

#### 4. AUDIT SCOTLAND OVERVIEW OF LOCAL AUTHORITY AUDITS 2008

The Audit Committee considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Finance presenting a comprehensive overview report on the 2007/2008 audits of local authorities by the Controller of Audits and incorporating the Accounts Commission's findings.

The report advised that the Accounts Commission had welcomed the evidence of improving local authority services across a range of areas. However the Commission noted that the report had been produced at a time when councils faced significant challenges in dealing with fast changing economic circumstances, financial pressures and in implementing Single Outcome Agreements.

The Controller of Audit's Report, attached to the report at Appendix 1, was split into five parts, namely The National Context, Supporting Continuous Improvement, Using Resources, Service Performance and Looking Ahead. The Head of Finance provided a summary of the key points arising from the Controller's report under each of these categories.

In his report the Controller had also mentioned the future challenges councils would need to address, including: -

- Performance management and monitoring – ensure good management processes and robust information was available on services;
- A culture of continuous improvement, with even greater emphasis on efficiency and effective use of resources;
- Competitiveness of key services, with a systematic approach to demonstrating service competitiveness and value for money;
- Shared services, which it was recommended that councils consider as a high priority;
- Making partnership working real and effective via development of Single Outcome Agreements; and
- Continuous development of elected members, with a personal development plan for all members.

The Head of Finance considered that West Lothian Council was well placed to meet these challenges by demonstrating a clear commitment to improvement and had made steady progress against improvement actions agreed as a result of its 2005 best value audit.

The Head of Finance concluded that, based on the Controller's report, the Accounts Commission had concluded that improvements were made by Local Government in 2007/2008 but also highlighted action that was required to improve outcomes for communities.

Additionally in terms of West Lothian Council, the Auditor stated in his

report on the council's 2007/2008 Accounts that the council continued to demonstrate a clear commitment to continuous improvement and developing Best Value services.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.