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Press release

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Dundee City Council needs to increase the pace of change

Dundee City Council still needs to embed a culture of continuous improvement throughout its business and increase the pace of change, according to a report out today. However services are generally getting better and there is evidence that citizens are more satisfied with the council's overall performance.

Today's findings follow the Accounts Commission's consideration of the Best Value 2 pathfinder audit report compiled by Audit Scotland. Dundee City Council is one of five local authorities that are part of the pathfinder process and this is the first of these reports to be published.

The Commission says that, although councillors need to give more leadership in the area of community planning, the council and its community planning partners have a good working relationship. This is having a positive effect on the quality of services and outcomes, such as better educational attainment and reduced crime, and citizens are more satisfied now with service performance than in 2005 when the first Best Value audit report was published. There have been significant concerns about some services such as housing and child protection, but the council and its partners are working to tackle these issues as a priority.

Chair of the Accounts Commission, John Baillie, said: "We see encouraging signs which we hope result in the council being better placed to improve and ensure best value and we welcome the positive effect that the recently appointed chief executive is having.

"However, there has been over-reliance on inspection to drive improvement and change has been too slow in other areas. We are also concerned to note that there has been little progress in implementing a previous recommendation to stop the practice of having all councillors sit on all committees, because this does not encourage independence and improved scrutiny."

The report notes that Dundee already faces significant demographic, economic and social challenges and there is a significant risk that the recession and tight public finances will affect the council's ability to keep improving. The Council's current approach will not be sufficient to meet future challenges. It needs to look more robustly at other choices of how it delivers services, become more outward looking in comparing its efficiency and effectiveness with other organisations.

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 Dundee are that it needs to improve more quickly and it has fair prospects for future improvement.

The issues identified in this report will inform the Assurance and Improvement Plan for the scrutiny of Dundee over the next three years. Local audit and inspection teams will continue to monitor progress.

For further information contact Anne McCubbin at Audit Scotland tel: 0131 625 1653 (amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk) or Fiona Deans : 0131 625 1651 (fdeans@audit-scotland.gov.uk).

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 Dundee City Council report and findings are the first of these pathfinder audits to be published.

2. The three-year Assurance and Improvement plan mentioned in the last paragraph of this press release refers to the new arrangements 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.
- 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 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.
5. 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.