

West Dunbartonshire Council
Report by Chief Executive
Council : 30 April 2008

Subject: Best Value Improvement Plan

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report discusses the progress of development of the next stage of the Council's Best Value Improvement Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1. Reports were submitted to Council on 27th February 2008 relating to the Audit of Best Value Progress Report and to a proposed structure for the management of Best Value improvement activity.
- 2.2. The Council agreed that a report on the proposed Best Value Improvement Plan be submitted to the April Council Meeting. The Council also agreed the structure of five workstreams – each being led by an Executive Director, supported by a nominated lead officer(s) and having trade union representation.
- 2.3. The Council also agreed to set up an 'Improvement & Efficiency Executive' to oversee the progress of the five workstreams and report to Council. Membership of the Group was agreed to total 8 Elected Members – comprised of 4 Labour, 2 Other Opposition and 2 SNP councillors. The group would be supported by the Chief Executive and led by the Leader of the Council.
- 2.4. The Council agreed that the previously set-up Improvement and Efficiency Steering Group – which had held two meetings in late 2007 since its inception– would be discontinued.
- 2.5. A report was submitted to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) on 4th March to initiate the process of setting up the workstreams. A further report was considered on 15th April.
- 2.6. The first meeting of the 'Improvement & Efficiency Executive' took place on the 23rd April – where it considered a draft version of this report.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1. The five workstreams have been set-up; they are at various stages of development of their remits, reviewing overlapping areas, defining attendees and reporting sub-groups and agreeing action plans. The groups along with the lead officers and CMT champions are shown in Figure 1.

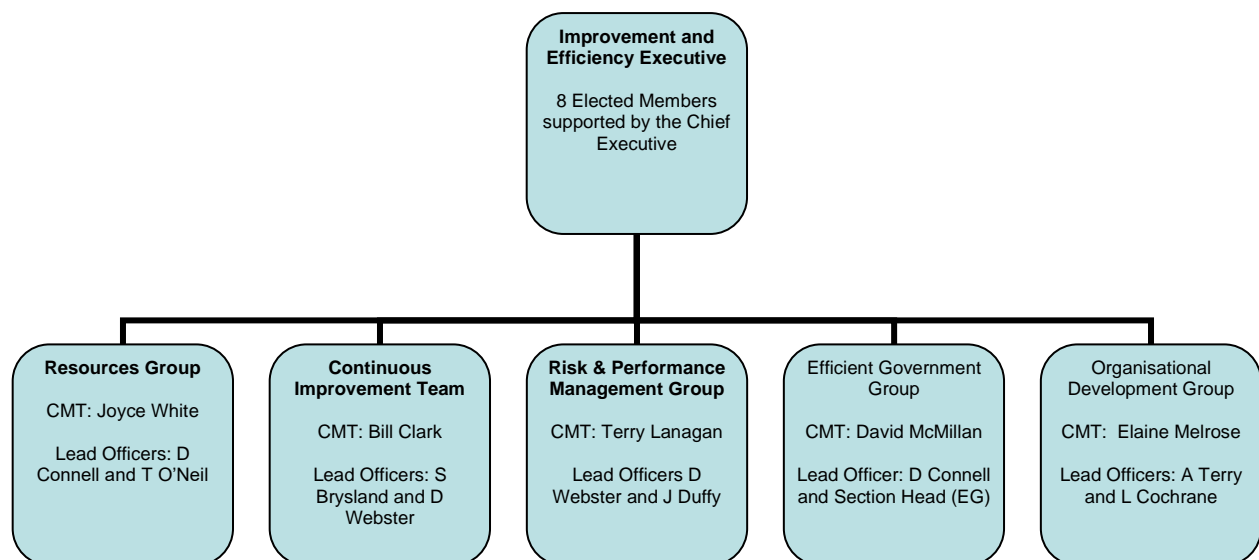


Figure 1: Improvement and Efficiency Structure

3.2. The primary aim of each of the workstreams is to address the 11 immediate and 3 medium term priorities identified by Audit Scotland in their Audit of Best Value and Community Planning Reports. These 14 priorities are shown on Table 1 along with the proposed respective responsible workstreams. Primary responsibility is shown by the black dots and secondary responsibility by the open dots.

