

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council : 29 June 2011

Subject: Audit Scotland report: An overview of local government in Scotland 2010

1. Purpose

1.1 This report provides detail of the Council's response to Audit Scotland's report 'An overview of local government in Scotland 2010'.

2. Background

2.1 In January 2011 the Accounts Commission considered a report by Audit Scotland which provided an overview of the key issues arising from local authority audits. The report acknowledged the substantial commitment and effort demonstrated so far by Councils in beginning to address the challenging financial outlook and the pressures they currently face. However the report equally highlighted the difficult decisions Councils will encounter in prioritising the level and quality of services to provide in the future.

2.2 The report emphasised a number of areas that will be important for Councils to have in place to ensure they are best placed to address the short term difficulties and the medium to longer term focus. These include robust performance management, sound governance and accountability, and good quality information to support effective decision making.

2.3 The report provides example of best practice across local authorities and draws on a range of sources to highlight areas for improvement and the challenges for 2011 and beyond. In conclusion the report presents a number of action points and key questions for Councils and councillors to consider and help identify how they are currently addressing the points raised.

3. Main issues

3.1 Set against the context of the report Audit Scotland put forward 22 action points for Councils to consider. These actions were distributed between senior managers within each department to evaluate and report on the work already underway to address the points highlighted. A summary of the responses to each action point is illustrated at Appendix A.

3.2 During the Member's Business Day in May, the key questions for Councillors formed a development session which engaged members in small group discussions to assess the Council's position within the questions raised. These small discussions subsequently formed a wider feedback session to

identify common themes that were evident across all the discussions. The response to the key questions is illustrated at Appendix B.

3.3 Overall the Council's response to the action points and key questions highlights the significant work already underway to ensure the Council is best placed to meet future challenges. However, equally some areas were identified as requiring further development going forward. These include:

- Improving performance management and reporting
- Making better use of benchmarking information
- Improving competitiveness
- Developing a greater focus on outcomes
- Measuring the value of services within the community

3.4 Work is already underway to address improvement within these areas either through departmental plans or the Assurance and Improvement Plan. In addition the Council will continue to consider the outcomes of any future reports by Audit Scotland as a resource for challenge and improvement within our future plans.

4. People Implications

4.1 There are no people implications associated with this report.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 The report highlights a number of issues and challenges which are important for Councils to consider in plans for 2011 and beyond. There is a risk that failing to consider these issues may weaken the Council's opportunity to take on board the Accounts Commission guidance on areas they have placed importance on in addressing the continued financial pressures.

7. Equalities, Health & Humans Rights Impact Assessment (EIA)

7.1 No significant issues are identified at this stage regarding potential equality impact.

8. Conclusions & Officer's Recommendations

8.1 The report reinforces the significant challenges Councils will need to consider within their forward plans for 2011 and beyond. This is balanced with examples of best practice and guidance on areas the Accounts Commission believe Councils should progress and place importance to secure Best Value.

8.2 Deliberation of these issues has provided the Council with opportunity to explore the issues raised, take stock of its current plans and priorities, and identify areas for improvement going forward.

8.3 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the outcomes of officers and member's assessment in response to the key actions and questions raised.
- ii. Provide any feedback on future improvement areas.

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Date: 17 June 2011

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Appendix A: Responses to action points for Councils
Appendix B: Responses to key questions for Councillors

Background Papers: Audit Scotland report: 'An overview of local government in Scotland 2010' published January 2011

Wards Affected: All