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News release

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New report on managing performance and improvement in local authorities

All councils in Scotland can improve how they manage their performance.

An Accounts Commission report published today says gathering, analysing and acting on performance information is essential to improve services and the quality of people's lives. But no single council has all the elements of a comprehensive performance and improvement framework in place.

Managing performance: are you getting it right? offers practical pointers and support to help councillors and officials. It says effective management of performance is everyone's business – from the chief executive down. In well-run councils, it is embedded throughout the organisation as part of the day job and not seen as a burden. A key element is getting the culture right with councillors and officials sharing a common purpose and vision and setting clear priorities.

Councils in Scotland spend £21 billion a year – or £40,000 every minute - but cannot easily compare their performance in particular services against other councils.

Sometimes information itself is poor quality or the focus is on bringing in electronic systems rather than developing the corporate culture. Lengthy performance reports are often ineffective because critical issues are buried in the detail. Councils are also large organisations – so they have to prioritise areas important to them.

Chair of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said: "Establishing effective performance management isn't easy but it can and does deliver huge benefits for councils, their staff and the quality and effectiveness of the services they offer the communities they serve.

"We hope this report helps guide councillors and officials on the steps they can take to make it happen. It is particularly important at this time of tight financial pressures that they do have effective performance management to maintain quality services and ensure they are getting the best value for every pound spent."

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Notes to editors

1 This report is the fourth in the How Councils Work series. This series draws on audit work in all councils to highlight concerns, issues and good practice. Previous reports have looked at councillors' and officers' roles and working relationships, Arm's Length Organisations (ALEOs) and using cost information.

2 Today's report has been prepared by Audit Scotland for the Accounts Commission. The Accounts Commission for Scotland checks whether local authorities, fire & rescue services and police boards spend public money properly and effectively. Audit Scotland provides services to the Accounts Commission. More background is available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk