

The Audit of Best Value and
Community Planning

The Moray Council

Progress report



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared for the Accounts Commission
February 2009



The Accounts Commission

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- securing the external audit, including the audit of Best Value and Community Planning
- following up issues of concern identified through the audit, to ensure satisfactory resolutions
- carrying out national performance studies to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local government
- issuing an annual direction to local authorities which sets out the range of performance information they are required to publish.

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Commission findings



1. In July 2007, the Accounts Commission considered the Controller of Audit's report on the Best Value follow-up audit of The Moray Council and required the Controller of Audit to make a further follow-up report on the council's progress. We accept this report as fulfilling that requirement. We recognise that the report gives a broad picture of the council's performance based on the work of Audit Scotland and does not attempt a comprehensive review of all service delivery. We acknowledge the co-operation and assistance given to the audit process by members and officers of the council.

2. The Commission is encouraged with the progress which the council has made. We welcome in particular the improvement in the strategic leadership by elected members and the development of the council's approach to strategic planning. We note, however, that there is still much work to be done and it is important that the council keeps moving forward. It is important in building for the future that elected members are committed to their ongoing personal development, in order to ensure they have the skills needed to deliver effective strategic management. Attention must also be given to the need to continue to demonstrate competitiveness, and programme management arrangements in respect of strategic projects should be reviewed.

3. We endorse the conclusions of the Controller of Audit that the council needs to sustain a culture of continuous improvement reflected in improving services for the people of Moray. We would ask the Controller of Audit to continue to monitor progress through the annual audit process.

Introduction



The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced new statutory duties relating to Best Value and Community Planning. The report on the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning undertaken at The Moray Council and the Accounts Commission's findings were published in February 2006.

The report described a council with a long way to go to respond to its statutory duties on Best Value and with significant work needed to create a culture of continuous improvement. Sound management practices, such as performance monitoring, had been weak, though the limited evidence available suggested that there were no fundamental weaknesses in service performance.

In its findings, the Commission said that The Moray Council had lacked effective corporate leadership and direction, and had been an inward-looking and isolated organisation where small, parochial issues overwhelmed any consideration of strategic direction.

In conclusion, the Commission outlined a number of requirements which the council would have to meet if it was to deliver Best Value. 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 a comprehensive performance management framework.

The Commission also noted that it was unlikely that the council could undertake this task without securing appropriate external assistance, both on a consultancy basis and at a governance level, from elected members and chief executive peers.

In concluding its findings, the Commission said that it would continue to monitor the situation. A progress report was published in August 2007 summarising the progress made by the council up to May 2007. The report recognised that since the publication of the original Best Value report there had been improvement in the strategic leadership and strategic direction of the council, in particular:

- 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.

There were, however, continuing areas of concern for the Commission, particularly:

- the need for consistent strategic leadership by elected members (the Commission noted that almost all of the changes implemented had been driven by officers, with little clear evidence of member commitment)
- 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.

In its findings, the Commission said that The Moray Council had made steady progress in a number of areas

but still had a considerable way to go in delivering Best Value to ensure that improvement in corporate processes flowed through to improved services for the people of Moray. A significant proportion of members elected in May 2007 were new councillors, which presented challenges for the council in making progress. The Commission wished to see elected members in Moray demonstrate a commitment to delivering Best Value and developing their corporate role in all the council's affairs.

In concluding its findings, the Commission requested a further report from the Controller of Audit on continued improvement in The Moray Council as at 30 June 2008.

This report provides an update on the progress that The Moray Council has made up to November 2008. Most of the audit work was carried out in July and the report has been updated with key developments since then. It focuses on the implementation of the council's improvement programme and notes progress in service performance.

We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided to the audit team by Councillor George McIntyre, convenor; Alastair Keddie, chief executive; Bridget Mustard, Corporate Policy Unit manager and all other elected members and staff involved.

Conclusions



The council continues to move in the right direction. It has demonstrated a real willingness to progress the improvement agenda and an increased openness to external advice. Since the last progress report, elected member leadership has improved, clearer priorities have been established and a systematic approach to managing performance is now becoming embedded. A more structured approach is required to manage strategic priorities. There are some areas where further progress needs to be made, including an increased commitment by elected members to their personal development. The council needs to ensure that its progress works through to continuous improvement in services.

