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## Press release

Embargoed until 0001hrs on Thursday 13 January 2005

### Council libraries show signs of change

**Performance information published today by the Accounts Commission shows that the number of books being borrowed from libraries in 2003/04 continued to fall. The number of items borrowed fell by 1.5 million to 32.5 million. However, the role of libraries is changing; councils reported that nearly 300,000 people used learning centres and they accessed terminals on 2.4 million occasions.**

**Over 81% of museums met national quality standards in 2003/04, a rise of more than 10% compared with the previous year.**

#### Accounts Commission Chairman, Alastair MacNish says:

“The traditional use of libraries is changing. While fewer people are borrowing fewer items, there has been a move to other library services such as the use of learning centres and computer terminals to access information. New initiatives are welcome and I look forward to seeing how this particular service develops in the years to come. It is also good to see a general rise in quality standards with regard to Scottish museums.”

#### Library users

In 2003/04 the proportion of people borrowing from libraries fell slightly for the sixth year running to just over 24% of the population and the average number of issues per borrower was 27.4, which is also a year on year decline over the last six years. Just over 1.2 million people borrowed 32.5 million items during the year.

#### Library stock investment

Councils fell further behind the target stock investment levels they set themselves in 1995. Overall, investment fell to 62% of target levels for adult stock and 65% for children and teenagers' stock.

#### Learning centres and access points

Across Scotland, nearly 300,000 people (7.5% of the population) used learning centres and they accessed terminals on 2.4 million occasions. This is the first year that the information has been reported which means that there is no comparative data.

#### Museums and Galleries

Almost 81% of museums and galleries either owned or supported by councils, were registered under the Museums and Galleries Commission quality scheme compared with just over 72% the previous year.

**The Accounts Commission is also publishing performance information today relating to corporate management including council tax and benefits. See separate release for further information, or contact Anne Ryan on 0131 624 9970 or Beth Hocking on 0131-624 9954.**

#### 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.

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

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 2003/04 is the eleventh annual comparison of council performance. It provides important benchmarks against which performance will continue to be measured in future years.
4. The pamphlet published today relates to cultural & community services. A further pamphlet relating to council benefits, corporate and financial management will also be published today (13 January). This is the third 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.
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 10 December 2004. Housing and social work will follow on 27 January. Finally, information relating to environmental & regulatory services and education and children's services will be published on 3 February.