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Press release

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Orkney Islands Council carrying out good work but more needs to be done to demonstrate Best Value

In its first report on Best Value at Orkney Islands Council, published today, the Accounts Commission for Scotland says the council has good leadership and performs well in a number of areas.

Accounts Commission Chairman John Baillie said: "We welcome the extent of the council's community engagement and its financial planning and sustainability and we acknowledge its level of self-awareness and culture of openness."

In its findings, the Commission notes that the council region is remote and spread out and the council has adopted an innovative approach to these circumstances, in particular in its partnership arrangements with NHS Orkney and its joint working with community councils. However it is not yet able to show that it is providing Best Value for local people and it needs to make progress with this.

The Commission points to areas where the council needs to improve. It says the council needs to adopt innovative approaches to building capacity, particularly to support corporate functions and needs to ensure its corporate performance management arrangements are effective. In particular the community and corporate plans need to be supported by clear action plans.

John Baillie continued: "A number of the basic systems and processes to support and demonstrate Best Value are not yet in place. At the moment the council benchmarks itself against the other island councils but we would encourage it to compare itself more systematically to a wider range of councils to enable it to benefit from best practice elsewhere in Scotland. We look forward to receiving an improvement plan with measurable and achievable outcomes, to build on the good work being done by the council."

For further information contact Fiona Deans at Audit Scotland on tel: 0131 625 1651 or Anne McCubbin on tel: 0131 625 1653

Notes to Editors:

1. The report *The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning: Orkney Islands Council* was carried out from September 2007 to October 2007.
2. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975. The Commission checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend 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 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 is published after each individual audit.
- In most cases Key Findings from the Commission are 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