

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council : 27 February 2008

Subject: Audit of Best Value and Community Planning – Progress Report – January 2008

1. Purpose

1.1 This report presents the Progress Report on the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning in West Dunbartonshire.

2. Background

2.1 The first report of the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning in West Dunbartonshire was received in February 2007. This highlighted a number of priorities for immediate and medium term improvement, and noted that the Accounts Commission required a progress report from the Controller of Audit as at 31 July 2007.

2.2 Progress with the initial Best Value Improvement Plan was reported to Council on a regular basis during 2007, and on 31 July 2007, we submitted a Position Statement to Audit Scotland. Following this, Audit Scotland undertook further 'on site' work during August 2007, and the report on the results of this work was considered by the Accounts Commission in December 2007. The findings of the Accounts Commission based on this report were published on 22 January 2008.

2.3 The full Progress Report, including the Accounts Commission findings, was circulated to all Elected Members as soon as it became available, however the report is attached as an appendix.

3. Main Issues

3.1 The main findings of the Accounts Commission are set out in paragraph 3.1 – 3.3 as follows:-

“When the Commission made findings on the Best Value report on West Dunbartonshire Council in February 2007, it required a further report by the Controller of Audit on the progress made by the council as at 31 July 2007 and the Commission accepts this report as fulfilling that requirement. The Commission recognises that the report gives a broad picture of the council’s performance based on the work of Audit Scotland and does not attempt a comprehensive review of all service delivery. We acknowledge the co-operation and assistance given to the audit process by members and officers of the council.”

- 3.2** “The Commission acknowledges the council’s increased commitment to continuous improvement and the progress made by the council within a fairly short timescale. We endorse the conclusions of the Controller of Audit in her report and would urge the council to move forward as quickly as possible on the areas where limited progress has been made. Priority should be given to:-
- continuing to develop member/officer relationships
 - establishing arrangements to demonstrate the competitiveness of its services
 - developing robust financial planning
 - improving community engagement.”
- 3.3** “The Commission believes that West Dunbartonshire Council needs a longer period of time to put in place the improvements required to demonstrate Best Value and would encourage the council to increase the momentum of change. The Commission accordingly requires a further report from the Controller of Audit in eighteen months time.”
- 3.4** The audit follow up work was undertaken in August 2007, when the new Administration and revised political & administrative arrangements were only just in place. Nevertheless, it has been recognised that the new Council had, at an early stage, (June 2007), agreed the need for change. This resulted in the agreement of a new approach to both political and management arrangements, (based on the results of independent analysis and advice – which had been a key recommendation of the original report).
- 3.5** The new approach had also addressed some of the capacity issues which were identified in the original Audit, and in general, at the time of the follow up, many of the key building blocks for improvement were being put into place. In the period since the Audit follow up, the new Strategic Management Team has been recruited.
- 3.6** Work has been progressing on the Best Value Improvement Plan, both before and following the return Audit visit, and details of this continue to be reported to Council or the appropriate committee, (e.g. Employee Survey - Council August 07, Development of Member/Officer Relations – Council November 07, Remit of Audit & Performance Review Committee [Scrutiny] – Council January 08).
- 3.7** The receipt of the Audit Progress Report now allows us to review the Best Value Improvement Plan not only in the light of the views expressed, but also in terms of the wider national initiatives which will shape the development and reporting of Council services in future. These include the Concordat with the Scottish Government, and the development of the Single Outcome Agreement, (SOA) approach.

3.8 It is recommended that the proposals for the revised Best Value Improvement Plan should be reported to Council in March 2008, (although in the interim, the work to deliver on the priorities set out in the current plan will continue). This will allow the development of the new Single Outcome Agreement approach to inform the development of the revised Improvement Plan. (The first submission of the SOA is required at the end of March 2008). In addition, it will provide the opportunity for the new Strategic Management Team to be fully involved in the development of proposals, and will allow the Improvement Plan to be embedded as part of the Council's mainstream priorities, rather than having a separate focus.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 Any Personnel issues will be highlighted in the revised version of the Best Value Improvement Plan.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 Any financial implications will be highlighted in the revised version of the Best Value Improvement Plan

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 There is a risk that if we do not recognise the key issues set out in the Progress Report, and develop an appropriate response as part of a revised Improvement Plan, then we may not meet the standards required by the return Audit which will be carried out in 18 months time.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning Progress Report identifies a number of areas where the Council will require to demonstrate an increased momentum of change. These will be reflected in a revised version of the Best Value Improvement Plan, which will be presented to Council in April 2008.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Members are invited to comment on the findings set out in the Progress Report.

8.2 Members are asked to identify specific issues to be addressed in a revised version of the Best Value Improvement Plan.

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Chief Executive
Date: 14 February 2008

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Appendix: Audit of Best Value and Community Planning – West Dunbartonshire Council, A Progress Report

Background Papers: Report on Employee Survey - Council August 2007, Report on Development of Member/Officer Relations – Council November 2007, Remit of Audit & Performance Review Committee – Council January 2008).

Wards Affected: All