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Press release

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Commission welcomes significant progress made by Inverclyde Council

The Accounts Commission says it is pleased to welcome the significant progress and improvements made by Inverclyde Council as a result of its work to address the issues raised in its initial Best Value audit report and the two follow up reports.

In June 2005 the Commission made its first assessment of the council's performance towards providing Best Value for local people. It highlighted extensive and fundamental weaknesses in leadership and direction by elected members and senior management which were preventing the council from improving.

In a February 2007 follow up the Commission said the council was now moving in the right direction, noting that it had appointed a new Chief Executive, established a new management structure, appointed a Corporate Management Team, established some new political management arrangements and there had been an improvement in member/officer relations.

Reflecting on the latest progress report published today, the Commission says it is pleased to welcome the significant progress made by Inverclyde Council since June 2005. It welcomes the improvements in the council, particularly the work it has done to set a clear strategic direction through community and corporate plans and the changes to political management arrangements and management structures.

Chairman of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said:

"Inverclyde Council has made significant progress in providing Best Value for local people. It is pleasing to see the council now embracing the challenging agenda ahead of it with clear commitment and renewed energy and enthusiasm.

"We have now seen two progress reports that have charted improvements, such as in setting strategic direction and in management arrangements and structures. We look forward to the Council maintaining the momentum it has established and continuing to improve."

In particular the Commission urges the council to make progress with its review of the competitiveness of its trading operations.

The council's performance will continue to be monitored through routine audits.

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Notes to Editors:

1. 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.
2. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people.
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 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.
- All 32 councils in Scotland are audited.
- 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 monitors progress and reports through an annual review. If the council has made insufficient progress, the Commission is 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