

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

MEETING 17 MAY 2012

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Minutes of the meeting of the Accounts Commission held in the offices of Audit Scotland at 18 George Street, Edinburgh, on Thursday, 15 March 2012, at 10am

PRESENT: John Baillie (Chair)
Michael Ash
Sandy Cumming
James King
Christine May
Linda Pollock
Graham Sharp
Douglas Sinclair (Deputy Chair)

IN ATTENDANCE: Robert Black, Auditor General for Scotland [Item 12]
Barbara Hurst, Director of Performance Audit [Item 12]
Diane McGiffen, Chief Operating Officer, Audit Scotland [Item 12]
Fraser McKinlay, Controller of Audit and Director of Best Value and Scrutiny Improvement (BVSI)
Paul Reilly, Secretary and Business Manager
Ronnie Nicol, Assistant Director, Performance Audit
Gordon Neill, Portfolio Manager Best Value, BVSI [Items 8 to 11]
Kathrine Sibbald, Project Manager, BVSI [Items 8 and 10]
Mark McCabe, Project Manager, BVSI [Items 9 and 11]
Antony Clark, Assistant Director, BVSI [Item 12]

<u>Item No</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1.	Apologies for absence
2.	Declarations of interest
3.	Decisions on taking business in private
4.	Minutes of meeting of 16 February 2012
5.	Minutes of the meeting of the Financial Audit and Assurance Committee of 9 February 2012
6.	Chair's introduction
7.	Update report by the Controller of Audit
8.	Best Value Audit – Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue
9.	Best Value Audit – Strathclyde Fire and Rescue
10.	Best Value Audit – Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue
11.	Best Value Audit – Strathclyde Fire and Rescue
12.	The audit of community planning partnerships
13.	Any other business

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted from Alan Campbell, Colin Duncan, Bill McQueen and Colin Peebles.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Decisions on taking business in private

The Commission agreed to take the following items in private:

- Items 10 and 11, to allow deliberations on actions arising from the reports
- Item 12, to allow consideration of work in progress.

4. Minutes of meetings of 16 February 2012

The minutes of the meeting of 16 February 2012 were submitted and approved.

5. Minutes of the meeting of the Financial Audit and Assurance Committee of 9 February 2012

The minutes of the meeting of the Financial Audit and Assurance Committee of 9 February 2012 were submitted and approved.

6. Chair's introduction

The Chair reported that—

- On 1 March, he undertook television interviews on the *Commissioning social care* report.
- He undertook various media activities in relation to the Best Value audits of Grampian and Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue, including podcasts on 1 March and interviews for radio and television on 8 March (Highlands and Islands) and a podcast on 13 March (Grampian).
- On 8 March he undertook a podcast for the report *An Overview of Local Government in Scotland 2012*.
- On 9 March 2012, he and the Deputy Chair attended the first meeting of the Community Planning Partnership and Outcomes Audit Project Steering Group.
- On 13 March 2012, he and the Audit Scotland Board hosted members of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit at the Audit Scotland offices
- On 15 March 2012, he attended – along with the Auditor General for Scotland and Audit Scotland representatives - a briefing with the Scottish Parliament's Public Audit Committee on the *Commissioning Social Care* report

- The Commission's annual strategy seminar would take place in April and, consequently, there would be no meeting of the Commission in April, with the next meeting to take place on 17 May 2012.

7. Update report by the Controller of Audit

The Commission considered and noted a report by the Controller of Audit providing an update on significant recent activity in relation to the audit of local government.

During discussion the Commission agreed:

- That the Controller of Audit provide information on the positions of the statutory finance officer in Aberdeenshire and Shetland Islands councils.

(Action: Controller of Audit)

- That discussion take place with the Auditor General for Scotland and Audit Scotland about the process involved in participating in private briefings with parliamentary committees.

(Action: Chair and Controller of Audit)

Thereafter the Commission agreed to note the report.

8. Best Value Audit: Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue

The Commission considered a report by the Secretary and Business Manager introducing the Best Value audit of Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue, and seeking direction on how to proceed.

The Commission sought clarification and further explanation from the Controller of Audit and the audit team on a number of points in the report.

During discussion, the Commission agreed that the following issues be considered for inclusion in its report on an overview of the Best Value audit of fire and rescue services, to be published by the Commission later in 2012:

- Procurement, including any partnership activity in this regard
- Performance appraisal of senior fire officers
- The use of casualty figures in strategic planning and performance management
- How fire and rescue boards use performance management
- Sickness absence management

(Action: Controller of Audit)

The Commission agreed to note the report and to consider in private its findings.

9. Best Value Audit – Strathclyde Fire and Rescue

The Commission considered a report by the Secretary and Business Manager introducing the Best Value audit of Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, and seeking direction on how to proceed.

The Commission sought clarification and further explanation from the Controller of Audit and the audit team on a number of points in the report.

During discussion, the Commission agreed that national trends be considered for inclusion in its report on an overview of the Best Value audit of fire and rescue services, to be published by the Commission later in 2012:

- Inter-relationships between crewing levels, public safety and value for money
- Sharing and learning from good practice
- Sickness absence management

(Action: Controller of Audit)

The Commission agreed to note the report and to consider in private its findings.

Given that this audit is the last of a series of eight audits of fire and rescue services that the Commission has considered over its past four meetings, the Controller of Audit conveyed his thanks to the audit teams for undertaking this piece of work. The Chair agreed and expressed the appreciation of the Commission.

10. Best Value Audit - Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue (in private)

The Commission agreed that this item be held in private to allow it to consider actions in relation to its findings.

Following discussion, the Commission agreed to make findings as contained in the report to be published in early course.

11. Best Value Audit – Strathclyde Fire and Rescue (in private)

The Commission agreed that this item be held in private to allow it to consider actions in relation to its findings.

Following discussion, the Commission agreed to make findings as contained in the report to be published in early course.

12. The audit of community planning partnerships

The Commission considered a report by the Director of Best Value and Scrutiny Improvement providing a further update on recent progress in relation to the Cabinet Secretary's request that the Accounts Commission, working with Audit Scotland, develop and test proposals on how external scrutiny might support the better delivery of outcomes at the level of community planning partnerships. The report also provided an overview of the Scottish Government/COSLA review of community planning and single outcome agreements.

The Chair welcomed Caroline Gardner (ex-Deputy Auditor General and Controller of Audit) and Sally Hammond (Associate Director, Policy, Analysis and Research

Directorate, Audit Commission), who undertook brief presentations on issues and challenges associated with auditing partnerships.

There followed a discussion on the issues raised in the presentations. The Chair welcomed Robert Black, Auditor General for Scotland, who took part in the discussion.

Thereafter the Commission agreed to note the update report.

The Chair thanked Caroline Gardner and Sally Hammond for their attendance.