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News release

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Commission welcomes improvements at Strathclyde Partnership for Transport

The Accounts Commission has considered an update report on an audit investigation of travel expenses and other matters at Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT). In findings published today it says SPT has taken action to improve its processes.

Commenting on today's findings, John Baillie, Chair of the Accounts Commission, said: "Public bodies need to demonstrate good governance in using public money. Last year we found serious deficiencies in the way SPT managed and controlled travel expenses. We were also concerned about the culture and behaviour by some of its most senior elected members and officers in relation to trips and expenses. However SPT took the matter seriously and initiated improvements. It has made significant progress against its action plan and this is to be welcomed.

"It is also clear that SPT has taken appropriate steps to consider the case for further recovery of potentially personal and excessive costs. It has taken a reasonable decision in the circumstances, based on legal advice, not to pursue the matter."

Today's findings follow an update report from the Controller of Audit, which was considered by the Commission at its September meeting. The Commission has asked the external auditors to continue to monitor the effectiveness of actions taken and any further improvements required as part of their on-going annual audit work.

Background to today's findings

Last November the Commission stated that a number of trips and expenses claims dating from 2007-2009 gave cause for concern about the judgement of those involved and there appeared to have been a culture and behaviour by some of the 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. However the Commission also recognised that there had been changes in membership and senior management and value for money, scrutiny and authorisation controls had been strengthened.

Some of the money paid out in expenses had been recovered. However the Commission said 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.

An action plan with further recommendations for improving internal controls for expenses and travel had been agreed and the Commission asked for audit work to follow this up.

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Notes to editors

1. Today's findings follow a follow up review undertaken by KPMG. KPMG are the external auditors of SPT, as appointed by Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission. The Controller of Audit produced reports on both this latest review, and the initial review, to bring KPMG's conclusions to the attention of the Commission and the public.

2. Today's findings and the Controller of Audit's report are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

3. Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) is a regional transport authority, with representatives 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.

4. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

- The Accounts Commission looks at whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend public money properly and effectively.
- 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.