1. Officers continue to provide good strategic direction and are instrumental in moving forward key strategic issues such as community and financial planning. The strategic leadership provided by elected members has improved, the council has developed its approach to strategic planning, and processes are being put in place to provide a managed programme of professional development for members.

2. Since the publication of the progress report in August 2007, the council has demonstrated improved strategic leadership. It has:

- established priorities for the new administration and aligned these with the Scottish Government's priorities
- published its Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) in conjunction with its community planning partners
- revised its committee structures to reflect its priorities

- published a four-year financial plan based on its policy objectives
- reviewed the competitiveness of all of its trading operations
- improved its performance management arrangements
- continued to make progress on strategic objectives including flood prevention and the 'Designing Better Services' project.

3. The council demonstrates that it can deliver on priorities in its improvement plan when it focuses its efforts and resources. The council has taken steps to ensure that sufficient capacity and management arrangements are in place for individual projects. This has included greater use of external consultancy and advice.

4. There are still some areas where progress needs to be made:

- Elected members need to see the importance of continuous personal development if they are to be better equipped to provide the strategic leadership required to manage the council effectively.
- The council needs to decide how it will build on the comprehensive review of all trading operations to ensure that it continues to demonstrate competitiveness in future years.
- The council needs to review its programme management arrangements to ensure that strategic projects are prioritised, coordinated and monitored within an overarching framework.
- The council needs to incorporate the actions from the SOA into service improvement plans and prepare a revised corporate plan.

5. The ongoing challenge facing the council is to sustain a culture of continuous improvement reflected in improving services for the people of Moray. In order to achieve this, the council has to continue the development of its elected members and to provide effective arrangements to manage and renew its improvement programme.

Progress in The Moray Council



The improvement programme

The council has made steady progress with its improvement plan, although many of the changes are relatively recent and have yet to fully bed in and flow through to improvement in service delivery and outcomes.

6. The council received a full Best Value audit in 2005. Following publication of the February 2006 report, the council approved its improvement plan in April 2006. The Accounts Commission requested that the council's progress in implementing its improvement programme be formally reviewed in 2007 and the findings from this work were reported in August 2007.

7. Since then the council has made steady progress with its improvement programme. In November 2007, members agreed a follow-up action plan consisting of 11 objectives to address the findings in the 2007 report. Nine (64 per cent) of the 14 actions have been completed, with the remainder having all moved forward. There has been good progress in demonstrating competitiveness and strategic leadership, however, there is still some way to go on member training and developing a structured approach to managing strategic priorities across the council's programme of projects and initiatives.

8. This report highlights the progress the council has made on the Accounts Commission's findings included in the 2007 report. Many of these changes are relatively recent and it is therefore difficult to assess the impact on service delivery and outcomes at this stage. It is evident, however, that they are having a positive impact on corporate governance arrangements and the culture within the organisation.

Strategic direction, leadership and planning

Officers continue to provide good strategic direction and are instrumental in moving forward key strategic issues such as community and financial planning. The strategic leadership provided by elected members has improved and the council has developed its approach to strategic planning. Post-election induction training was very well attended but members have been less responsive to officers' recent efforts to agree learning and development plans with individual elected members.

9. In the first Best Value audit report the Accounts Commission identified weaknesses in leadership and strategic direction by members and senior management, and highlighted the need for the council to develop political and corporate leadership skills in councillors and senior management. In the 2007 progress report, the Commission acknowledged that there had been improvement in the corporate leadership and strategic direction of the council, but stressed the need for consistent strategic leadership by elected members.

10. Members have demonstrated strategic leadership by agreeing priorities and supporting changes to the council's political management arrangements. It is also clear from our observation of committee meetings that the level of challenge by members has improved and members are questioning other members and officers more effectively. In addition, members are more inclined to respond to questions themselves rather than pass them over to officers and members' questions seek solutions to problems rather than simply explanations.

11. Both officers and members continue to be involved in the Service Development Group (SDG) which meets monthly to examine policies and priorities. Following the

May 2007 elections, the SDG held a number of discussions which led to the publication of eight priorities which the council sees as important to Moray. A leaflet outlining these priorities was included with council tax bills sent to all residents in March 2008. As part of this exercise, the SDG also identified those areas of work and projects which are central to achieving the council's objectives.

