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## Press release

Strictly embargoed until 00.01 hours, Tuesday 11th October 2005

# East Renfrewshire Council performs well, and is committed to further improvement

**East Renfrewshire Council's commitment to providing high quality and improving services has been recognised in a Best Value audit report published by the Accounts Commission today (Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2005). The report provides information about how well the council is organised to deliver improving services to local people.**

Isabelle Low, Deputy Chair of the Accounts Commission said: "East Renfrewshire serves a number of relatively affluent areas, although it also has pockets of deprivation. The council is ambitious and successful and service performance is generally strong and improving. The only real exception is housing which falls short of the council's high standards and it knows that work is required here. East Renfrewshire demonstrates many of the attributes of a council which is achieving Best Value. Examples of good practice include the way councillors are involved in scrutiny through the Audit Committee, and the sound management systems in place. However, the council now needs to move to a higher level, shifting the focus from these internal processes to the impact they have on local communities. We anticipate the council will be keen to address this in their improvement plans."

The Commission also welcomed the following aspects of East Renfrewshire Council:

- Its good understanding of the present and future needs of the East Renfrewshire area
- Councillors and officers provide strong leadership for the council and the wider community and have helped to foster a culture of continuous improvement
- There is a sound system of performance management
- There is evidence that the council provides a high, responsive and generally improving standard of service, particularly in the education service

The report also identified areas where further work is required. These include:

- Improvements in the way the council reviews services to ensure it properly considers all ways of achieving Best Value, including joint-working with other councils
- More balance is required in the way the council reports its performance to local people
- Some aspects of the performance of the housing service need to be addressed, including repairs, services for homeless people, and the provision of housing for applicants from outside the area

Isabelle Low concluded: "The Commission looks forward to receiving an Improvement Plan from the Council which responds to the audit report and our findings. Progress will be monitored against the plan during the course of the next three years".

### For further information contact:

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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 improvement 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. The Best value audit 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. 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.
  - It is expected that all 32 councils in Scotland will be audited on a rolling basis, on average, once every three years. The councils being audited in the current programme, are Moray, Glasgow, Highland, Argyll & Bute. The councils that have already been audited are Angus, North Ayrshire, Stirling, Shetland, Inverclyde, West Lothian and Dundee.
  - Each 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.