

West Dunbartonshire Council
Report by Chief Executive
Council Meeting : 17 December 2008

Subject: Best Value Improvement Plan

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report discusses the progress of the Council's Best Value Improvement Plan (BVIP).

2. Background

- 2.1. The Council agreed in February 2008 that the BVIP be progressed by five workstreams – each being led by an Executive Director, supported by a nominated lead officer(s) and having trade union representation.
- 2.2. The Council also agreed to set up an 'Improvement & Efficiency Executive' (I&EE) 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, other members of the CMT and led by the Leader of the Council.
- 2.3. The BVIP will be reported to Council on a quarterly basis and the I&EE will meet quarterly some 2 or 3 weeks before the relevant Council meeting.
- 2.4. The first meeting of the I&EE was held on 23rd April – where it considered the first draft of the updated BVIP. The report was subsequently submitted to the April Council meeting. The Group next met on 13th June where it considered a progress report - which was submitted to the June Council Meeting. The Executive met again on the 5th September and a report was submitted to the September Council meeting (which was carried forward to the October meeting). The last meeting of the Executive was held on the 5th December where it considered a draft version of this report.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1. The latest version of the BVIP is shown as Appendix 1. Actions have been entered into the Covalent system and milestones have been developed to provide evidence of delivery. Actions are also part of Departmental Service Plans and link with objectives developed in the Corporate Plan.
- 3.2. Trade Union representatives have now attended a number of Group meetings.
- 3.3. Progress under each of the eleven immediate (IP) priorities and three

medium-term (MP) priorities as identified by Audit Scotland are summarised below.

IP01: Establish arrangements and working practices which demonstrate openness and accountability in strategic decision making processes.

A report addressing a range of matters relating to Strategic Leadership and Organisational Culture was considered by Council on 26th November 2008. This covered a number of strategic issues – namely:

- Systems which allow a focus on the whole of West Dunbartonshire and developing the opportunities offered by multi member wards
- Developing the ambition of the Council and improving relations
- Developing decision making structures to allow the provision of better information to members and a more strategic approach
- Scrutiny and the role of the Opposition

The report included an action plan with specific proposals for new systems of working and more in depth decision-making processes. The report was considered by Council at its November meeting, and it was agreed that the details of the action plan should be subject to further discussion at a seminar for elected members. This seminar is now being arranged. It is envisaged that it will take place in January 2009.

IP02: Develop and implement medium to longer-term strategies to ensure effective management of resources

The annual planning and budget guidance for departments was issued in early September. This contained improved guidance for departments on evidencing linkages between prioritisation of budgets and annual service planning. There will be a review of completeness once the budget process is completed.

A first draft of the Strategic Financial Plan has been prepared. Further work will be carried out over the next month and the document updated to include the 2009/10 agreed budget. The current plan is to table the final document at the February Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee.

Work continues on developing a workforce planning strategy (as part of the overall HR strategy) with the Improvement Service who are providing support and guidance to Councils. A pilot project is being established in Social Work and resource to drive this project forward is being identified.

A preferred bidder for the procurement of the HR and Payroll System has been identified. A report is being prepared for CMT and the plan is to table the preferred bidder at the next Tendering Committee Meeting in early December. Based on the most recent proposals the full Go Live date is likely to be 1st April 2010.

IP03: 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.

Work has now been completed on developing the role of the Audit & Performance Review Committee (A&PRC) in scrutinising Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs). The membership of the A&PRC has also been revised to include 4 lay members. The report on Strategic Leadership and Organisational Culture covers Decision-making Scrutiny and the role of the Opposition (see IP01 above)

IP04: Develop a culture to support best value and continuous improvement across the organisation

Organisational Development

A comprehensive review has been completed of the Employee Survey action plan, which demonstrated significant progress has been achieved in key areas mainly relating to organisational communications and development of leadership and management capacity. A rationale for prioritising actions in moving forward and adopting a co-ordinated approach has been developed as a move to progress implementation of key frameworks and development programmes in the final quarter of the year. This approach will facilitate a more robust and sustainable approach to wider organisational change and development involving managers at all levels. Planning for a new 2009 staff survey has commenced.

