

Address:
110 George Street
Edinburgh
EH2 4LH

Telephone:
0131 477 1234
Fax:
0131 477 4567

Website:
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk



Press release

Strictly embargoed until 00.01 hours on Wednesday 29th September 2004

First Best Value Audit Report published following review of Angus Council

The Accounts Commission has published its first Best Value Report on a Scottish Local Authority, today Wednesday 29th September 2004. The Commission found that Angus Council generally provides good services to the community and administers its affairs in a business-like manner. However, under Best Value, public bodies must pursue continuous improvement and become more responsive to the needs of local people. While the Commission recognises that Angus Council has made a start on this, it urges the council to increase the pace of change, to improve its customer focus and monitor its service performance more effectively.

The Chair of the Accounts Commission, Alastair MacNish said:

“The Commission welcomes this first report on the performance of a council under the new Best Value system, and we are grateful to Angus Council for the open and constructive way it has worked with us. Service delivery in Angus is generally good and the council embraces many aspects of Best Value, particularly with regard to Community Planning. However the challenge for Angus is to ensure that its planning work is converted into action at departmental level, increasing the pace of change, so that local people can begin to realise the benefits of improvements in services.”

The Angus report does not provide a comprehensive assessment of all departments, but does give a broad picture for local people of the overall management of the council and its commitment to improving local services. Amongst the strengths recognised in the report are:

- There is a culture of financial prudence across the council which safeguards public funds
- Reports from inspectors on education services in Angus have been very positive
- Similarly, inspectors report that the Housing Department is delivering a good service for the overwhelming majority of users
- Angus has the best record of waste recycling of Scottish councils
- The condition of the roads in Angus is among the best in Scotland
- Progress on electronic service delivery exceeds the Scottish average in most aspects.

In addition, the Accounts Commission has commended Angus Council for the progress it has made in Community Planning and joint working with other public sector bodies in its area.

The report identifies a number of specific areas in which Angus Council can make improvements. These include:

- The need for an improved system for managing performance, with more focus on customer needs and end results
- Giving the public balanced reports on how services are doing and providing better information to councillors to help them scrutinise service performance
- Moving away from departmentalism through more corporate working
- Translating council strategies and plans into explicit targets at service level
- Making a greater commitment to equal opportunities at all levels of the organisation
- Giving more consideration to new ways of delivering services and of how things are done elsewhere

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

More...

Commission Chair Alastair MacNish concluded:

“We recognise Angus Council’s commitment, and through its “*Responding to Change*” strategy, it has already acknowledged that it needs to address a number of important areas in order to meet the requirements of Best Value. We have asked the council to prepare and submit an Improvement Action Plan by November 2004, responding to the points made in our report and showing how this commitment to Best Value will be realised in practice. Over the course of the next two years, the local external auditor in Angus will carry out follow-up work to check what progress is being made against the plan, and another full Best Value audit will be undertaken in three years time. I anticipate Angus Council will be able to demonstrate then, that real improvements have been made.”

Ends.

For further information please contact: Beth Hocking, Anne Ryan or Mandy Gallacher on 0131 624 9974

Notes to Editors:

1. 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 £9 billion of public money properly and effectively.
2. Audits of Best Value, were established as a result of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. A rolling programme of audits will affect each local authority in Scotland every three years. The audit assesses the extent to which each council is meeting its legal duty to improve service delivery, identifies where this is in doubt, and outlines any remedial action that is required.
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 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
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 and therefore league tables and scores are inappropriate.
 - All councils in Scotland will be audited once every three years.
 - The councils that are being audited in the current programme are Angus, North Ayrshire, Shetland, Stirling, Inverclyde, West Lothian and Dundee. They have been selected to reflect a balanced mix of size, geography and socio-economic factors.
 - The council’s local 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.
 - Each audit results in a report to the Accounts Commission which will be published.
 - 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.

A full Best Value press briefing is available on the Audit Scotland web-site (www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)

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