

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council Meeting : 28 February 2007

Subject: Progress of Best Value Improvement Plan

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report provides Members with an update on the progress made on the Best Value Improvement Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1** The Accounts Commission in their findings following the Public Hearing into the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning required the Council to produce an improvement plan to address the 11 immediate and 3 medium-term priorities identified in the Audit Scotland Report.
- 2.2** A report¹ and draft plan was subsequently prepared for the Council meeting on 17th January 2007, which was agreed by the Council. At this meeting the Council:
- Agreed to accept all of the recommendations contained in the letter from the Accounts Commission dated 14th December 2006.
 - Agreed, in principle, the draft Improvement Plan with a finalised report to be submitted to the Council Meeting on 28th February 2007.
 - Endorsed the decision by the Chief Executive to recruit five new posts.
 - Agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to engage appropriate external assistance as required.
 - Agreed to form a cross-party member/officer working group consisting of six Members (4 from the Administration and 2 from the opposition) to develop the Plan and monitor progress.
- 2.3** Reports on progress of the Best Value Improvement Plan were submitted to the first meetings of the Member/Officer Working Group on Best Value Improvement Plan² on 14th February and 21st February 2007. Further meetings are planned for 4th and 8th April.
- ### **3. Overall Progress**
- 3.1** The Chief Executive has had a number of meetings with senior representatives from COSLA, the Improvement Service and SOLACE Enterprises.
- 3.2** The draft 2007/8 budget has a general provision of £350,000 built in, with an additional £70,000 added to departmental budgets, to fund the Best Value Improvement Plan. There are also a number of capital bids added which will be considered when reviewing the 2007/08 capital plan.

- 3.3 The external assistance may highlight the need for further resources in addition to this.
- 3.4 A proposed Programme Management structure has been drawn up. This is shown as Appendix 1. This comprises the Member-Officer Working Group – which will receive regular reports from the programme project manager. The improvement plan will be implanted by eight themed workstreams covering people, finance, strategy, performance management, Customer First, Risk, Assets and sustainable development. Lead officers have been identified to be responsible for each of these workstreams and remits are being drawn up for each. A number of existing and new officer working groups have been identified as being key to progressing the various tasks.
- 3.5 The details of the improvement plan and the status of individual actions is shown in Appendix 2 and progress is summarised in Sections 4, 5 and 6 below. Members are advised that the detail set out in appendix 2 will be subject to regular refinement as we receive the results of work carried out by consultants and other information. It should also be noted that the final two columns will be adjusted to ensure that they give details of progress and completion dates, (where appropriate).

4. Immediate Priorities

4.1 ***Establish arrangements and working practices which demonstrate openness and accountability in strategic decision making processes.***

The Strategy workstream have prepared a brief for external consultants to review these issues, which has been sent to four consultancy bodies recommended by the Improvement Service (KPMG, Brodies, Glasgow Caledonian University and Hedra). They are expected to be returned by 23rd February and it is anticipated that work on the review will commence week beginning 5th March. We anticipate that some interim conclusions and recommendations on options can be presented to the April Council meeting.

4.2 ***Develop and implement medium to longer-term strategies to ensure effective management of resources, including financial planning and workforce planning. These arrangements should also be integrated with the service planning process.***

The People workstream has submitted a consultancy brief which includes a review of workforce-planning options to SOLACE Enterprises (as recommended by the Improvement Service). A cost estimate is expected by 23rd February.

The People workstream is overseeing the recruitment of the Project Team to progress the procurement and implementation of the new HR system. Three temporary posts were advertised in the Herald on 16th February including a project manager.

A short-life officers working group will be set-up in May to produce a financial strategy for the Council and to integrate this into the annual planning and budget guidance planned to be issued to Departments in late August. The new Departmental Revenue Estimate Books – due for publication in March – will now show two indicative years as well as 07/08. This work is being jointly managed by the Finance and Performance Management Workstreams.

