

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council : 26 November 2008

Subject: Strategic Leadership & Organisational Culture

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides proposals on how Elected Members and officers can collectively address some of the issues relating to strategic leadership and organisational culture which were highlighted in the Best Value Audit report of February 2007 and subsequent progress report in January 2008.
- 1.2 It sets out a number of proposed actions based on an assessment of the Progress report and incorporates the outcomes of the Improvement Service (IS) review of member/officer relations, including the subsequent discussion forums between members and the IS.

2. Background

- 2.1 Strategic leadership, decision making and issues surrounding organisational culture, (including member / officer relations), were noted as major priorities in the initial Best Value report and follow up progress report.
- 2.2 The progress report in January 2008 noted positive action was underway on a number of fronts, including:
 - the review of political and managerial structures,
 - the establishment of a new scrutiny structure, and
 - the beginning of an increase in openness and inclusiveness
- 2.3 However it also noted that more limited progress had been made in developing strategic capacity including limited investment in Elected Member development, and the lack of a robust leadership and management development programme. Whilst the Council has broadly accepted the need for improved strategic leadership and culture change, the review highlighted that the Council still has some way to go in demonstrating an improved and positive organisational culture and that a period of stable political and managerial arrangements would be required to facilitate such change. The Organisational Development workstream is co-ordinating the steps forward in responding to these issues.

2.4 Since the progress report assessment was undertaken in Autumn 2007, the development of the Best Value Improvement Plan (BVIP) has progressed, and differing projects are now underway which aim to build individual capability of both Elected Members and officers leading to strengthened organisational capacity capable of steering change and improvement. These include:

- Implementation of the Political Skills Framework and personal development plans for Elected Members (September)
- Implementation of a Leadership Development Programme for Senior Managers (January 2009)
- Implementation of management qualifications for middle and front – line managers (October – January)
- Introduction of individual performance management for senior managers

2.5 Development programmes and initiatives of this kind alone will not deliver the required change and improvement. There is a critical need to adopt new ways of working using cohesive approaches which develop solid working relationships and amplify the Council's ambition. To facilitate this, some elements of our BVIP still require additional work including:

- Agreeing and implementing an action plan to improve strategic decision making
- Considering any other action required to improve decision making, including openness, accountability and scrutiny structures
- Implementation of a training programme for Elected Members (including the CPD framework)

2.6 It is envisaged that issues relating to member/officer, inter-member relations and the organisational culture will be addressed through effective implementation of these mechanisms, a unified approach to personal development, and the embedding of new approaches to working collectively. A strong demonstrable commitment from members and officers alike will be required to make this happen.

2.7 This report focuses on a range of actions which should be developed further to address these issues and facilitate improved ways of working between officers and members in developing our strategic leadership and decision making processes.

3. Main issues

3.1 Basic guidance is available in the form of the Code of Conduct for Elected Members and the Protocol for Member / Officer Relations, but these do not have a specific focus on strategic leadership and decision making processes.

3.2 The initial IS report (in mid 2007) emphasised the positive findings from both member and officer viewpoints of the condition of member / officer relations. However the report continued to highlight that the Council was still at an early stage, and that forthcoming difficult and complex decisions may test these relationships. Meetings in recent months have illustrated this is sometimes the case.

3.3 It is increasingly apparent that relations between member / officer and member / member need to be firmly rooted on a level of trust and shared understanding. This needs to be an organisational development priority if we are collectively to influence and change the organisational culture and develop the IS suggestion of a 'culture of ambition' for the Council. This will be supported through some of the initiatives suggested within this report.

4. Proposed Actions

4.1 It is stressed at the outset that responsibility and ownership of developing strategic leadership and improving the organisational culture within West Dunbartonshire do not rest exclusively with either elected members or officers alone. Real change can only be effected by officers and members working collectively to challenge historical ways of working, embracing the need to involve all parties at the earliest opportunity, and comprehensively exploring options before moving to the decision making stage.