12. The council's priorities have been aligned with the national priorities set by the Scottish Government and were used to develop the SOA in conjunction with the council's community planning partners. The SOA was approved and published in June 2008. The council received positive feedback from the Improvement Service's review of its SOA. This highlighted a number of areas of good practice including the strong and clear local context, comparison with Scottish positions and benchmarking comparator councils and the engagement of elected members in drafting responses to each national outcome.

13. At the time of the first Best Value audit in 2006, the council committed to revising its corporate plan to ensure it was aligned with the community plan. Progress was delayed following the May 2007 elections, as the council considered whether a corporate plan was required for the new council or whether the action plans associated with the community plan, supported by service plans, would be sufficient. In response to the *Report on the 2007/08 Audit*, officers confirmed that the SOA would be used as a basis for developing a revised corporate plan by the end of 2008.

14. In May 2008, the council agreed its four-year financial plan linking future expenditure to areas of both local and national priority over the period from 2008 to 2012. The plan identifies the need for the council to make £6.2 million of efficiency savings over the next four years.

15. The SDG has also started to look beyond the medium term to the longer term, particularly in areas such as:

- asset management planning, in particular infrastructure and school estate
- housing – 30-year development plan
- economic development – Moray 2020.

16. The council recognises that more needs to be done in the areas of asset management and demographic analysis to support this longer term planning work.

17. One of the key findings of previous Best Value audits was the need for elected members to demonstrate consistent strategic leadership and develop their role in all of the council's affairs. In order to do that, the council set six objectives within its Best Value Improvement Plan including delivery of training on strategic leadership and the development of a personal training plan for all members.

18. The political context for councils changed significantly in 2007, with a new Scottish government and a shift to more coalition and minority administrations in local government. In common with many other councils, the May 2007 elections resulted in a considerable turnover of elected members with 16 out of 26 being newly elected.

19. Following the election, the council ran a comprehensive induction programme which was attended by all but one member. This included a seminar/workshop on strategic leadership delivered by the director of the Scottish Local Authority Management Centre at Strathclyde University. In addition, 20 further focused courses were held which were attended by members involved

in the related committees. The course on Community Planning partnerships was well attended, with 73 per cent of members attending and 65 per cent of members attended the induction on children and young people. A programme of e-learning courses was also made available, but uptake of this has been very poor with only two of the 26 members accessing these facilities.

20. A programme covering eleven personal development skills, such as time management, communication and speed reading, was also offered to members during 2007. Attendance at these courses was more mixed, ranging between 20 and 39 per cent of all (new and returning) members. Although attendance rates were higher for new members, overall 11 members (42 per cent) did not attend any of these courses.

21. Individual learning and development plans have been developed for each member. Members were invited to attend a series of meetings to discuss their future needs and to look at what further training was available. A timetable of meetings was sent to each member in January 2008 but only eight of the 26 members chose to attend. The council's learning and development group have recently contacted members again to invite them to arrange a meeting to discuss their individual training needs.

22. Elected members need to see the importance of continuous personal development and make the most of the learning and development opportunities provided to ensure they have the right skills mix to help them fulfil their role effectively. Now that clearer corporate priorities have been established, elected members will need to maintain a consistent focus on delivering these in the years ahead.

Managing council business

The council has revised its structure to better reflect its priorities, but it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the new arrangements.

23. During 2007/08, the council reviewed its decision-making structures to ensure they were effective for the new council and to better align them with the priorities in the SOA. This is the second time the committee structure has been changed since the first Best Value Audit. The new structure ([Exhibit 1](#)) took effect from May 2008 and retains the Audit and Performance Review Committee and a licensing committee.

24. As part of the review, the council also agreed in principle, subject to consultation with local communities, to introduce local area committees as a first step to decentralising some elements of the council's business and to complete the Community Planning structure. The consultation exercise identified significant opposition to the implementation of local area committees and the council decided not to proceed with them. Instead, the Community Engagement Group will lead on the local agenda, and the council will continue to support the work of the existing Area Forums.

Managing competitiveness

The council has developed a framework of measures to demonstrate that direct services are achieving best value in service delivery. A wide range of trading operations have been reviewed against the framework and the results indicate that the council's operations are competitive. The council now needs to decide how it will build on this work to ensure that it can demonstrate competitiveness on an ongoing basis.