Priority	Workstreams				
	Resources	CI Team	Risk & PM	Efficient Gov	OD
IP1- Openness & accountability					●
IP2- Integrate resource and workforce planning	●		○		○
IP3- Scrutiny			●		●
IP4- Culture of Best Value		○		○	●
IP5- Management & Political Structures					●
IP6- Elected Member support & training					●
IP7- Community Plan & Joint Working			●		○
IP8- Action Plans for poor performing areas			●		
IP9- Performance Management framework			●		○
IP10- Competitiveness		●		●	
IP11- Risk Management			●		
MP1- Service Review and Option Appraisal		●		○	
MP2- Leadership & Management Develop					●
MP3- Community engagement and consultation					●

Table 1 : Improvement Priorities and Workstream responsibilities

3.3. Continuous Improvement Team

This group was set up early last year and has been meeting monthly since. Its main remit has been the implementation of the Public Services Improvement Framework (PSIF) as part of the corporate response to improving the culture of best value and continuous improvement (IP4) and developing a corporate approach to competitiveness (IP10) mainly through improving benchmarking activities through new guidance and training.

The team also has a responsibility for developing and implementing a corporate approach to service reviews and option appraisal and scrutinising and peer reviewing on-going Best Value Service Reviews (MP1).

The team have completed a major 'mini' self-assessment of over 60 services as a precursor to full PSIF implementation. This has identified provisional improvement plans for each service allowing them to concentrate their management capacity on the most pressing improvement activities. These plans are being built into Departmental Service Plans to help evidence the service improvements.

Six services (Leisure Services, Sports Development, Homelessness, Welfare Rights and ICT & Business Development) are piloting the full PSIF self-assessment and a comprehensive training programme has been completed and a new e-tool purchased. Further assessor training is planned for this year. In addition the team are overseeing the piloting of the 'Kaizen-Blitz' improvement technique in three pilot areas (ICT Helpdesk, Sold Property and Tenancy Services).

The Group has proposed that areas that it formally was reviewing (such as organisational culture, consultation and communication) should now come under the remit of the new Organisational Development (OD) Group. This has been agreed by the OD Group.

The group has a joint remit with the Efficient Government Group in developing the corporate approach to competitiveness (IP10). This area of joint work requires further development. In addition there needs to be integration with the work of the Shared Services Diagnostic Pathway project which has the potential to provide benchmarking data and to formulate possible future service delivery options.

The Group have responsibility for co-ordinating and supporting the other major quality accreditation schemes – such as IIP and the new Charter Mark replacement and quality control of submissions for national quality award schemes such as the Cosla excellence awards.

3.4. Risk and Performance Management Group

This Group has had two meetings since its inception and plans to meet approximately every 6-weeks. It has replaced and refreshed the previous Best Value Development Group. Its remit covers the overseeing of the preparation and monitoring of action plans for poorly performing service areas (IP8) and refining and embedding the new performance management framework (IP9) mainly through implementing the new Covalent system and setting up a revised system of internal performance reporting (using a new short-life sub-group). This work will build on the work commenced by K3 consultants last year. The Group have already agreed a new approach to CMT performance reporting (with each department reporting quarterly) and have implemented a revised approach to Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI) reporting and scrutiny being led by the Audit & Performance Review Committee.

It also is overseeing the development and implementation of risk management (IP11) throughout the council – also through adopting and using the Covalent system. It also has taken responsibility for overseeing the development of performance scrutiny arrangements (part of IP3) and has a part to play in developing the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) process (part of IP7).

The Group will work jointly with the Resources Group to improve our approach to integrated planning and budgeting (part of IP2) and will work jointly with the Efficient Government Group to integrate the efficiency measures and targets into the performance management framework.

The Group are also overseeing the councils approach to corporate and service planning and public performance reporting – because they are also an integral part of the performance management framework and play a crucial role in evidencing continuous improvement activities. These developments will also build on the initial work in this area undertaken by K3 consultants last year.

The Group have also commenced work on refreshing the corporate complaints process – which overlaps with the work of the Efficient Government Group. The work will progress the monitoring of ‘Stage 1’ complaints as well as compliments.

The Group have agreed that the existing Covalent Project Team and the Risk Management Working Group will report formally to the Group and will provide regular written progress reports to each meeting.

3.5. Resources Group

This group has had one meeting since its inception and plans to meet approximately every 6 weeks or so. It has agreed that its prime responsibility is addressing IP2 by developing a new medium-long term strategic financial strategy and beginning to address workforce planning by overseeing the procurement and implementation of the new Human Resources (HR) information system (which is now at the tender evaluation stage).