4.2 The Corporate Management Team acknowledge the crucial involvement of their role in this change process and have committed to a number of development initiatives to build their team capacity including:

- Development of their values and behaviours for working together
- Implementation (and cascade) of new framework for managing individual performance
- Support for the implementation of leadership and management development programmes
- Developing communication styles which engage and involve staff in strategic issues as early as possible

4.3 An assessment has identified the following key areas requiring further joint development:

i. Strategic Leadership

There is a need to develop strong and stable political leadership which works across the strong, separate historical identities of the different communities that are currently a barrier to longer term strategic decisions. It is proposed this may be done both by giving a high profile to 'focal issues' which can only be addressed on a West Dunbartonshire wide basis, and by developing the opportunities offered by multi member wards.

ii. *Ambition for the Council and Improving Relations*

The IS also raised wider issues such as the culture of 'ambition and discipline'. They suggest that although there is a basic wish to develop good and respectful relationships, the ambitions should be greater, including aspirations for better leadership, increased partnership working and the development of external relationships. Discipline will be needed to steer some of the more difficult decisions, combined with a commitment to adopt new ways of working within a new political structure. It's recommended that the IS undertake further work with the Council on this issue.

iii. *Decision making*

There is a need to develop processes which support members in being fully involved in decisions, particularly in early discussions about strategic issues. This is in recognition of the crucial role which members play at this level, (as set out in paragraph 3.3 of the Code of Conduct for Councillors). This is a role which has scope for considerable development if members are freed up from some of the more front line activity which takes their time at present. It will be the responsibility of officers to ensure that members have the support necessary to engage fully in this role. In general this should include:

- ***Definition of the types of issues which will be subject to early discussion with members***
- ***Initial discussions via pre planned / cyclical meetings, ad hoc meetings, or member / officer policy development forums or boards.***
- ***Opposition member involvement in pre agenda arrangements***
- ***An opportunity to clarify / seek further information following the issue of agenda papers***

These mechanisms are considered in further detail in appendix A

iv. *Scrutiny and the role of the Opposition*

The role of Opposition can take a number of forms, including:

- The Westminster / Holyrood 'Question Time' model
- The scrutiny / performance monitoring role
- The involvement of Opposition members in policy development

The first approach has become more apparent across Scotland since the introduction of Proportional Representation. However the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats presented by each of these models should be considered by members. There are certainly opportunities to develop the use of scrutiny

and performance monitoring systems to ensure the most effective use of these processes, and the involvement of opposition members in policy development is an important feature of the processes outlined in appendix A.

- 4.4** The proposed actions explained within Appendix A provide further details of the full range of possible activity to address the issues raised within this report. This takes account of the feedback from the June session with the IS, and more general feedback from previous discussions

Measures of Success

- 4.5** The measures of success in these areas would be the same mechanisms which identified the challenges in the first instance. Staff surveys and interviews with members, officers and other stakeholders highlighted the concerns. These same methods should be used to assess the impact of these improvement actions.

5. Personnel issues

- 5.1** No personnel issues are anticipated at this stage.

6. Financial issues

- 6.1** There are no financial implications at this stage.

7. Risk analysis

- 7.1** There is a real risk of being unable to deliver the required development and improvement plans of the Council if there is a lack of progress in terms of how we work, act, and behave with each other in our business operations and routines.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1** A number of options have been discussed and highlighted as possible actions for improving strategic decision making and facilitating change in how members and officers work together. This will require members and officers alike to consider new and different ways of working together to facilitate real change in relations.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1** Council is asked to:-
- i. review the report and provide feedback
 - ii. agree the recommendations within appendix A

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Date: 17 November 2008

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Appendix A: Improvement Actions

Background Papers: Reports - Improvement Service

Wards Affected: All

The following paragraphs outline a number of suggested improvement actions and development opportunities to move forward on the issues contained within the main report.