4.3 *Ensure robust and effective scrutiny arrangements, including the involvement of opposition elected members, covering the council's decision making processes as well as service performance, are put in place.*

The Strategy Workstream has commissioned external assistance from Hexagon Research to undertake consultation on possible options for modifying our scrutiny arrangements. This will be co-ordinated with the work outlined in paragraph 4.1. A review of the arrangements undertaken by several other councils has also been undertaken and the group is aiming for a preliminary review of the possible options in a report for the April Council meeting.

4.4 *Develop a culture to support best value and continuous improvement across the organisation.*

The Performance Management workstream has prepared and submitted a brief for a SOLACE Enterprises consultant to review options for improving our continuous improvement culture – including a review of organisational arrangements. A further brief – covering a review of our arrangements for improving our approach to efficient government and competitiveness has also been sent to SOLACE Enterprises.

A new officer project team (the Continuous Improvement Project Team) is being set up within this workstream to manage the implementation of the new Public Services Improvement Framework (PSIF), which is a new self-assessment tool for services being rolled out nationally. It is based on the European Foundation Quality Model (EFQM) and was developed by West Lothian Council. Meetings have been held with the sponsors (Quality Scotland and the Improvement Service) to brief senior managers, draw up an implementation plan, decide which services to pilot and organise assessor training. Regular progress reports³ are being produced for the Audit & performance Review Committee. The Project Team will also assess our approach to Best Value Service Reviews and manage our quality accreditation strategy (Charter Mark and Investors in People). A new post of Quality & Improvement officer – whose main task will be implementation of the PSIF- has been agreed and the post-holder should be in post by the end of March.

The overall Efficient Government Strategy and monitoring are the responsibility of the Finance Workstream – the five efficient government officer working groups (covering the themes of absence, procurement, shared services, streamlining bureaucracy and assets) are proposed to continue with their remits in their respective workstreams. We continue to make progress on the efficient government agenda and produced our first progress report for members last December. An update is being submitted to the next meeting in March. We have actively participated in the national consultation exercise to develop a set of efficiency and productivity measures for Scottish Councils.

The Shared Services Project Team – part of the Strategy Workstream – is overseeing our approach to sharing services with other providers. An update on the current position regarding shared services is being submitted to the Audit & Performance Review Committee in March 2007. In summary, we are participating with Glasgow and a number of other authorities in a Pathfinder initiative, which aims to develop a best practice and shared service approach to the business processes and systems which underpin service delivery. The initial stage involves diagnostic and business case preparation for a service delivery transformation programme. West Dunbartonshire is also involved in a number of other national initiatives covering issues such as procurement, e planning and workforce planning. We are continuing to prioritise work at a Scottish national level, through the National Shared Services Board, although the national picture on shared service development remains patchy, with an ongoing debate about whether this approach can really deliver the full range of savings envisaged by the Scottish Executive. In addition, we have asked the SOLACE consultants who will be looking at Efficient Government and Competitiveness, to consider additional opportunities for shared service arrangements at national, regional or local level.

4.5 *Review political and managerial structures to ensure that they operate effectively and are complementary.*

The Strategy workstream have prepared a brief for external consultants to review structures and their relationship to committee remits. This is part of the work on decision-making and structures outlined in paragraph 4.1. We anticipate that some interim conclusions and recommendations on structural options can be presented to the April Council meeting.

4.6 *Provide elected members with support and training to discharge their functions*

The People workstream is preparing an enhanced induction programme for new and existing members to be delivered immediately post the May elections. This will be supported by a further training needs assessment. Approaches to improving Member-Officer relations is also being assessed by consultants from SOLACE Enterprises as part of the study outlined in 4.2 above.

4.7 *Agree and adopt an up-to-date community plan. Continue to drive the community planning partnership with a focus on defined outcomes.*

The Strategy Workstream is overseeing progress on community planning. We have prepared the first draft of a new Community Plan and wide ranging initial consultation has been undertaken. We are about to start further consultation in line with the requirements of Strategic Environment Assessment and Integrated Impact Assessment. We are aiming to have the new plan endorsed by the Partnership Board in June. At the same time a review of progress on the outcomes highlighted in the Regeneration Outcome Agreement (ROA) is expected.

