

# Council gets cautious thumbs up from Accounts Commission



A major independent audit of the City of Edinburgh Council by the Accounts Commission has found that the Council's overall performance is good and that its current actions are likely to lead to further improvements. However, the report also acknowledges that the Council still has a number of high profile and significant challenges to resolve, especially in meeting savings targets.

The Best Value audit, carried out on all Scottish local authorities, and last conducted in Edinburgh in 2006, reviewed the Council's leadership, performance and major operational issues. It was carried out by Audit Scotland for the Accounts Commission. The report is not yet available online but when issued [it will be published here.](#)

[The last report](#) published in February 2007 found that:-*"In a Best value report published today the Accounts Commission says Edinburgh City Council displays many of the features of a Best Value council, including many examples of good service delivery. However some services, such as refuse collection and the processing of planning applications, still need to improve."*

Following an extensive review, including interviews with senior officers and councillors, the Commission formally assessed the Council's performance as 'good'. It also described the Council's capacity for improvement as 'fair', noting that it had also been dealing with some major issues at the same time as introducing a wide-reaching change programme.

Chief Executive Sue Bruce said:- “We very much welcome the scrutiny that the audit provides, as it helps us to assess the progress we’re making in transforming the Council. I’m pleased that our achievements in recent years were recognised, especially given some of the challenges we’ve been tackling.

“The Commission is keen that we prioritise meeting our savings targets and that is what we’re doing. Indeed, the auditors found that we already manage our finances well and have a good understanding of what we need to do. Although we still have a lot of work ahead, the overall assessment is very positive and shows that we remain on the right path to creating an excellent local authority that serves the city effectively and efficiently. All of the areas for development are already in established improvement plans and this audit should further reassure the public of our approach.”

Council Leader Councillor Andrew Burns added:- “This result is testament to a great deal of hard work by the Council’s managers and staff. The auditors also recognised the importance of the strong political leadership that this coalition is providing. That, combined with the efforts of officers, will continue to deliver improved services and value for money to the benefit of the people of Edinburgh.

“I agree with the Commission that we need to deal with the significant financial challenges we face. Our new approach to publishing and consulting on a draft budget earlier than any previous Council will help us to do that. I’m confident that the follow-up review in 18 months’ time will show that we have made further significant progress. In the meantime, we will continue with our commitment to report openly and regularly on our achievements against the pledges we made.”

The report’s key findings include:

The Council shows a strong understanding of what it needs to do to meet the service and financial issues it faces. It has

effective political and managerial leadership that sets a clear vision of what it wants to achieve and focuses on improving outcomes for people.

The Council demonstrates a strong awareness of where it needs to improve. The improvement programme is gathering pace and the council is now implementing many of the plans. The current chief executive has had a significant influence on increasing the pace of change and improvement in the council.

Councillors demonstrate a strong, cross-party commitment to restoring public confidence in the council following the problems with trams, statutory repairs and more recent concerns about practices at the Mortonhall crematorium.

The council manages its finances well, with spending contained within budget and long-term plans in place. Savings plans are in place but it is too early to assess whether the council is likely to achieve all the savings it requires to balance its budget.

Partnership working in Edinburgh is strong and the council and its partners are making good progress in improving outcomes for people. The Council and its partners can demonstrate:

- Good performance in ensuring Edinburgh's economy delivers investment, jobs and opportunities for all and in improving outcomes for children and young people.
- Generally positive and improving outcomes in health and well-being.
- Mixed performance in making Edinburgh's communities safer and improving the physical and social environment people live in.
- Well developed arrangements for consulting with local people and users of services, the results of which are used to inform service improvements.

The Council also acknowledges the need to improve communication with staff to widen understanding of, and commitment to, the council's plans for change.

*The report highlights various areas for improvement:*

*Establish clear improvement priorities, and use its new corporate programmes office to support delivery*

*Identify areas where consolidation and stability is required and those where the council should further increase the pace of improvement*

*Focus on savings plans and satisfy itself that planned savings are achievable, particularly in procurement*

*Deal with weaknesses in workforce planning and ICT.*

*Identify and put in place the skills and capacity it needs to deliver improvement.*

*Develop its arrangements for communicating the purpose and progress of change to staff.*

The Council says it already has programmes in place to improve in all of these areas. A follow-up review will take place in around 18 months' time, focussing particularly on procurement, change programmes and trust in the Council.

This is the previous report from 2007:-

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