

News release

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Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) provides good services but needs to make better progress in implementing Best Value

In a report published today, the Accounts Commission says while Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has put some of the basic building blocks in place for providing Best Value, there remain significant aspects requiring better progress.

The Commission last assessed the Comhairle's Best Value arrangements in 2006. Since then there has been slow progress overall. In particular, the culture of challenge and improvement remains underdeveloped. While the Comhairle responds well to external appraisal through audit and inspection, it remains reactive rather than proactive in identifying and implementing improvements.

Today's findings state that there needs to be a systematic approach to continuous improvement activity, supported by good arrangements for managing performance. A longer term strategic financial plan needs to be developed. Councillors should be more active in ensuring that improvements are made and the chief executive and corporate management team's leadership should be clearer and more visible, to show that the Comhairle is fully ready for the future challenges that it faces.

Chair of the Accounts Commission John Baillie said: "Overall there has been slow progress in putting in place arrangements to ensure Best Value. This is disappointing and needs to be rectified. Nevertheless, the Comhairle has strong political and community leadership, its financial management and governance arrangements are in good order and most services perform well. The Comhairle also understands that improvements have still to be made. We have asked for a further audit to report on the progress made in around 12 months' time."

The Commission rates overall performance as satisfactory, with fair prospects for future improvement.

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Notes to editors

1. The Accounts Commission's findings and the Audit Scotland report will be published on 29 November at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk. The 2006 Best Value report on Western Isles Council is available at: <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/work/bestvalue.php?year=2006>
2. Today's findings follow the Accounts Commission's consideration of the Best Value audit report compiled by Audit Scotland. Two judgements have been introduced to the audit, on overall performance and the prospects for future improvement. The judgements for Western Isles are that its overall performance is satisfactory and it has fair prospects for future improvement.
3. 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.
4. Best Value is the duty placed on local authorities to demonstrate their on-going commitment to providing better services to local people.
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 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.

6.

- 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. It provides services to the Accounts Commission for Scotland.