Although there will be some overlapping responsibility with the OD team it is proposed that the resources team oversee the development of the new HR management strategy.

It is proposed that the group oversee corporate approaches to improving procurement, absence and asset management by requiring regular written progress reports from the Procurement Forum, The Absence Group and the Strategic Asset Management Group. In particular the absence management pilot in Corporate Services will be closely monitored. The benefits realisation aspects of these approaches will, however, be also reported to the Efficient Government Group.

The Group have agreed to setup a subgroup to work with the members of the Risk & Performance Management Group to improve further the annual guidance issued to Departments in relation to priority-led budgeting. Examples of good practice (eg from West Lothian and the NHS will be used).

3.6. Efficient Government Group

This Group has had one meeting since its inception and also plans to meet every 6 weeks or so. It has agreed that its main remit is to oversee the Council's approach to the Efficient Government initiative as described in the SOLACE consultancy study. It plans to do this through reviewing the 06/07 Efficiency Statement and overseeing the development of the new 07/08 Statement. It will develop and monitor appropriate action plans to improve efficiency as well as monitor progress towards targets set.

The Group will also monitor progress towards achieving the 1% efficiency target. It will work with the Risk & Performance Management Group to integrate appropriate efficiency measures into corporate and service plans and also to develop links between the efficiency statements and the new Single Outcome Agreement.

The Group will also review trading operations for competitiveness and provide activity and unit costs as inputs to benchmarking and competitiveness studies being jointly conducted by the Group and the Continuous Improvement Team as outlined in the SOLACE consultancy study.

The Group will oversee the benefits realisation aspects of three of the five 'strands' of Efficient Government – namely Absence, Procurement and Assets. It will not review the progress of the actions (this is the responsibility of the Resources Group) but proposes to review the benefits by requiring each of the respective working groups to report to each meeting on the quantitative benefits being realised. A major part of the benefits accruing from improving our approach to asset management is energy (and carbon dioxide) reduction. It is proposed that the Group should oversee progress towards targets of energy and carbon emission reduction being overseen by the Sustainable Development Working Group and the Corporate Energy Team.

The Group will also manage the other two strands of efficient government (Shared Services and Reducing Bureaucracy) by requiring written reports to each meeting on both the progress and the benefits realisation of the Shared Services Diagnostic Pathway Project, the Shared Services Working Group and the Customer First Steering Group.

The Shared Services Working Group will resume its activities later this year once the Diagnostic project has completed its initial work. It will then complete work on a Shared Services Strategy and continue reviewing specific opportunities with other authorities.

The Customer First Steering Group is overseeing the development of the contact centre and its associated IT infrastructure (Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, name/address databases, entitlement cards) as well as the self-service aspects of the website. The Steering Group (which previously had several name changes) has, however, not met for some time and requires to be reconstituted. In the past the group also oversaw the development of the corporate approach to Customer Services. It is recommended that this continue – but there is an overlap with the Risk and Performance Group in the area of complaints.

3.7. Organisational Development Team

This team has had two meetings since its inception. It has a broad remit which underpins much of the culture of the organisation and therefore the activity which addressed under other themes. The scope of the work, terms of reference and outcomes expected by the team are currently being finalised. Some of the activity is being developed through structures which have been in place for some months, and other elements are more recent.

The general scope of the work is to develop *“the Council’s strategic approach to those issues impacting on the development of the organisation, and that affect the way the organisation works. The role is to develop proposals to improve the Council’s performance, creating*

the capacity to promote and respond effectively to change, and establishing strong foundations for the future development of the organisation to support the Best Value ethos”.

The team acknowledges the specific requirements within the Best Value Improvement Plan which fall within its remit, but believes that the wider remit is central to the work of the organisation, and that by tackling this, the specific Best Value issues will be dealt with as a consequence. The Group will provide a corporate focus for a good deal of improvement work and aims to create a confidence that the culture is improving even if some of the work will require a considerable time period to evidence positive outcomes.

The action plan requires further development and will include addressing strategic decision-making which is closely linked into the work to improve Member-Officer relationships (IP1) and decision-making scrutiny arrangements (part of IP3) and to progress Elected Member training and development (IP6).