4.8 *Establish robust action plans for all areas of poor performance identified within the best value report and housing services in particular.*

As part of the Performance Management Workstream an officer working group (The Planning and Performance Management Development Group –previously the Best Value Development Group) is ensuring that Departments addresses all areas of poor service performance and that monitoring reports continue to be brought forward to respective thematic committees and the Audit & Performance Review Committee. In addition, reports covering all Statutory and Key Performance Indicators are being submitted to the CMT along with Action Plans for poorly performing indicators.

Housing services are the subject of a specific focus. The Council agreed on 17th January 2007, that it will prepare a remedial plan in a voluntary arrangement with Communities Scotland and has requested that the formal notice under Section 74 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, be withdrawn.

It has also agreed to establish a Member/Officer Working Group to facilitate the preparation of the remedial plan.

We have already made considerable progress in completing major aspects of the original service improvement plan drawn up by Communities Scotland. Approximately 90% of all recommendations have been actioned and are completed, and it is expected that the remainder will be completed by Summer 2007.

4.9 *Refine and embed the new performance management framework, improve traffic light reporting to better support scrutiny, resource allocation and public performance reporting.*

The Planning and Performance Management Development Group is also reviewing performance reports going to members to ensure their consistency and correct use of traffic lights and comparator groups. The group has further enhanced our internal Action Planning database and has commenced a review of vendor performance management systems. It will prepare a tender specification should the review recommend a new system to replace the Action Planning database. Costs have yet to be estimated and an options report will be prepared for the CMT in March. If we are to retain the database then a refreshed training programme will be implemented.

4.10 *Establish robust arrangements from which the council is able to demonstrate the competitiveness of its services.*

We have submitted a brief for external consultants from SOLACE Enterprises (recommended by the Improvement Service), to review our approach to testing competitiveness. This brief is part of the second study outlined in 4.4 above and the resultant recommendations will be managed and implemented by the Finance workstream.

4.11 *Develop and embed a risk management culture across the council.*

The Risk Management workstream is responsible for this priority area. A Risk Analysis Section is now part of the standard committee report template. We reported progress to Members in December noting that a further tranche of risk management training from an external supplier will be completed by March 2007 – this is on-track. Existing departmental risk registers are currently being reviewed and transferred into the new risk register format. A guidance note and risk register on partnership risk has been drafted. All of this work is being coordinated by the Risk Management Working Group which has officer representation from all Departments.

5. Medium-Term Priorities

5.1 *Ensure robust review and option appraisal is undertaken on all services.*

The Performance Management workstream has agreed a process of peer-review for all best value service reviews before they are finalised. The brief which we have submitted on reviewing options for improving the Best Value culture, (paragraph 4.4), contains specific requirements in relation to improving our approach to option appraisal.

5.2 *Implement a leadership and management development programme*

The People workstream is progressing with reviewing options for developing a leadership & management development programme. A more detailed programme is the subject of a project brief to external consultants being progressed by the People workstream.

5.3 *Review community engagement activity for efficiency and effectiveness.*

The review of decision making and management structures, (see paragraphs 4.1 and 4.5), will encompass a review of the Community Participation Committee. The Strategy workstream will review our consultation strategy through the consultation network and will progress these issues and recommendations including reviewing the effectiveness of the recent budget consultation exercise.

6. Other Priorities

6.1 The People workstream is preparing a consultants brief to review our dignity at work procedures and develop effective mediation and support arrangements for staff. A report has been prepared for the JCF on processes for settling outstanding grievances. Preparation of a consultants brief to undertake a new staff survey is well underway and a Project Team has been established with the aim of carrying out the survey in April and producing a report to Council by June. Future work in this workstream will encompass developing an HR strategy, further developing our approach to improving absence and developing a refreshed learning and development strategy. Further staff resources will be likely required to progress these issues and options are being considered by the Chief Executive. Recruitment of the new posts of Equal Opportunity Employment Officer is progressing to ensure we comply with the latest employment regulations and guidance.

