

"It is not acceptable for councils to recycle low levels of waste and some councils are nowhere near meeting the target. These councils still have a lot of work to do.

If Scotland's recycling record is to improve councils need to make recycling easy and convenient. We all have a responsibility to help reduce the amount of waste that is produced and to use recycling facilities where they are available.

The Commission looks forward to the publication of the Scottish Executive's National Waste Plan, which will help councils with the challenges they face and should help to bring about a marked improvement in future years."

Other environmental services

Last year improvements were made last year to a number of council services

- Despite an extra 10,425 consumer complaints to trading standards the percentage dealt with in the target time of 14 days increased from 78% to 81.7%.
- the average time taken to process a building warrant decreased by two days to 13 despite an increase of 5,000 in the number of applications received.
- 91% of Scotland's street light repairs were carried out on time, a 1% increase on the previous year and continuing a trend of improvement since 1997/98.

Cultural and community services

Performance information on cultural and community services was also published today. The report revealed that:

- council swimming pools and sport centres attracted their highest attendance rates since the figures were first collected. Across Scotland, attendances rose from 33.7 million in 2000/01 to 35.2 million in 2001/02.
- More new library stock was bought than in any previous year. However only 66.4% of the target number of new books for adults and 79% of the target number of new books for children & teenagers were bought.

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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 2001/2002 is the ninth annual comparison of council performance. It provides important benchmarks against which performance will continue to be measured in future years.
4. The pamphlets published today relate to environmental & regulatory services and cultural & community services and are the fifth and sixth 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. Once published, this information will be available on the Commission's web site on www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
5. This year, for the first time, information considered by an authority's appointed auditor to be unreliable has been excluded from the Scotland figures.
6. This year the figure for recycling takes in commercial and industrial waste for the first time. This means that it is not comparable to last year's figure which only dealt with household waste.
7. It is understood that the Scottish Executive will be publishing the National Waste Plan in the near future showing what is required to develop a more sustainable waste system. The plan will set out actions for councils, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and the Scottish Executive to tackle the problem. However, it will also highlight the need for everyone to participate in reducing waste and helping to get more of it recycled.