

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council - Wednesday 30th September 2009

Subject: Accounts Commission Best Value Audit Follow Up Report – July 2009 - Examples of Political Conflict

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides members with further detail in relation to the motion which was agreed by Council on 26th August 2009.

2. Background

- 2.1 Following the debate on the Accounts Commission's Best Value Audit Report at its August meeting, Council agreed a motion which included a request to the Chief Executive to provide a further report giving additional information:

“Council is concerned about the claim that political conflict among elected members is having a negative effect on the operation and development of the Council and calls for a report from the Chief Executive giving clear examples of where this has occurred.”

- 2.2 As a result, the Chief Executive requested Audit Scotland to provide details of the examples which it took into account when reaching its conclusions.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1 A response was received from Audit Scotland on 18th September 2009. This is attached in full as appendix 1.

- 3.2 The main example cited in the response refers to the effect of lengthy discussions around the issue of Single Status, which Audit Scotland believes inhibited progress on other aspects of Council business, including the Best Value improvement plan. Audit Scotland notes that its interviews identified that, even where there was agreement on the issues being discussed, members would often take opposing positions in Council meetings

- 3.3 The other comments provided by Audit Scotland refer to the behaviour of some elected members, (including examples contained in the minutes of Council meetings), the volatility of Council meetings and the resulting impact on perceptions.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1 There are no Personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 The risks associated with this issue relate both to the effectiveness of the Council's decision making processes and to the reputation of the Council and West Dunbartonshire as a whole.

7. Conclusions & Officers' Recommendations

7.1 Audit Scotland has provided some detail of the issues which it took into account when reaching its conclusions in the Best Value Audit follow up report.

7.2 Members are asked to note and make comment on this response.

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David McMillan
Chief Executive
Date: 22 September 2009

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Appendices: Response from Audit Scotland – 18th September 2009

Background Papers: Accounts Commission Best Value Audit Follow Up Report
– July 2009

Wards Affected: All

Audit of Best Value and Community Planning Best Value Progress Report

West Dunbartonshire Council

Evidence of political conflict having a negative effect on the operation and development of the council.

Best Value reports use a range of sources of evidence from which audit judgements are drawn. This includes document reviews, observations and interviews. Evidence of political conflict and its effect on the organisational culture was obtained from:

- interviews and meetings with officers and elected members
- a review of council meeting minutes
- media reports
- a letter to elected members from Chief Executive regarding conduct (April 09)
- observation of council and committee meetings
- cultural web snapshot

The Best Value progress report specifically refers to slow progress in council agreeing improvement work to develop relationships between officers and elected members. Single status discussions involved lengthy discussions, inhibiting progress in other aspects of council business including the best value improvement plan. Generally interviews identified that even when there was agreement on issues being discussed, members would often take opposing positions in council meetings.

In relation to the Councillors' code of conduct the report refers to Councillor Bolan's suspension. Other example used but not reported include verbal assault by elected members on officers (minutes 19/12/07 :26/03/08 :29/10/08), warnings about conduct (minutes 26/03/08) and disorder at committee meeting (minutes 14/05/08). Evidence from interviews highlighted that council meetings could be 'volatile' and that there were some elected members not aware of the behavioural issues and conduct and the resulting impact on perceptions.

September 2009