A workshop has been held (with 'Change Navigators') exploring the process for planning and facilitating organisational culture change and how these tools could be utilised to bring about culture change within West Dunbartonshire Council. A proposal has been developed and is currently being considered for utilising early in the New Year.

An intensive development programme has been completed for the revised Dignity at Work policy and procedure, and all key roles within the process are now fully trained to facilitate effective operation of the policy. The policy will be referred to Council in December and further development sessions are scheduled for January cascading to other management how the policy and procedure will operate in practical management terms.

Continuous Improvement

All services have used a customised mini Service Performance Assessment (SPA) questionnaire based on the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) to evaluate their performance and identify targeted areas requiring improvement. The SPA was designed to take an initial broad look at how we do things; and broadly examine if services have the basics in place to deliver best value. A short term Improvement Plan was developed for each service, with guidance to ensure continuous improvement is embedded in strategic and

operational planning and performance management processes. A review has been carried out to ascertain the extent to which Departments have embedded the improvement plans in their Departmental Service Plan scorecards in Covalent. The Chief Executive's Department has a number of correlating actions and Educational Services have an appropriate high-level action. However, actions are being developed in the other three Departmental Plans.

Five West Dunbartonshire services have successfully participated in the national PSIF pilot; namely Sports Development, Cultural Services, Leisure Services, Welfare Rights and Forward Planning. The pilot involved service teams taking part in a 4 day facilitator led PSIF self evaluation and improvement programme where they compared performance against PSIF and challenged the way of designing and delivering services. Results of the pilots are being analysed and Improvement Plans developed. Welfare Rights have prepared with a draft Improvement Plan for the Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) inspection. However, the other four services have not been issued with Improvement Plans as yet and the final report has yet to be finalised.

A project plan for the phased roll out of PSIF across the Council is in preparation which will be based on current levels of performance and statutory external review activity. It is proposed that self evaluation is phased across the Council over a three year period, with the Corporate Management Team evaluating the performance of the Council, extended Directorate teams evaluating the performance of their Departments and Section Heads evaluating the performance of their service(s). This hierarchical approach will ensure that all Council functions and services are comparing, challenging and reviewing their performance. A methodology will be designed to ensure members' views are incorporated into the process.

PSIF implementation across the Council will provide a corporate approach to continuous improvement and the route to certification of other quality management frameworks like Investors in People, the National Excellence Standard (NES) and ISO 9000:2000 series. Services that have certification against NES and IIP and are preparing for external review have been provided with advice and guidance to ensure they retain certification against the respective models.

The Kaizen rapid improvement technique has been piloted in the Sold Property Service in August-September. Results were presented to elected members and senior staff in November. The process was well received and the results included an analysis of the cost and time used to deliver the current process and the cost and time, which will be saved with a newly developed process. A final report is in preparation.

Efficient Government

A report is in preparation on the monitoring of outcomes of efficiency savings initiatives and is being considered along with the probable outturns submitted as part of the budget submission.

The CMT regularly review the 67 Aspirational Targets (the 'Building Blocks') agreed by Council during the process of finalising Budget 2008/9. It has been agreed by Council that regular updates on achieving these targets should be updated to the Budget Working Group who next meet on 9th December 2008.

Best practice for setting-up the framework for 08/09 Efficient Government monitoring is being reviewed. All Efficiency Statements submitted by Local Authorities for 2008/9 are being analysed before deciding on a set of efficiency measures and methodologies

Progress in each of the 5 Efficient Government work streams has been as follows:

Customer First: The Steering Group has been re-established and has had two meetings to date. The aim of the group is to improve the citizen's experience when transacting business with the Council. Work has commenced in order to ensure that the correct representatives are included in the group, and to track progress to date on each of the 46 Core Services.

