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Press release

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Councils need to give race equality higher priority

Today's Accounts Commission report, *The impact of the race equality duty on council services*, says that all councils have developed policies and processes on race equality. They now need to ensure these have a positive impact on services.

John Baillie, Chair of the Accounts Commission, said: "Scottish society is increasingly diverse and councils have a duty to promote and ensure race equality for all people within their area. There are examples of good practice, but the main focus has been the development of policies and processes which, by themselves, do not meet the needs of minority ethnic communities."

The report says there are some initiatives to meet the diverse needs of local communities, such as the provision of interpretation and translation services and information packs for recent migrants. However, overall councils lack information about minority ethnic communities, their needs and experiences. They are also unable to show how race equality is systematically and routinely built into the design and delivery of services.

An example of contrasting approaches can be seen in library and in planning services. Libraries take account of the race equality duty by assessing needs and providing information in languages other than English; planning services show less activity designed to meet the needs of minority ethnic communities.

In focus groups, people from minority ethnic communities said that they are generally pleased with the range of services provided and appreciate the way information is available in different languages. However, when asked how well they thought their needs were understood, most people said councils generally have a limited understanding and appear uninterested in making improvements to meet their needs.

John Baillie continued: "Councils now need to get better at engaging with people from minority ethnic communities; develop a clearer understanding of their experiences and service needs; and ensure that race equality is given higher priority in everyday council business. This will help improve council services for everyone."

The report recommends that councillors and senior managers ensure race equality is incorporated into the improvement programmes they have already established under Best Value, and do more to identify and share good practice. It also calls for support from key national organisations including COSLA, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, the Scottish Government, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Improvement Service.

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Notes to Editors:

1. The report, this press release and a podcast interview with the report authors are available on request under embargo and will be published on www.audit-scotland.gov.uk from 9.30am, Thursday 13 November. Further media interviews can be arranged on request.

2. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975 and is independent of both central and local government. The Commission considers whether local authorities, fire & rescue services and police forces spend public money properly, efficiently and effectively.

3. 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 for Scotland.