1. Decision making and scrutiny

1.1 Commitment of Support to Members

General officer support to both administration and opposition members is a fundamental issue. It is proposed that the mechanisms used to improve strategic decision making, must ensure that officers fully advise and support all elected members across all stages of the process, with a view to optimising consensus on key decisions and minimising adversarial politics. This will also require some commitment from elected members to take part in this process, firstly by their participation in the development of appropriate mechanisms, and subsequently by their full engagement in these. As with many of these issues, a key factor will be building in the time needed to do this effectively. (It has to be recognised that this will place additional pressures on both elected members and staff.)

Action:

All officers commit to the principle of involving all Elected Members, at the earliest opportunity, in proposals for decision by Council, and fully advise and support Elected Members across all stages of the decision making process.

All members commit to the principle of participating in opportunities for involvement in all stages of the decision making processes – subject to their initial involvement in agreeing appropriate mechanisms.

Once appropriate models of involvement are agreed, officers should ensure that members are fully briefed on the details of their operation.

1.2 Defined areas for Council decision

A first stage is clearly defining the business of Council and determining the type/level of issues which are a priority for early discussions between members and officers. It is suggested that the development of all major decisions on issues which affect the whole of West Dunbartonshire such as strategy, budgets and improvement should be planned and resourced at an early stage. A rolling annual plan of key strategic decisions, linked to the development of corporate and service plans should be presented to council in April each year.

Some issues can be planned on a cyclical basis, e.g:

- The development and review of the Single Outcome Agreement, (SOA),
- The development and review of the Corporate Plan,
- The annual budget development process, (linked to the priorities in the SOA and Corporate Plan).

Some will be much longer term and will be ongoing issues, e.g

- Addressing population decline
- Economic Regeneration activity
- Looking for better and improved ways of delivering services

Others will change from year to year, but are key issues which will be apparent well in advance such as:

- Schools Regeneration,
- Standard Delivery Plan for the Council's Housing,
- Care Homes Strategy
- Single Status

Finally, there will be issues which arise suddenly, but in which it is still important to involve all members in the fullest possible discussions. Lower profile decisions may continue to be dealt with at Committee in the current way, although any matter with implications for a particular ward should involve all members representing that area.

In general, items which are purely operational, or for information, should not be submitted to Committee at all, but provided as briefings to all members (performance information would be the exception to this). This approach will involve more effective use of Schemes of Delegation and it would then be the responsibility of members to identify any other matters on which they wished fuller strategic discussion according to the definition above. This approach would also reflect the Code of Conduct for elected members which stresses the need for members to focus on their strategic role as opposed to more operational issues.

Action:

(i) The CMT define the key strategic issues for Council decision and Elected Member involvement to 31st March 2009, and develop an annual plan thereafter (presented in April each year)

(ii) Complete a review of the Scheme of Delegation

1.3 Involvement in development and initial discussions

Early discussion on the main strategic issues with members, (and where relevant other stakeholders such as TUs) is a key goal, and was the subject of much debate at the IS sessions. The Best Value progress report commended the early signs of more effective cross-party strategic working through joint working, the introduction of pre-agenda meetings, and a desire to develop a more open and inclusive approach to decision making. It highlighted this was a more balanced approach but there is scope to plan, develop, and embed this activity much more effectively. Options include:

