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Press release

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North Lanarkshire Council has high level of performance and can improve further

In its first report on Best Value at North Lanarkshire Council, published today, the Accounts Commission for Scotland says the council shows a strong commitment to improvement, has a high level of performance and has the capacity and ability to make further improvements.

The Commission welcomes the council's good strategic direction and pace of change, and says it has good leadership and clear vision. The Commission also highlights the council's consultation with people who use its services and its well-developed arrangements for financial, asset and risk management.

However, there is still scope for improvement. The council knows the areas that it needs to target to make further improvements, and it has plans for doing this.

Accounts Commission Chairman John Baillie said: "North Lanarkshire Council faces challenges due to deprivation in the local area and its previous low level of performance in some areas. But the council now has a high rate of service improvement, knows where it needs to target its efforts and has the commitment, capacity and ability to build on its high performance to improve further.

"We would now like to see the council implement its improvement agenda, including plans for increasing the uptake of training by councillors, developing its scrutiny of policy implementation and producing a comprehensive human resources strategy, together with improved sickness absence rates and staff morale."

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Notes to Editors:

1. The main audit work on this report *The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning: North Lanarkshire Council* was carried out from August to December 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:

www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accounts/pdfs/BestValuebriefingnote.pdf