Some of the main achievements of the group are:

- the establishment and development of the Contact Centre allowing citizens to self serve 24/7 and to access multiple services
- The establishment of a corporate address gazetteer enquiry which provides users with local address details, council tax banding and rateable value information for example
- integration of two back office functions (Council Tax and Housing)
- On line payment facility now operational

Shared-Services (and the Diagnostic Pathway project): Involvement in key national and regional shared-service initiatives is continuing. A significant number of local and departmental shared-service arrangements are also in place throughout the authority. The external shared service strategy was approved by the Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee in October 2008. This Strategy sets the context and defines the decision making process for future shared-service development and address issues raised in the audit of best value. The Strategy will be launched to officers at the Senior Management Network in December, and will be discussed at departmental Senior Management Teams early in 2009. This Strategy will be further developed to encompass interdepartmental shared-service arrangements. There is also a commitment to updating the current list of shared-service arrangements.

The diagnostic project's cross-cutting workshops have now been completed and a report for the CMT is being prepared containing detailed business cases and projections in eleven key themed opportunity areas. It is intended that these opportunities will introduce efficient working practices and improve customer experience when using council services.

Procurement: The We-Buy e-procurement system went live on 1 October 2008 and has processed 50 orders at a total of £25,000. The next stage is well under way in terms of data collection and user training throughout the organisation.

Following a vote among Member Councils, Scotland Excel has purchased the remaining gas and electricity requirements for summer and winter 2009. This will produce a saving in energy costs over current rates.

Cashable savings have been identified from new contracts for ICT hardware, office supplier, telephones and temporary agency staff and from a review of trades materials and termination of rental for redundant BT handsets. Full year savings are estimated at £193,200.

Non Cashable Efficiencies have been identified from consolidation of individual utility bills into one electronic payment.

Asset Management: The Standard Delivery Plan (SDP) for housing has been agreed by Council and office accommodation and care home condition surveys have been completed. A meeting has been arranged to discuss and agree the asset disposal and investment programme for non-operational property, and a report has been prepared with regard to Energy Performance Certificates (EPC's) which will be required for large operational buildings with public access and all properties being sold or changing tenancy from January 2009 onwards.

Absence Management: An attendance management pilot was arranged for managers to gain a better understanding of the soft skills required in managing sickness absence cases. As a result, managers have gained confidence in managing absence, which is a key step in managing the attendance policy. Promotion of the new Occupational Health and Physiotherapy service has commenced.

IP05: Review political and managerial structures to ensure that they operate effectively and are complementary.

The recruitment of key posts is complete and revisions to departmental managerial structures are ongoing, however there will be a need to evaluate how effectively our structural arrangements operate, develop, and maintain service synergies across the organisation. Further development in key areas such as strategic leadership, organisational change, communication, performance management, and people management practice will be essential to underpin the effective operation of these structures. These developments need further time to promote and embed new ways of working before an assessment can be made of their effectiveness.

IP06: Provide Elected Members with support and training to discharge their functions

The pilot project for the Political Skills CPD framework is now underway with elected members completing their development profile, and where applicable, extending this to incorporate 360° assessment. This first phase will complete early December, following which, members will receive a personal feedback report. These outcomes will be explored further through 1-2-1 feedback sessions in January, resulting in the implementation of personal development plans and related development programmes by March 2009. The member seminar scheduled for early January (see IP01 above) will also provide opportunity to discuss additional approaches in creating further internal development opportunities.

IP07: Agree and adopt an up-to-date community plan. Continue to drive the community planning partnership with a focus on defined outcomes.

Progress with the 2007/17 Community Plan was reported to the Community Planning Strategic Board in November. Seven of eight planned partner workshops to develop the 2009 SOA have taken place. A progress report on the 2008 SOA was prepared and presented to Council, the A&PRC and the Community Planning Board. A seminar for members on the SOA is being planned for later in January.

IP08: Establish robust action plans for all areas of poor performance identified within the best value report and housing services in particular

The monitoring of action plans for poorly performing service areas is being achieved through linking actions specifically to poorly performing Statutory Performance Indicators and reporting these through Service Committees and the A&PRC.

IP09: Refine and embed the new performance management framework, improve traffic light reporting to better support scrutiny, resource allocation and public performance reporting.

The revised Performance Management Framework is being refined and was re-submitted for further comments to the CMT which will be followed by a report to the A&PRC in January. A planned member consultation exercise (to be carried out by Strathclyde University) has been delayed due to the lack of progress on the development of the questionnaire. Alternative options are being reviewed.