- 6.2** The Customer First workstream is maintaining good progress in developing our new contact centre software and linking it to back-office systems. The pilot contact centre is expected to go-live in May 2007 and will be followed by a one-stop shop pilot and further development of the Contact Centre with additional business processes. A Customer Services Section Head has now been recruited and he commences on 19th March. Further work on linking the GTX software to citizens and property databases is underway as well as the work to integrate all of our appropriate systems to the national citizens account and address gazetteers. Work is well progressed on further developing the website and a refreshed project team is being set up to complete the entitlement card project. The Document Imaging project is key to reducing bureaucracy and capital funding has been obtained for this. Electronic service delivery options such as e-planning, e-care, e-booking are progressing. We intend reviewing the complaints procedure and integrating it into the contact centre as well as carrying out regular reviews of customer care.
- 6.3** The Performance Management Workstream has commenced preparations for producing a new corporate plan after the elections and linked departmental service plans.
- 6.4** The Asset Management group are progressing with the collation of asset related data into the new asset management database and work has started on producing an asset plan for the Council.
- 6.5** Procurement is part of the Finance workstream. The Compliance Certificate required by the McClelland Review was signed in July 2006, since we believe we now have appropriate plans in place to meet the minimum standards by March 2007, as required by the Scottish Executive. The Council Procurement Forum is in place, with representatives from all departments meeting every six weeks. An intranet site is now available, and provides information and guidance on procurement related matters to all internal users. This will also provide advice for local businesses on appropriate ways of interacting with the Council. A register of current and future, tenders and contract awards is currently being compiled for inclusion on the Council website. An initial purchasing cards pilot continues within the Roads section. Phase 2 will commence for stationery purchases in March 2007. Some problems continue to persist with the Glasgow City Council Benefits Tracking tool, which we are using. The EGF2 stage 2 bid, branded Scotland Excel, in which we are a partner, has been successful. There will now commence a programme of change across the public sector nationally relating to procurement and the formation of Centres of Procurement Expertise. The capital plan for 07/08 includes a sum to progress e-procurement and an officers working group has been set-up to progress the creation of approved contractor lists.
- 6.6** Recruitment of the new post of Sustainable Development Officer is progressing – interview date has been set for 20th March. Once the officer is in post we can progress the development of the sustainable development strategy and the action plans required as part of the Scottish Climate Change Declaration – including energy efficiency, staff travel plans and sustainable procurement. The newly created Dunbartonshire Biodiversity Partnership is currently recruiting a (temporary) Biodiversity Officer (jointly funded by ourselves, Scottish Natural

Heritage and East Dunbartonshire Council) with the aim of producing a Local Biodiversity Action Plan to meet the statutory duty of biodiversity. This – along with the planned open-space strategy - will greatly improve the quality of our green spaces.

- 6.7 Implementation of the statutory Race and Disability Equality duties is progressing and a report will be submitted to the Social Justice Committee in March 2007, on the options for addressing the Gender equality duty. The draft Gender Equality Scheme will be considered by the Community Participation Committee in March 2007, and the final draft will be presented to Council following the May elections. The Disability Equality scheme has been launched and we continue to install access improvements. A report on options for implementing a new approach to integrated impact assessment is being planned for the Social Justice Committee in May.
- 6.8 The Planning and Performance Management Development Group are reviewing options for improving the balance of public performance reporting – including a review of the style and content of the annual performance report.

7. Personnel Issues

- 7.1 The immediate Personnel issues are outlined in paragraphs 4.5 and 6. Further issues will be reported to the working group as they arise.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The current financial arrangements are set out in paragraph 3.2. Paragraph 3.3 identifies that the consultancy work may raise additional issues. These will be reported to the working group.

9. Risk Analysis

- 9.1 No Risk Analysis is required at this stage.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 Members are invited to note the progress made and that a further report on progress will be brought to the April Council meeting.

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Date: 22 February 2007

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Proposed Programme Structure
Appendix 2 - Best Value Improvement Plan

Wards Affected:

All

Background Papers:

¹ [Report to Council 17th January 2007](#)

² Reports and Minutes of Member-Officer Working Group 14 February 2007 and 21 February 2007

³ [Report on Public Services Improvement Framework to A&PR Committee December 2006](#)