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## Press release

Embargoed until 00.01 hours, Thursday 2 August 2007

# The Moray Council makes progress with Best Value but still has some way to go

**In its follow-up report on Best Value at The Moray Council, published today, the Accounts Commission acknowledges improvement in the council's corporate leadership and strategic direction, but says that there are still areas of concern.**

Commenting on the report's findings Accounts Commission Deputy Chair Isabelle Low said:

"In our February 2006 report we said The Moray Council still had a long way to go to be in a position to deliver Best Value to local people. Significant work was needed to create a culture of continuous improvement.

"This follow-up report shows that the council is starting to move in the right direction. But the Commission does have continuing areas of concern. Many of the changes introduced have been driven by officers, with not so much evidence of councillors' commitment. Since the local elections, many of the councillors are new and have the opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to Best Value and develop their corporate role in the council's affairs."

In its February 2006 report the Commission highlighted a number of recommendations. These included:

- Identifying clear priorities and concentrating on the essential steps to achieve them
- Developing political and corporate leadership skills in councillors and senior management
- Implementing the consistent use of comprehensive performance measures

Today's report charts progress to May 2007. It acknowledges improvement in the council's corporate leadership and strategic direction, in particular:

- the publication of a Community Plan
- training programmes for elected members and senior officers
- improvements to performance management arrangements
- new political management arrangements
- progress on strategic priorities such as flood prevention projects and agreement on single status

But the Commission points to continuing areas of concern, particularly:

- the need for consistent, strategic leadership by elected members
- the need to develop a systematic approach to demonstrating competitiveness
- the need for a more systematic approach to prioritise and manage strategic priorities
- the need to accept the value of external support to help deliver its improvement agenda

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## Notes to Editors:

1. This report looks at progress to May 2007. The Commission has asked for a further report on continued improvement in The Moray Council as at 30 June 2008.
2. 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.
3. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people.
4. 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
  - meeting new rules relating to trading.
5. 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 32 councils in Scotland will be audited on a rolling programme.
  - Each audit results in a report to the Accounts Commission.
  - A report will be published after each individual audit.
  - 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: 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.
  - The council's 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.

**A full press briefing on the process and aims of Best Value is available on Audit Scotland's website:**  
**[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accounts/pdfs/BestValuebriefingnote.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accounts/pdfs/BestValuebriefingnote.pdf)**