

Address:  
110 George Street  
Edinburgh  
EH2 4LH

Telephone:  
0845 146 1010  
Fax:  
0845 146 1009

Website:  
[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)



## Press release

Strictly embargoed until 00:01, Wednesday 7 March 2007

# Scottish Borders Council has made major progress but now needs to focus on service improvement

**The Scottish Borders Council has made substantial progress in recent years and has done much of the groundwork needed to achieve Best Value, says the Accounts Commission. However there is a gap between its ambitions and its current performance.**

The Commission has today published its report into Best Value and community planning at the council.

Commission chairman Alistair MacNish said: 'Scottish Borders Council is an ambitious council and it has invested significantly in response to the findings of inspection and audit reports over recent years.

'It has built its senior management capacity and has developed appropriate and effective political and management systems. Scottish Borders is an ambitious council that is realistic about its strengths and weaknesses.'

The Commission says the council has put in place many of the building blocks of Best Value, including:

- good arrangements for community planning and joint working;
- effective leadership and clear strategic direction by elected members and senior officers;
- leadership development for members and officers;
- effective scrutiny;
- open and transparent decision making.

Mr MacNish said: 'Many of the improvements have come in recently. The council now needs to build on these to raise the quality of the services it delivers to its people.

'In doing so, the council needs to focus on its capacity to deliver its own very ambitious improvement programme. There is currently a gap between the council's current performance and its aspirations.'

The Commission has identified a number of areas where it believes the council should pay particular attention in developing an improvement plan. These are:

- lack of a clear strategy to manage the council's assets;
- a fragmented approach to customer care;
- the need for its services to be more competitive;
- the need to increase the momentum in strategic procurement;
- prioritisation of roads maintenance and the deteriorating performance of the planning application service.

**For further information please contact Simon Ebbett on 0131 625 1652 [sebbett@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:sebbett@audit-scotland.gov.uk) or Anne McCubbin on 0131 625 1653 [amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk)**

**For comment or information from Scottish Borders Council, please call the press office on 01835 826 632.**

### Notes to Editors:

1. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people. The audit of The Scottish Borders Council is the 20th in a rolling programme covering all councils in Scotland.

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 & rescue services and police forces spend nearly £16 billion of public money properly and effectively.

Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission.

The Audit Commission operates only in England.

3. 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.
4. 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 basis
- Each audit results in a report to the Accounts Commission for Scotland
- A report will be published after each individual audit.

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)