Exhibit 1**Committees and remits**

Committee	Remit	
Policy and resources	Budget Corporate budget monitoring Modernising Government Communications Performance reporting	Corporate policies Grant requests
Children and young people	School education Nurseries and child care Gaelic Children's services Leisure Libraries and museums	Sports and the arts Community learning and development Lifelong learning Youth justice Child protection
Health and social care	Community care Joint Futures Health improvement Mental health Substance misuse	Social work Criminal justice Vulnerable adults
Planning and regulatory services	Planning Building standards Local plan Environmental health Health and safety	Smoking control Contaminated land Trading standards Environmental protection
Economic development and infrastructure	Economic development Transport policy and delivery Flood protection Waste management Direct services	
Communities	Housing/HMO Housing regeneration Homelessness Social inclusion Equalities	Community safety Antisocial behaviour Community liaison
Audit and performance review	Internal and external audit reports Scrutiny – progress on action plans, SOA and improvement projects	Performance measures – development and monitoring Standards

25. The council has four Significant Trading Operations (STOs), building services, roads, vehicle maintenance and grounds maintenance. In the three years to 31 March 2008, all four met the statutory targets.

26. During 2007/08, the council agreed a framework for demonstrating the competitiveness of its trading operations, including reviews and benchmarking exercises designed to highlight areas of weakness which could be challenged by the members. The framework contained two phases:

- An annual plan to provide details of the relevant review work to be completed. This would be reported to members for them to challenge, using an APSE assessment tool.
- Monitoring – a report to be provided at the year end. If outcomes were deemed unsatisfactory members would be asked to consider options to ensure competitiveness.

27. During the year, the council carried out reviews of 24 trading operations, including the four STOs and a range of other services including training, car parks, harbours and engineering design. In August 2008, the Policy and Resources Committee considered a report on the reviews. Although the report did not offer judgements on the competitiveness of individual operations, it summarised the work done throughout the year and provided sufficient evidence to satisfy members that its statutory trading operations were competitive. Our review of the work supports this conclusion. The council is currently considering how to build on this comprehensive review to ensure that it continues to demonstrate the ongoing competitiveness of its trading operations in future years.

Project and programme management

The Audit and Performance Review Committee has had its remit extended to include monitoring of performance against the SOA and large projects. Progress has been made to ensure effective capacity and management for individual projects, but there is still no overarching framework.

28. There have been a number of examples of progress in managing large projects. Specialist managers have been put in place in all the major projects and the Audit and Performance Review Committee has recently had its remit extended to include monitoring of the SOA and other large projects. The extent to which this will help to drive forward the improvement agenda is yet to be seen.

29. In addition, the council is working in conjunction with Highlands and Islands Enterprise on a project to ensure that all development projects across the Community Planning partnership are coordinated. A re-development officer has been appointed to progress this initiative and a consultancy contract is expected to be launched soon.

30. There is, however, little evidence that the council has adopted a consistent approach to programme management and there is still no overarching framework for prioritising, monitoring and coordinating projects. To date, this has not impacted on the council's ability to deliver on individual projects but as resources become more restricted, a more structured approach would put the council in a better position to prioritise its significant commitments.

Exhibit 2

Specialist support

- Schools PPP project manager.
- 'Designing Better Services' manager.
- Shared Revenues Services manager to lead a joint revenues and benefits project with six other councils.
- Elgin Re-development officer seconded to HIE Moray to link all proposals for physical developments in Elgin.
- Flood Alleviation manager to progress major capital schemes in Moray.
- Broadband Project Development officer to overview the council's implementation of the joint project.

Source: The Moray Council

Capacity and external support

The council continues to demonstrate that it can deliver on priorities in its improvement plan when it targets its efforts and resources effectively. Steps have been taken to ensure that this capacity will continue in the longer term and the council is making greater use of external consultancy and advice.

31. The council is using external consultants to support a range of activities including member development seminars, Community Planning seminars, the development of the consultation and engagement strategy and the flood alleviation project. Since the last progress report it has also employed consultants to assist in the 'Designing Better Services' programme, and has committed further resources for this to continue. Members are also planning visits to other councils (see paragraph 34).

32. The council has also recognised the need to look externally to recruit key staff to address capacity issues relating to the major projects and has carried out a number of secondments and made appointments to ensure that these projects are supported (Exhibit 2).

