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Press release

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Encouraging signs of progress at North Ayrshire Council but further improvement needed

Since the first best value report in 2005 North Ayrshire Council has shown an increased commitment to providing Best Value, according to the Accounts Commission. The Commission finds that the council's overall performance is satisfactory and it has fair prospects for future improvement.

The council is performing well in some important service areas such as education, housing, social work, planning and libraries and is making progress in helping improve the lives of the most vulnerable people in the area. However for some of the activities which the council has put in place to ensure improvements it is too early to judge how effective they will be.

Chair of the Accounts Commission John Baillie said: "North Ayrshire Council's increased commitment to Best Value has been clear since mid-2009. It is encouraging to see the council working hard to improve how it manages its resources and keeps track of service performance. Councillors are now doing more to support improvement and we urge them to continue to develop their role.

"We remain keen to see key processes put in place that will enable the council to keep up the quality of those services that are performing well, extend that level of performance to other service areas and demonstrate value for money."

The Commission also says that while it is good to see that the council has moved forward, particularly over the past year and a half, looking back to 2005 when the first Best Value report on the council was published, the progress made since then is disappointing overall.

The Commission wants to see the council establish arrangements to help councillors scrutinise performance so that they have better information available when making decisions. The council also needs to develop its financial strategy and get better at showing that it is using its resources efficiently. To do this it will need to improve how it manages assets and procurement of goods and services.

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Notes to Editors:

1. Today's findings follow the Accounts Commission's consideration of the Best Value audit report compiled by Audit Scotland. Two judgements have been introduced to the audit, on overall performance and the prospects for future improvement. The judgements for North Ayrshire are that its overall performance is satisfactory and it has fair prospects for future improvement.
2. 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'.
3. The issues identified in this report will inform the Assurance and Improvement Plan for the scrutiny of North Ayrshire Council. Local audit and inspection teams will continue to monitor progress. The Assurance and Improvement Plan enables audit and inspection bodies to work 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.
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.
6. The Accounts Commission for Scotland checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend public money properly and effectively.