- **Discussion forums:** linked to issues which occur on a cyclical basis - such as the annual planning processes
- **Semi permanent sub-groupings:** potential to build expertise in a particular area (e.g. Member Reference Groups to oversee the development of specific projects or proposals)
- **Regular opportunities for debate between Elected Members and the CMT:** either through Administration and Opposition Leader attendance at monthly meetings with the CMT. These debates should focus on a small number of key issues – such as those outlined in the 2nd bullet list in paragraph 1.2.
- **Replacement of every second Council meeting with a briefing session or less formal discussion forum:** this would have the advantage of allowing *all* members to participate in discussion of key issues, and would also allow input from the community or other relevant agencies or interest groups. However the format of meetings would need revised to be less formal, less party political and to allow more participation from officers. Similarly, these sessions might focus on the type of issues previously outlined in paragraph 1.2, but would allow a wider member and officer involvement. This approach (i.e. business meetings once every 2 months) may also have the advantage of allowing papers to be produced earlier, and more time for member involvement in the pre agenda stages for Council reports.
- **The development of ‘on line’ intranet discussion forums, which would allow all members to give views on particular issues:** this would also allow the submission of views *following* debate, after a period of further research or consideration.

It is proposed that all of the mechanisms suggested have a role to play, and the most appropriate in each case should be considered, together with the development a rolling annual plan (see paragraph 1.2). These mechanisms should not just be led by officers and it would be important to include direct input by elected members. Mechanisms by which members could raise issues should be developed. Further discussion is also needed on the membership arrangements in each example (e.g. a grouping of leaders/conveners and shadows, but also involving independents and smaller parties).

Action:

- (i) Agree mechanisms for implementation following establishment of key strategic issues by CMT
- (ii) Pilot the introduction of monthly discussion forums to complement development of strategic issues. Begin with a 3 month programme, November 2008, January & February 2009 – covering key issues. Some examples might include:
 - Addressing population decline / image of West Dunbartonshire
 - Working in partnership
 - West Dunbartonshire – opportunities for 2014 – Commonwealth Games
- (iii) Scope the development of an internal ‘on-line’ discussion forum for Elected Members and also possibly elected member ‘blogs’.
- (iv) Facilitate more direct links between the Chief Executive, CMT and Group Leaders, (e.g. group leaders’ attendance at bi-monthly meetings with CMT – with programme of topics)

1.4 **Report Preparation**

Following these early discussions, it would be the responsibility of officers to ensure that the draft reports prepared for pre agenda meetings reflect the views expressed as far as possible, without compromising professional views and advice.

With regard to the format of reports, further discussion is needed on how to make the content more accessible, while ensuring that all the relevant information is provided. More effective option appraisal is a particular area for development.

Action:

Consider practical revisions to the reporting format including presentation, distribution, recording, and accessibility arrangements.

Develop a system of briefing notes – rather than committee reports, where decisions are not required. This will include format, distribution mechanisms, publication arrangements and record management.

1.5 **Pre agenda meetings**

The initial IS report suggested that conveners, vice conveners and their opposition shadows should be briefed together at pre-agenda meetings. This method of working was practised in the early days and was acknowledged by the Best Value progress report as a more balanced approach to sharing information. However this approach appears to have stalled and it is proposed that, with

relevant support, this should be reinstated. This is a valuable mechanism which aims to ensure all parties receive the same key information and opportunity to comment on the content of reports. It is acknowledged however that it may be difficult for conveners and shadows to express the views of their groups before discussions have taken place, but cross party involvement in pre agenda meetings could also play a role in informing discussion at group meetings. As above, any changes agreed at pre agenda meetings would not be at the expense of professional views and advice. Arrangements for Independents / minority parties would need separate consideration.

It is proposed that pre agenda meetings should be scheduled and supported by the committee section as an integral part of the overall committee / council process.

Action:

- (i) Develop scope and parameters for pre-agenda meeting***
- (ii) Develop diary of pre agenda meetings***
- (iii) Develop operational arrangements for pre agenda meetings***
- (iv) Briefing sessions for members and officers on key purpose of these meetings***
- (v) Implement review and evaluation process on ongoing basis***

