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## Press release

Embargoed until 00.01 hours, Wednesday 6 September 2006

### East Ayrshire Council demonstrates its commitment to Best Value

**The Accounts Commission's report on Best Value at East Ayrshire Council, published today (Wednesday 6 September) says that the council's commitment to improving performance is supported by effective leadership. It performs well in a number of activities and is able to recognise areas for improvement and take action to address them. However there are some weaker areas of service performance and the council now needs to streamline its best value processes and ensure continuous improvement throughout its activities.**

Alastair MacNish, chair of the Accounts Commission, said: "We welcome East Ayrshire Council's clear commitment to Best Value and improved performance. It has effective leadership, strategic vision and can identify where improvements are needed and take action to address them. It does well in other important areas too, particularly in Community Planning and joint working. The council now needs to consolidate, streamline and embed its systems and processes for driving best value so that all its activities and services continuously improve."

The report recognises that East Ayrshire has several areas of significant deprivation and when established in 1996, did not reflect any natural or traditional community. Despite these challenges, there is evidence of good community planning and engagement. The council also performs well in:

- financial stewardship
- managing risk
- customer focus
- community care, housing, finance and education services

However, in addition to working on its best value systems and processes, the council needs to make progress on:

- clarifying and strengthening the roles of committees and member/ officer groups engaged in scrutiny
- making improvements in some areas of weaker service performance, particularly housing repairs

Alastair MacNish said: "We are encouraged by this report and we look forward to receiving an Improvement Plan from East Ayrshire Council which has measurable targets based on outcomes which will allow it to deliver on its ambitions for the future."

#### Ends

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#### Notes to Editors:

1. 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.
2. 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 provides information about how well East Ayrshire Council is organised to deliver improvement.
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.
5. 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](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accounts/pdfs/BestValuebriefingnote.pdf)