Performance management and reporting

The council's performance management framework is becoming part of the culture of the authority and is widely used by services and members. Scrutiny has continued to improve.

33. The council has invested in performance management software which allows performance information to be monitored, analysed and reported in a number of different ways. Quarterly performance reports are submitted to service committees with 'traffic light' indicators highlighting good and poor performance, and additional narrative providing explanations and planned actions to address poor performance. The performance reports are well used and are easily understood by officers and members. The traffic light warning system makes it easy to focus attention on indicators showing poor performance and highlights areas where performance is consistently below standard. The chair of each committee also reports on performance to the Audit and Performance Review Committee. The council now needs to ensure that the good practice is rolled out to all service areas.

34. Scrutiny within the authority has continued to improve with members now providing a real challenge at the Audit and Performance Review Committee. Informal meetings have been held between committee members, Service committee chairs and officers to review performance indicators in advance of Audit and Performance Review Committee meetings. This has allowed explanations about the meaning of indicators to take place outwith formal committee meetings thus freeing up time for more effective challenge of results. The Committee has also arranged to visit two comparable councils to observe their arrangements for audit and the scrutiny of performance in order to identify areas where the council can improve its own scrutiny process.

35. A set of standards and targets were agreed by the council in May 2008 which will form the basis of scrutiny in 2008/09. These have been entered onto the monitoring system with clear links to Community Planning partnership targets and service improvement plan actions. The council has agreed to lead on performance monitoring against the single outcome agreement. Outcome measures from the SOA will be input to the council's performance management system once strategic assessments have been completed for all the SOA themes. At the time of writing four of the 15 themes were still outstanding.

36. The council is currently developing its own performance model, 'Moray Performs', based on the 'Scotland Performs' model used by the Scottish Government. The model aims to develop a more effective performance management system which focuses on the SOA and the council's local priorities. The programme is ambitious and includes the following key areas:

- Development, for each service, of a vision and a set of key measures that are based on outcomes, focused on results rather than

Exhibit 3

SPI Profiles: Proportion of indicators in quartiles 1 and 4

	Quartile 1		Quartile 4	
	No. of indicators	%	No. of indicators	%
2005/06	33	44.0	11	14.7
2007/08	31	40.8	11	14.5

Source: Audit Scotland

processes, and with clear links to the financial resources required for their delivery.

- Review of the service standards for each activity to ensure that they take account of national and statutory standards and targets.
- Development of a 'management scorecard' which focuses on key management activities to be undertaken during the year. This will be based on the Public Sector Improvement Framework, a self-assessment tool which requires the council to systematically and comprehensively review its activities and results in order to identify its strengths and areas for improvement.

37. The council's 2007/08 public performance report was published in October 2008 and provides information on performance against the Scottish Government's five strategic objectives, which form the basis of Moray's SOA. The report provides a balanced view of the council's achievements during the year. The council continues to develop other approaches to reporting performance information to stakeholders. These include webcasting all committee meetings, displaying community care performance information on television screens at the local hospital and a direct web link to the local newspaper, the *Northern Scot*.

Service performance

Statutory performance indicators (SPIs) show that relative performance remains consistent with previous levels. Performance varies across the council, but, overall, SPIs compare well with other Scottish local authorities, and the rate of improvement is above the national average. In 2008, the council received largely positive reports from Her Majesty's Inspector of Education (HMIE) on the education function and Psychological Services. A Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) inspection report published in December 2007 showed more mixed performance.

38. The follow-up audit reviewed service performance as measured by SPIs. These do not give a comprehensive picture of performance across all services, but they allow some comparisons to be made between councils and over time.

39. The first Best Value audit report concluded that the SPIs suggested some good performance and no fundamental weaknesses overall. The Moray Council's SPIs compared well with other local authorities.

40. The indicators for 2007/08 (**Exhibit 3**) show a similar picture. The proportion of SPI indicators in the upper quartile of all Scottish authorities was 40.8 per cent (compared to 44 per cent in 2005/06) and the proportion of indicators in the

Exhibit 4

SPI Profiles: Performance change between 2005/06 - 2007/08

	Measures that worsened by:			Measures that improved by:		
	> 15%	10-14%	5-9%	5-9%	10-14%	>15%
Scotland	10	3	4	6	5	18
Moray	10	2	5	3	5	24

Source: Audit Scotland

bottom quartile was 14.5 per cent in 2007/08 (compared to 14.7 per cent in 2005/06).

