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Press release

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Angus Council provides good services but quicker progress needed on Best Value

The Accounts Commission says the council still has much to do to ensure it is organised to deliver Best Value.

Angus Council has clear ambitions for its area and is making progress with its partners towards their shared goals. Services are generally of a good quality and well regarded by the local community. Although the council consults widely with local people it needs to strengthen local involvement in community planning.

Chair of the Accounts Commission John Baillie said: "Angus Council is providing good services that are well regarded by local people. However the council still needs far better corporate processes to help it maintain these standards and drive improvement. In particular councillors need much better information on service performance and the options available to them so they can make sure the council delivers the best possible services in the most efficient and effective way."

"In general, progress against many of the recommendations we made in our first Best Value audit in 2004 has been disappointing. There are welcome signs that the pace is now picking up, and this now needs to progress as quickly as possible."

Another key point is that the requirements of effective scrutiny do not appear to be sufficiently well understood. This limits the council's ability to focus leadership on delivering key priorities.

John Baillie continued "The lack of progress on establishing independent scrutiny of the authority's performance is particularly disappointing. The newly-formed Scrutiny and Audit Subcommittee is chaired by the leader of the council, which cannot be regarded as good practice."

Councillors also need to develop their ability to work together in a constructive way to provide strong strategic leadership, and to challenge and hold officers to account. Political leadership and senior management need to work together to ensure that the information systems, processes and governance structures are in place to ensure robust and transparent challenge by councillors of officers.

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Notes to Editors:

1. The first phase of audits of Best Value and Community Planning (BV1) has been completed, with at least one report and findings published on all councils. Best Value 2 (BV2) is the second phase and has been tested at five councils, with 'pathfinder audits'. Today's *BV2: The Angus Council* report and findings are the third of these pathfinder audits to be published.
2. Two new judgements have been introduced to the audit, on the direction and pace of change and on the prospects for future improvement. The judgements for Angus are that needs to improve more quickly and that its prospects for future improvement are fair.
3. The issues identified in this report will inform the Assurance and Improvement Plan for the scrutiny of Angus Council over the next three years. Local audit and inspection teams will continue to monitor progress. The three-year Assurance and Improvement Plan is a new arrangement whereby audit and inspection bodies are working together to target and streamline their work for each council, across Scotland. This involves improving the planning and scheduling of scrutiny activity; developing a single corporate assessment and implementing a shared risk assessment framework.
4. The Accounts Commission for Scotland checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend public money properly and effectively.

5. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people.
6. 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 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.