1.6 **Seeking clarification and further information**

It is important that members have a comprehensive understanding and the fullest information to enable them to participate confidently in the decision making process. With regard to the Council/Committee decision making stage, it is proposed there should be opportunity for members to request clarification or further information between the issue of agenda papers and the Council/Committee meeting. This may be difficult to implement without a review of the current timescales for the issuing of agendas (see also comments re Council meeting cycle in paragraph 1.3). There are also issues of balance between members' needs for time to consider reports, and the provision of the most up to date information (e.g. performance information). Further discussion is needed on the practicalities of this, but it is suggested that ***in principle, if a member requires further information it is their responsibility to seek this in advance of the council/committee, and it is an officer's obligation to prioritise any such request.*** In addition, it is proposed that Members' motions arising from reports should also be discussed by members with the appropriate Director. This will ensure that the wishes of Members can be reflected in a way which accords with Standing Orders and that they will not fall for procedural reasons.

Action:

- (i) Elected members commit to the principle of requesting the fullest information in advance of Council/Committee meetings***
- (ii) Elected members commit to the principle of discussing motions in full with the appropriate Directors in good time before meetings***
- (iii) Officers give priority to any requests for advance information***
- (iv) Organisation of Development Forums to support elected members in most effective use of committee structures (through use of case studies etc)***
- (v) Complete a review of current timescales and issuing of agendas, (including a review of checking processes)***

1.7 **Use of Scrutiny Systems**

The issue of scrutiny contains several elements. Some of these, such as the ability to question the decision making *process* or the *outcome* of the decision have been built into the remit of the revised Audit & Performance Review Committee. However further work is needed to ensure the most effective use of the scrutiny function. Some training has been provided on the type of questions and issues which members might feel it appropriate to raise, but there are opportunities to develop this.

Action:

- (i) Complete a review of the scrutiny function***
- (ii) Provide further development sessions for Elected Members in this area***

2 Elected Member Development

- 2.1 The introduction of the CPD Political Skills framework will be a valuable mechanism for identifying the individual development needs of members, particularly in relation to the positive behaviours associated with the role. The personal assessment (and optional 360°) will lead to personal development plans for all involved and subsequently the implementation of development programmes to facilitate development needs. Alongside this it is also proposed to introduce development workshops on more practical and perhaps focal issues surrounding the Councillor role (e.g. chairing a Committee, Standing Orders, model of Opposition, model of Administration, Code of Conduct etc). These would be arranged at times most convenient to members. Members should also be aware that their active participation in such sessions will be required to meet Audit Scotland expectations.

Action:

- (i) Development of role descriptions for Elected Members***
- (ii) Develop a programme of 'bite-size' development sessions for Elected Members (top 5 areas to be developed as a pilot)***

- 2.2 The development of a shared understanding and inclusive process of policy development, decision making and scrutiny will be crucial to develop the culture of West Dunbartonshire Council and will demonstrate a collective commitment to achieving the Council's ambitions. A mechanism to cultivate the shared information process would be the introduction of shared development forums involving the CMT, all Elected Members and other invited stakeholders such as Union Representatives, external expertise, and/or senior officers. The key purpose of these events would be to engage in dialogue across the parties and management levels on the key issues and strategic direction for West Dunbartonshire.

Action:

Develop a programme of bi-monthly/monthly shared development forums for the CMT and Elected Members

3 Member / Officer Relations

- 3.1 In the particular context of relations *between* members, it is recognised that there will always be a party political dimension. Nevertheless, recent arrangements such as proportional representation and Best Value create a clear incentive to find new ways of working in some type of partnership. This relates especially to strategic issues such as the Community Plan, Corporate Plan and SOA. Effective cross party working is also a key reputational issue for the Council.

The IS report raised a number of wider issues such as the culture of 'ambition and discipline' which would be valuable to explore and develop further. ***It is recommended that the IS undertake further work with the Council on this issue.*** In the first instance, a further session will be arranged and facilitated by the IS, for those Elected Members unable to attend previously, to gain additional feedback and input.

Action:

- (i) Set up further workshop between Improvement Service and Elected Members (for those unable to attend in June)***
- (ii) Arrange a programme of facilitated sessions in consultation with the Improvement Service***