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Press release

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Stirling Council committed to delivering better services

The Accounts Commission has published the first Best Value Report on Stirling Council, today (Wednesday 2 March) providing information to local people for the first time about how well the council is organised to deliver its services. The Commission commended the council on its ambition and commitment to improvement. Its vision of high-quality services and the value it places on openness and participation are shared across the political spectrum. However, the council is aware of the need to improve in a number of important areas. Elected members need to become more actively involved in scrutiny. Performance management and reporting must get better. There is a need to reallocate resources to the poorer performing services, without compromising those areas that are performing well.

The Best Value audit is part of a rolling programme covering all local authorities in Scotland. While it does not attempt a comprehensive review of all services, it aims to assess the extent to which the council is meeting its legal duty to improve service delivery, identify where this is in doubt and outline any remedial action that is required.

Accounts Commission Chairman, Alastair MacNish said:

“This is a highly ambitious council which has a clear vision for its area and is well positioned to meet the needs of citizens now and in the future. Stirling Council has performed well with regard to Best Value and Community Planning and is focused on the need for further improvement. It is now developing an action plan which will take account of the commission’s findings. Progress against the plan will be monitored by the local external auditor and we look forward to reporting again in three year’s time by which time we anticipate further improvements will have been made in key areas.”

Many council services are performing well. Children’s services, youth support, libraries, and council tax collection are very good. Community care, community learning and development and housing voids management are also good. In other areas, there is scope for improvement. These include refuse collection, roads and grounds maintenance, home care and sports facilities.

The Commission found Stirling Council to be committed to bringing about continuous improvement in service delivery. In particular the report highlights the following:

- It has an ambitious forward development programme incorporating more than 8,000 new homes, a schools Public Private Partnership programme, an urban regeneration company, city centre developments, a sports village, housing stock transfer and skills development.
- It has clear plans for developing its staff, finding better ways of conducting its business and managing its resources.
- It has a clear commitment to local democracy and community leadership that makes it very visible to local citizens. Overall, its approach to community engagement provides a model of good practice for others.
- There is a long-standing commitment to social inclusion and equal opportunities.
- A mature and constructive relationship exists between the Administration and Opposition. Elected members are clear about their role and they have a high regard for council staff.

More...

The report identifies a number of specific areas in which the council can make improvements. For example:

- Elected members must become more actively involved in scrutiny.
- There is a need to reallocate resources to the poorer performing services, without compromising those areas that are performing well.
- The council must ensure that it translates its plans into action that leads to sustained service improvement.

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Notes to Editors:

1. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975 and is independent of both central and local government. The Commission checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend £9 billion of public money properly and effectively.
2. Audits of Best Value, were established as a result of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. A rolling programme of audits will affect each local authority in Scotland every three years. The audit assesses the extent to which each council is meeting its legal duty to improve service delivery, identifies where this is in doubt, and outlines any remedial action that is required.
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 new 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
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 and therefore league tables and scores are inappropriate.
 - All councils in Scotland will be audited once every three years.
 - The councils that are being audited in the current programme are Angus, North Ayrshire, Stirling, Shetland, Inverclyde, West Lothian and Dundee. They have been selected to reflect a balanced mix of size, geography and socio-economic factors.
 - The council's local external auditor will monitor progress and report through an annual review. If the council has made insufficient progress, the Commission will be alerted and it may ask for further action to be taken.
 - Each audit results in a report to the Accounts Commission which will be published.
 - In most cases Key Findings from the Commission will be published at the same time as the Report. However, the Commission also has the power to do the following: 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.