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Press release

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Renfrewshire Council is modernising and committed to further improvement

A Best Value audit report published by the Accounts Commission today (Thursday 6 July 2006) says that Renfrewshire Council's leadership is strong and effective, understands what needs to be done to deliver best value and is making good progress with this. However there is still much to be done to improve service performance. The report provides information about how well the council is organised to deliver improving services to local people.

Alastair MacNish, Chair of the Accounts Commission, said:

"Renfrewshire council has strong and effective leadership, a good understanding of what it needs to do to deliver best value and is making good progress with this. It has a positive organisational culture which effectively supports the drive for improvement.

"Council services are generally well managed and are focused on the needs of those who use them. However the council's starting point was a low performance base and there is still much to do to improve service performance. We are pleased that the council recognises this in its improvement agenda. We are also encouraged by the council's firm commitment to working with other agencies to deliver services and tackle complex problems."

The Commission welcomed the following aspects of Renfrewshire Council:

- The clear strategic direction provided by elected members and senior officers
- Its effective consultation arrangements
- The strong managerial culture of the council
- The good progress being made in its arrangements for managing and developing its staff, procurement, equal opportunities, sustainable development and customer care

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

- Scrutiny by elected members needs to be improved considerably, and all political parties need to engage in all aspects of scrutiny
- There needs to be a broader approach to examining and weighing up the options for services. This should include, where appropriate, market testing.
- Management re-structuring has happened as opportunities have arisen. The council should consider a more strategic approach to determine the most effective management arrangements

Alastair MacNish, Chair of the Accounts Commission 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".

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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.
 - 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.