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## Press release

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### Scottish Borders Council provides good services and is well placed for future improvement

**The Accounts Commission says Scottish Borders Council works well with other organisations, is improving well already and knows what more it needs to do to improve. It now needs to develop its systems for managing its performance.**

Scottish Borders delivers good quality services which have improved in recent years and are well-regarded by the local community. The council works well with its partners and together they are achieving good outcomes for the community in areas such as health improvement, jointly-provided social care, community safety and child protection.

Chair of the Accounts Commission John Baillie said: "Scottish Borders Council has strong leadership and effective governance as well as clear strategic direction and a good awareness of its own capacity and need for improvement."

"Services are generally of good quality and we particularly welcome the good and improving service delivery within social work and education services. The council has a clear programme for improving how it conducts its business, although progress against this has been slower than anticipated. The council should make further progress with this programme and also develop its corporate processes to help it maintain standards and drive improvement"

The council has set a very challenging efficiency savings target. To help meet this it should develop fully its mechanisms for testing and scrutinising value for money across its services and firmly establish its processes for managing performance. Some important areas highlighted in the 2007 Best Value audit, such as regulatory and technical services, roads and asset management also still need attention.

Two new judgements have been introduced to the audit, on the direction and pace of change and on the prospects for future improvement. The judgements for Scottish Borders Council are that is improving well and is well placed to deliver future improvement .

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#### Notes to Editors:

1. The first phase of audits of Best Value and Community Planning (BV1) has been completed, with at least one report and findings published on all councils. Best Value 2 (BV2) is the second phase and has been tested at five councils, with 'pathfinder audits'. Today's *BV2: Scottish Borders Council* report and findings are the fifth of these pathfinder audits to be published.
2. The issues identified in this report will inform the Assurance and Improvement Plan for the scrutiny of Scottish Borders Council over the next three years. Local audit and inspection teams will continue to monitor progress. The three-year Assurance and Improvement Plan is a new arrangement whereby audit and inspection bodies are working together to target and streamline their work for each council, across Scotland. This involves improving the planning and scheduling of scrutiny activity; developing a single corporate assessment and implementing a shared risk assessment framework.
3. The Accounts Commission for Scotland checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend public money properly and effectively.
4. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people.
5. 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 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.