

EMBARGO: not for use before 0001hrs on Thursday 5 February 2004

Councils failing to reduce landfill

A report published today by the Accounts Commission shows that councils are making slow progress towards reducing the amount of waste that goes to landfill and increasing the amount they recycle. In 2002/03 councils sent 2.8 million tonnes of waste to landfill, the same amount as in the previous year. The proportion of waste recycled or composted by councils was 9.6% - 2% more than the previous year.

Accounts Commission Chairman, Alastair MacNish says:

“The latest figures are disappointing. Unless councils do more to make recycling easy and convenient they will not reach the target of 25% of waste being recycled by 2006. We need to see marked improvements in waste recycling and composting levels in the next few years.”

Waste recycling

Although councils increased recycling and composting by 2% to 9.6% in 2002/03, the report reveals wide variation across councils in the amount of waste recycled from 24.3% in Angus to just 3.5% in Highland. Councils are expected to reduce the amount going to landfill by 300,000 tonnes over the next two years and targets for individual councils are to be set by the Scottish Executive from April 2004.

Planning Applications

Councils dealt with about 80% of householder planning applications and just over 50% of other planning applications within two months. However, only six councils (Clackmannanshire, Eilean Siar, Inverclyde, Moray, South Lanarkshire and West Lothian) met the Scottish Executive target of determining 90% of householder applications within two months.

Food Hygiene Inspections

Councils continue to carry out a high proportion of food hygiene inspections (95%) within the target times.

Other performance information also published today covers cultural and community services.

Library usage

In 2002/03 the proportion of people in Scotland borrowing from libraries fell for the fifth year running to just over 24%. The average number of items issued to each borrower was 28.7, which is also a year on year decline over the last five years. Just over 1.2 million people borrowed more than 34.1 million items during the year.

Investment in library stock

Scotland's councils have consistently failed to meet the national target levels for additions to both adult, and children & teenager lending stock every year since the targets were established in 1995. In 2002/03 adult stock additions rose to 70.2% of the target set, continuing a rise in investment since 1999/2000. Nevertheless, additions to stock for children and teenagers fell slightly to 76.7% of the target. (See notes to editors, 7)

Pools and leisure centres

In 2002/03, there were nearly 35.5 million attendances at councils' sports facilities. This was an increase of just over 0.3 million attendances compared with the previous year. The average number of attendances per head of population at all facilities was 7.2, an increase of 0.2 since last year.

Ends

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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 2002/2003 is the tenth 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 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 services.
5. Information considered by an authority's appointed auditor to be unreliable has been excluded from the Scotland figures.
6. Information relating to police and fire services was published on 19 December 2003. Information on benefits, finance and corporate issues was published on 15 January. Information on children's services, and housing and social work was published on 22 January. This information can also be found on the Commission's web site on www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
7. The report 'Standards for the Public Library Services in Scotland' (1995) published by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) set recommendations for the annual number of additions to stock. For lending stock, book and audio materials the recommendation for adults is 280 items per 1,000 population. For children and teenagers the recommendation is 100 items per 1,000 population.