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Press release

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SPT's control of travel and expenses had 'serious deficiencies'

The Accounts Commission finds serious deficiencies in the way that Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) managed and controlled travel expenses. However it welcomes the actions taken by the authority since concerns came to light.

The Commission's findings and recommendations follow a report by the Controller of Audit which looked at travel expenses and other matters at SPT between 2007-2009.

John Baillie, Chair of the Accounts Commission, said:

"A number of trips and expenses claims give cause for concern about the judgement of those involved. There appears to have been a culture and behaviour by some of SPT's most senior elected members and officers at the time that fell well short of what is expected of those holding public office and overseeing public funds."

There have been changes in membership and senior management since these concerns came to light. Value for money, scrutiny and authorisation controls have been strengthened, in line with internal audit work. An action plan has also been approved which includes further recommendations for improving internal controls for expenses and travel.

Some of the money paid out in expenses has been recovered. However the Commission and the Controller of Audit conclude that the circumstances of the visit to the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive constituted an unacceptable use of public money and SPT should seek repayment of all expenses associated with this visit.

John Baillie continued:

"As a regional transport partnership, SPT has many of the same obligations as all local authorities in Scotland. It must adhere to the principles of good governance, and ensure that its processes support rigorous scrutiny and accountability in the use of public funds."

"SPT's processes must ensure that the costs, benefits and value of proposed travel are adequately examined so that it always acts in a way designed to ensure value for money. It must also ensure that it applies the appropriate regulations and practices on expenses in all respects. The training and development requirements of members also need to be considered. They need to be clear about the revised policies and procedures and able to demonstrate good governance, including effective scrutiny and challenge, in the discharge of their roles."

The Commission has asked for a progress report from the Controller of Audit in approximately six months, identifying progress in implementing the action plan and control actions. It also expects this to explain the authority's actions on further recovery of personal or excessive expenses.

For further information contact Anne McCubbin, Audit Scotland tel: 0131 625 1653 amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

1. Today's findings follow a review undertaken by KPMG looking at travel expenses and other matters at Strathclyde Partnership for Transport in the period between 2007 and 2009. KPMG are the external auditors of SPT, as appointed by Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission.

2. The Controller of Audit produced a report to bring KPMG's conclusions to the attention of the Commission and the public.

3. Today's findings and the Controller of Audit's report are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk KPMG's report is also publicly available.
2. Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) is a regional transport authority, with representative from the following councils: Glasgow City, South Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire, Inverclyde and Argyll and Bute.
3. More information on the Accounts Commission for Scotland is available at <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accounts/index.htm>
4. The Accounts Commission looks at whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend public money properly and effectively. It operates independently of central and local government.

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.

The Accounts Commission is sometimes mistakenly referred to as the Audit Commission. The Audit Commission is a completely separate organisation that operates only in England.