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## Press release

Wednesday 9 April 2008. For immediate release

### **Accounts Commission announces date and venue for Best Value Hearing at Aberdeen City Council**

**The Accounts Commission for Scotland's Hearing at Aberdeen City Council will take place at Town and County Hall, Town House, Castle Street, Aberdeen on Tuesday 13 and Wednesday 14 May 2008. It will begin at 10am on Tuesday 13 May.**

The Commission decided to hold a Hearing when it met on 19 March and considered the Controller of Audit's report on Best Value and Community Planning at Aberdeen City Council. The report assesses how well the council is performing, the way it is organised and managed to achieve improvements over time, and also identifies areas of weakness and recommendations for improvement.

The decision to hold a Hearing was taken in light of the concerns highlighted in the report. The Commission wishes to hear first hand from representatives of Aberdeen City Council to gain a greater understanding of the council's difficulties in implementing its long-held vision for the area and its plans to improve its financial position.

A Hearing is a formal process organised and led by the Accounts Commission. Its primary purpose is to assist the Commission to make findings by listening to appropriate evidence.

The Hearing will be held in public. Members of the public, including journalists, are welcome to attend.

At the Hearing the Commission will be represented by a panel of members comprising John Baillie (Chair of the Accounts Commission), Ann Faulds, Keith Geddes, Iain Robertson and Douglas Sinclair. They will explore evidence in relation to what has happened at the council, its current context and its plans for the future.

In particular the Commission wishes to explore:

- the pace of improvement in achieving the council's vision for the area
- the capacity of the council to secure change
- why staff commitment to the programme of change does not seem to have been achieved
- the council's financial position

Following the Hearing the Commission will consider the evidence it has gathered. It can then publish findings, which could include recommendations to Aberdeen City Council and also to Scottish Government Ministers.

The Commission will consider any correspondence received in connection with the Hearing but needs to maintain focus on the Best Value & Community Planning audit. Policy decisions at Aberdeen City Council remain the council's responsibility.

The Commission will decide at its discretion who will be heard at the Hearing and the format of the event. Further details of the likely timetable and speakers will be announced in due course.

**For further information contact Anne McCubbin, Audit Scotland Tel: 0131 625 1653 [amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk) or Simon Ebbett, Audit Scotland Tel: 0131 625 1652 [sebbett@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:sebbett@audit-scotland.gov.uk)**

#### **Notes to Editors:**

1. The Hearing is a public event open to the media. All journalists wishing to attend should contact Anne McCubbin to discuss arrangements. Anne McCubbin, Communications officer, Audit Scotland. Tel: 0131 625 1653 [amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk)

2. Members of the public are entitled to make representations to the Hearing. Correspondence should be addressed to: The Secretary to the Accounts Commission for Scotland, Audit Scotland, 110 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4LH. Tel: 0845 146 1010

3. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975. The Commission checks whether local authorities, fire & rescue services and police forces spend public money properly and effectively. For more information including biographical details of the Panel members for the Hearing go to: <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accounts/index.htm>

4. The Controller of Audit's Aberdeen City Council Best Value Audit and Community Planning report is available at [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2007/bv\\_080320\\_aberdeen\\_city.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2007/bv_080320_aberdeen_city.pdf). The Controller of Audit is Caroline Gardner.

5. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people. All 32 local authorities in Scotland are audited in this way, on a rolling basis. 20 councils have undergone Best Value & Community Planning audits so far (making Aberdeen City Council the 21st council to do so). This is the second time the Commission has chosen to hold a Hearing as part of this process. The first was held at West Dunbartonshire Council in December 2006.

6. 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 Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. More details about Audit Scotland and its remit are available at <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/about/>

(The Audit Commission is a completely separate body that operates only in England.)

7. 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.

8. 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
- All 32 councils in Scotland are audited, on a rolling programme basis
- Each audit results in a report to the Accounts Commission for Scotland
- A report is published for each individual audit.

A briefing on the process and aims of Best Value is available on Audit Scotland's website at [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2007/bv\\_about\\_best\\_value\\_audit.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2007/bv_about_best_value_audit.pdf)