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## Press release

Embargoed until 00.01 hours, Wednesday 13 May 2009

### Some good progress by East Dunbartonshire Council, but still more to do

**The Accounts Commission says that council services have improved, there is positive leadership, good working relationships and a 'can do' attitude. However the council still has more to do to ensure it can provide best value for local people.**

Today's findings follow the Commission's consideration of the Best Value audit report compiled by Audit Scotland. This is the first time this council has had this type of audit.

The Commission says the council has concentrated on improving its key services and, from a low base-line position in 2001, there has been considerable improvement in key areas such as education, social work and housing.

There is positive leadership, with councillors and officers working well together, despite there having been significant changes in senior personnel over the past few years. The council also works well with its partners and has shown good self-awareness, including an understanding of the areas where improvement is needed.

Chair of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said: "East Dunbartonshire Council has made good progress with aspects of Best Value. It has improved its services, has positive leadership, good working relationships and an open and 'can do' attitude. We're encouraged by the progress so far, however the council still has work to do across a wide range of issues in order to ensure best value for local people."

The Commission says that many of the building blocks of Best Value are not well developed, highlighting:

- Slower progress in significant areas such as performance management, competitiveness, the strategic use of resources, customer service and workforce development.
- The need for councillors to identify their priorities for improvement and to scrutinise improvement activity. They should also be more involved in the scrutiny and challenge of community planning activity. Councillors should take every opportunity to adopt best practice as they develop their roles.

John Baillie continued: "We encourage the council to continue to improve by taking action on the areas highlighted in the report and to increase the momentum towards the achievement of Best Value."

The next step in the process is for the council to prepare an improvement plan.

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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.