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## Press release

Embargoed until 00.01 hours, Friday 23 May 2008

### Falkirk Council performing well, although still room for improvement

**In its first report on Best Value at Falkirk Council, published today, the Accounts Commission for Scotland says the council shows good, solid performance with many characteristics of best value, while still having room for improvement in some areas.**

Accounts Commission Chairman John Baillie said: "Falkirk Council has many of the characteristics required in order to be able to provide best value to local people. In general the council shows good, solid performance. It is doing particularly well in important areas such as strategic planning and engaging with the local community to try and provide the services they want and need. However there are also areas where the council could make improvements, such as in ensuring that services do improve, staff vacancies are addressed and long term financial planning gets better. "

The Accounts Commission's findings state that the council does well with its vision and strategic direction, community engagement, customer focus and partnership working. It also highlights performance management and the delivery of a number of major projects and initiatives contributing to economic development and regeneration.

However there is still room for improvement, such as in the services provided, addressing senior management vacancies, reviewing how the council approaches scrutiny and matching financial planning to long term strategies.

The findings point to the need to give high priority to the planned review of commercial services and also say that leadership development and the training of elected members should be prioritised, in view of the number of new members elected in May 2007.

John Baillie continued "We look forward to receiving an improvement plan from the council with measurable and achievable outcomes, to build on the good work already being done by the council."

**For further information contact Anne McCubbin at Audit Scotland tel: 0131 625 1653 or Fiona Deans tel: 0131 625 1651**

#### Notes to Editors:

1. The main audit work for this report *The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning: Falkirk Council* was carried out in June, August and September 2007.
2. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975. The Commission checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend public money properly and effectively.
3. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people.
4. 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 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.
5. 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 on a rolling programme.
- Each audit results in a report to the Accounts Commission.
- A report is published after each individual audit.
- In most cases Key Findings from the Commission are 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 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)**