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Press release

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The Moray Council 'has a long way to go' to deliver Best Value despite some improvements

In its Best Value report on The Moray Council published today (Wednesday, 8 February) the Accounts Commission states that the council is not yet in a position to deliver Best Value to the people it serves.

Commenting on the report's findings Accounts Commission Deputy Chair Isabelle Low said:

"The report describes an inward looking council that has a long way to go to be in a position to deliver Best Value to the people of Moray.

"Vital management practices such as performance monitoring and checks on the competitiveness of services have been weak. The limited evidence available suggests there is considerable variation in service delivery with few elements of Best Value properly established and significant work is needed to create a culture of continuous improvement.

"Although there are signs that the new leadership of the council has adopted a more positive approach to Best Value, it is unlikely the council will be able to achieve the rapid change required without external help from elected member and chief executive peers."

The Commission highlights a number of requirements which the council will have to meet if it is to deliver Best Value. These include:

- Identifying clear priorities and concentrate on the essential steps to achieve them
- Developing political and corporate leadership skills in councillors and senior management
- Implementing the consistent use of comprehensive performance measures

The Moray Council now needs to produce an Improvement Plan that addresses the report and the Commission's findings. The Commission will continue to monitor the situation and ask Audit Scotland to undertake a report on progress made to 31 January 2007.

Ends

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Other contacts

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Notes to Editors:

1. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people. Today's report is the tenth in a rolling programme affecting all local authorities in Scotland and provides information to local people for the first time about how well The Moray Council is organised to deliver improvement.
2. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975 and is independent of both central and local government. The Commission checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend £9 billion of public money properly and effectively.

3. The Audit of Best Value is undertaken by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission. It responds to the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, which gave councils a new power to promote or improve the well-being of their area and the people living within it and new responsibilities including:
- making arrangements which secure Best Value, defined as 'continuous improvement in the performance of the authority's functions, having regard to efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equal opportunities.
 - discharging their duties in a way which contributes to sustainable development
 - maintaining a community planning process
 - making arrangements for reporting to the public on their performance
 - meeting new rules relating to trading.
- 4 Key Features of the Audit are:
- The focus is on each council's performance over time rather than comparisons between councils. It takes account of differences in local priorities, constraints and opportunities and therefore league tables and scores are inappropriate.
 - All 32 councils in Scotland will be audited about once in every three years. Each audit will take around 20 weeks from start to finish.
 - Each audit results in a report to the Accounts Commission
 - A report will be published after each individual audit.
 - In most cases Key Findings from the Commission will be published at the same time as the Report. However, the Commission also has the power to: Ask the Controller of Audit to carry out further investigations before reporting its findings; hold a hearing with council before reporting its findings; publish findings which include recommendations to the council and/or Scottish Ministers.
 - The council's external auditor will monitor progress and report through an annual review. If the council has made insufficient progress, the Commission will be alerted and it may ask for further action to be taken.

A full press briefing on the process and aims of Best Value is available on Audit Scotland's website:
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accounts/pdfs/BestValuebriefingnote.pdf