The team will also address the issues relating to improving the organisational culture (part of IP4) through, for example, by improving corporate approaches to Dignity at Work (completing the People Resolutions work) and developing and implementing a new internal communication strategy. The latter is one of several actions that are developing from the recent staff survey and the team will also oversee the planning and implementation of a new survey in 2009. The team will build on the work initially undertaken by the Employee Survey Actions Working Group.

There will be joint work required with the Resources Team to ensure that these issues are fully integrated into the emerging HR Strategy and that areas of potential overlap are addressed.

Although much of the work relating to new political and managerial structures (IP5) is now complete following the various Brodies studies the team will review further development options and opportunities.

The team will oversee the development of a comprehensive and integrated approach to leadership and management development (MP2).

Another developmental area will be that of engaging with communities. The team will oversee corporate approaches to community engagement activities (MP3) for example through the new community engagement strategy. The consultation network – a cross-departmental officer working group – will be refreshed and will report progress to the team.

Although not explicitly mentioned in the immediate and medium-term priorities by Audit Scotland it is currently envisaged that the team will also oversee the corporate approaches to the development of equal opportunities strategies and action plans.

The OD team believe that Sustainable development should be part of the remit of either the Resources or Efficient Government Group – but this requires further discussion by the CMT.

3.8. Developing Action Plans

Further work is required to finalise the wider reporting and accountability processes. Some of the groups have well-developed developed Action Plans; whereas others have more work to do in this area. A first draft consolidated Best Value Improvement Action Plan is attached to this report (Appendix 1). It is proposed that regular progress reports will be presented to the Executive and the Council on a quarterly basis.

3.9. Relationship to the Corporate Plan and the SOA

Both the corporate plan and the SOA have distinct themes relating to improvement. The action plans being developed here will form an integral part of these plans – which will demonstrate the mainstreaming of the Best Value Improvement Plan into overall corporate improvement strategies.

3.10. Trade Union Involvement

The Council have agreed that Trade Union representatives will be invited to meetings of each of the 5 workstreams. Invitations will be sent out to Trade Union representatives to attend the next round of workstream meetings.

3.11. Future Development of Improvement & Efficiency Structures

This report notes a number of areas where there are links, and therefore the need for working *between* teams. While this will be a key feature of the approach, it is also proposed that there should be a number of more structured mechanisms for identifying and developing links between work areas. The CMT, with its focus on a strategic approach, will be one method; however it is also suggested that there should be regular 'networking' events, involving all members of all of the teams. The first of these should be arranged following the preparation of all action plans, and they should take place on a six-monthly basis thereafter.

In addition, it is suggested that there is a need to consider the lifespan of this structure and of the teams at an early stage. While it is recognised that much of this work will continue to develop, and that some issues such as organisational culture will take time to address, it is suggested that the teams should develop their action plans with a

view to demonstrating key achievements prior to the return visit of the Best Value auditors. The functioning and suitability of the current structure should then be reviewed with the aim of embedding ongoing activity within wider structures, and allowing a reconsideration of where any continued focus might be necessary.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1. There are no personnel issues at this stage

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. A budget of £108,500 has been set up for 2008/09 for items specific to the BV Improvement Plan.

6. Risk assessment

- 6.1. If the Best Value Improvement Plan is not properly managed, there is a major risk that Audit Scotland will report limited progress in their audit work planned for summer 2009.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1. The five workstreams have now been set-up. They are at different stages of finalising remits and developing action plans.
- 7.2. There are a number of important areas falling under the remit of more than one group – eg HR strategies, priority-led budgeting, competitiveness, scrutiny arrangements, and perhaps most importantly the culture of best value.
- 7.3. As well as CMT overview some form of regular networking events are proposed to address the joins and overlaps between the teams.
- 7.4. A first draft action plan has been prepared and much more work is required to finalise this.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1. That the Members of the Improvement & Efficiency Executive review and comment on the progress of the Best Value Improvement Plan.
- 8.2. That Members of the Council contact the respective Executive Directors should they require further details on the progress of work being carried out in the various workstreams.
- 8.3. That a more detailed action plan and progress report be scrutinised by the Improvement & Efficiency Executive and submitted to Council in June.

- 8.4. That progress reports be submitted to the Council thereafter on a quarterly basis.

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Date: 24 April 2008

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Appendix: Draft Best Value Improvement Plan

Background Papers: Report to Council on Best Value Progress Report 27 February 2008
Report to Council on Best Value Improvement Structures 27 February 2008
Report to Improvement and Efficiency Steering Group 23 April 2008

Wards Affected: All Wards