41. Between 2005/06 and 2007/08, the council's performance worsened by five per cent or more on 17 SPI measures and improved by five per cent or more on 32 (Exhibit 4). This gives the council an improvement-to-decline ratio of 1.88, which is slightly above the national average of 1.7.

42. Two SPIs which were in the bottom quartile in 2005/06 had still not improved by at least five per cent, by 2007/08; these relate to the processing time for planning applications and the cost of refuse collection.

43. Other key achievements highlighted in the council's 2007/08 performance report include:

- Flood alleviation schemes continue to progress with construction started on the Forres scheme, the Rothes scheme given ministerial approval and submission of the Flood Prevention Order for the Elgin scheme.
- The council recycled 44 per cent of household and business waste in 2007/08, exceeding the 2010 national target of 40 per cent.
- More than 65 per cent of the council's 5,917 houses meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

Inspections

44. In December 2007, SWIA published a performance inspection report on social work services. Four of the ten quality indicators were rated as good, five as adequate and one as weak. The report concluded that the council's community services 'delivered some good outcomes for people who use their services' and that people who responded to the inspection survey were 'generally positive about their experience of using social work services'. The report went on to note that there 'were some excellent services available for adults with learning disabilities and that children who had been looked after and accommodated were able to access a good level of ongoing support'. The report also stated that the 'workforce was committed and motivated with many staff enjoying their jobs and that community services had a strong belief in the importance of working in partnership with other statutory agencies and the independent sector'. The inspection noted that 'a performance management culture was developing and there was a commitment to service improvement combined with a good capacity to achieve this'.

45. The report identified a number of areas for improvement, including, 'some of the data collected in measuring outcomes for service users was inaccurate, communication with staff was better in some areas than others, there was not enough scrutiny of social work practice by managers, there were some shortcomings, including the level of recording in the assessment

and management of risk to service users, the workforce planning and development strategy needed to be better integrated with staff training and professional development' and that 'commissioning and contracting required further development.'

46. HMIE plans to publish a multi-agency report early this year on services to protect children and young people. This will provide information about the child protection services provided by the council, with partner services including the Health Board and the police.

47. In January 2008, HMIE published an inspection report on the education function of The Moray Council. Eight of the quality indicators were rated as good and two as adequate. The report identified the key strengths of the services as: the well-planned and comprehensive programme for continuous professional development, the strong ethos of inclusion, support for vulnerable learners and their broader achievement, the impact of the Parental Involvement Strategy in preparing staff and parents for working in partnership and a successful Active Schools Sports programme for increasing the participation of young people in physical activity.

48. The inspection recommended that the council continues to improve the quality of attainment, particularly at S5 and S6; improve approaches to self-evaluation within establishments and across community learning and development and ensure that head teachers and senior promoted staff take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating performance; and continue to improve the strategic direction of the authority's work to ensure greater impact on all learners.

49. Secondary school provision in Elgin has been a matter of debate for some time and the council had, in recent years, struggled to arrive at an agreement on whether one or two secondary schools provided the best option. In November 2007, the council

agreed to build a new secondary school in Elgin and a new primary school in Keith.

50. HMIE also published a report on the Educational Psychology Service in January 2008. Of the 16 quality indicators, seven were rated very good, five as good, three as adequate and one as weak.

51. The Scottish Housing Regulator has recently carried out an inspection of housing and homelessness services which is scheduled for publication early in 2009.

Outlook

The council has made steady progress on its improvement programme and has demonstrated that it can deliver on its objectives when it prioritises and resources them. The council now needs to build on this progress, managing and renewing its improvement agenda on a continuing basis.

52. Since the last Best Value progress report, members have shown more strategic leadership and the council has improved its systems, processes and capacity to help deliver its priorities. The council now needs to embed these arrangements, deliver its strategic priorities and ensure that these improvements work through to better services for people in Moray.

53. In order to support this, it needs to improve its programme management arrangements, build on its review of competitiveness, put sustainable arrangements in place to demonstrate efficiency on an ongoing basis, and incorporate actions from the SOA into service improvement plans. Elected members need to see the importance of continuous personal development if they are to equip themselves to provide the strategic leadership required and fulfil their role effectively.

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