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News release

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Strong leadership and clear vision driving improvements at Stirling Council

Stirling Council has strong leadership with a clear vision, and has made good progress in improving the performance of its services, its management of resources and partnership working, according to the Accounts Commission.

The Commission has today published findings on an audit of Best Value and Community Planning at the council. It says Stirling's overall performance is good and it has good prospects for improving further in the future. The council now needs to focus on involving its employees more in its improvement work. Key areas for improvement include the region's roads, waste management and aspects of social care.

Chair of the Accounts Commission John Baillie said: "Stirling Council has made substantial progress since its last Best Value audit in 2005. The Commission is very encouraged by the strong collaborative leadership in the council between members and officers and across political groups, particularly given the delicate political balance.

"The Commission welcomes the clarity of the council's vision and its good sense of self-awareness, which provides a sound basis for further improvement. We urge the council to maintain its momentum and progress."

Today's report says the council has good governance, but needs to assure itself that officers in key positions, such as the chief financial officer and monitoring officer, are able to exercise enough influence in order to fulfil their statutory duties.

It also says the council needs to simplify its partnership arrangements. This will help the council and its partners to be clearer about the outcomes they want to achieve for Stirling, particularly in relation to economic inequalities and rural economic development.

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Notes to editors

1. Today's findings follow the Accounts Commission's consideration of an Audit Scotland report on the Best Value audit of Stirling Council. Two judgments have been introduced to the audit, on overall performance and the prospects for future improvement. The judgments for Stirling are that its overall performance is good and that it has good prospects for future improvement.

2. The issues identified in this report will inform the Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) for the scrutiny of Stirling Council. Local audit and inspection teams will continue to monitor progress. The AIP enables audit and inspection bodies to work 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 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.

5. The Accounts Commission looks at whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend 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.