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## Press release

Embargoed until 00.01 hours, Wednesday 4 February 2009

### Commission welcomes progress made by Moray Council

**The Accounts Commission says that it is encouraged by the progress the council has made towards providing Best Value for local people. However there is still more work to be done and it is important that the council keeps moving forward.**

Today's progress report and findings follow the initial report into Best Value & Community Planning at the council, published in February 2006. At that point the Commission said that the council was not yet in a position to deliver Best Value to the people it serves.

In its findings on a follow up report in July 2007 the Commission acknowledged improvement in the council's corporate leadership and strategic direction, but said that there were still areas of concern.

Reflecting on the latest progress report published today, the Commission says that it is encouraged with the progress which the council has made. In particular it welcomes improvement in strategic leadership by elected members and the development of the council's approach to strategic planning.

However there is still more to be done. The Commission says that it is important that in building for the future elected members are committed to continuing their personal development, in order to ensure they have the skills needed to deliver effective strategic management. Attention must also be given to the need to continue to demonstrate competitiveness in services. Programme management arrangements for strategic projects should also be reviewed.

Chairman of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said:

"Moray Council has shown encouraging progress, with improvements in leadership by elected members and also in developing the council's approach to strategic planning. The council now needs to sustain a culture of continuous improvement, reflected in improving services for the people of Moray."

Progress will continue to be monitored through the routine annual audits.

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#### Notes to Editors:

1. This report provides an update on the progress that The Moray Council has made up to November 2008. Most of the audit work was carried out in July and the report has been updated with key developments since then.
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.
- 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](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accounts/pdfs/BestValuebriefingnote.pdf)