The Covalent system is becoming further embedded and regular reporting of progress from various 'Scorecards' is developing well. Six half-day training courses were run – five at introductory level (40 attendees) and one at advanced level (7 attendees). Two ½ day courses per month are planned.

A proposal from SOLACE consultants to carry-out a 'Golden Thread health check' has been received and the Chief Executive has agreed that this process will commence in December 2008. An update on the scope and progress will be presented to the A&PRC in January.

IP10: Establish robust arrangements from which the Council is able to demonstrate the competitiveness of Services

Results from the Service Performance Assessments completed by every Council service and consecutive findings from Audit Scotland and SOLACE identified that services cannot fully prove that they are competitive and delivering best value. A group has been set-up to develop and refine a corporate approach to competitiveness led by the Director of HEED. Future work planned includes developing a benchmarking strategy, revamping the benchmarking toolkit and carrying-out appropriate training for staff. The benchmarking activities will be used to:

- Establish the service's position in the market
- Determine if the service has the ability to provide services of the required quality at a price people are willing to pay
- Compare performance with other local authorities with a similar multiple index of deprivation or those identified by statutory inspection bodies and Audit Scotland
- Compare performance against best practice local authorities and the private sector to gain a different perspective of service design and delivery
- Focus on the comparison of indicators which measure both efficiency (*costs versus outcomes achieved*) and effectiveness (*levels of customer satisfaction*)
- Compare performance against the Public Service Improvement framework

Additional milestones will be developed to cover developing a corporate approach to Unit and Activity Based Costing once the corporate competitiveness statement is finalised.

IP11: Develop and embed a risk management culture across the council

The development and implementation of risk management throughout the Council is also being achieved using the Covalent system. Strategic and Departmental Risk registers have been input to the system. The Risk Management Working Group are progressing the updating of these registers and integrating these with corporate, departmental and operational plans. A progress report was submitted to the CMT and A& PRC in November.

MP01: Ensure robust review and option appraisal is undertaken on all services

Once comparator information is collected via benchmarking, the results will be used to enable each Council service to appraise the options for service delivery. A systematic approach to option appraisal will be developed to include each service with a step-by-step toolkit and training to enable managers to carry out option appraisal independently.

MP2: Implement a leadership and management development programme

Following the Corporate Management Team's assessment and feedback on the proposed pilot programmes, development of both these arenas is now progressing. Three accredited development programmes for managers, at differing levels, are scheduled for delivery in February 2009, in partnership with Clydebank College. Development of an accredited leadership programme will progress following a prompt tender exercise with implementation also scheduled for February/March.

Alongside the above development programmes a number of other strands are being developed which will be crucial in engaging managers in facilitating and managing change and building our management and leadership capacity. This includes the launch of a revised Senior Manager Network, development and implementation of an organisational Core Briefing framework, and embedding of a revised process for managing personal performance and development planning. An integrated plan is now underway between Organisational Development and Corporate Communications which focuses on these priority development areas and facilitates a strategic approach to developing wider management teams as facilitators of change

MP3: Review community engagement activity for efficiency and effectiveness.

The Community Engagement and Consultation Strategies have now been approved by Council, and are available on the Council website. Both strategies will be published in one document in February.

An initial Consultation Scoping Workshop has taken place, with around 24 staff in attendance – facilitated by the Consultation Institute. The purpose of this was “To understand current and future requirements for public engagement and consultation in West Dunbartonshire, so that priorities can be set for investment in skills and processes”. Around thirty employees have taken part in follow-up Effective Consultation Workshops sessions in December. These have provided more information on the development of appropriate systems and training - some of which will be scheduled during early 2009 along with development of an action plan.

A Budget Consultation process is being co-ordinated, including a Citizens' Panel Priorities Survey and three Budget Public Forum meetings in mid January.

4. Personnel Implications

4.1. There are no personnel implications 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.

5.2. Spend to date totals £24,500 (Kaizen Blitz, Dignity at Work and Absence Management). Future planned expenditure includes the 'Culture Web project from Change Navigators (c. £18,000), more work on absence management (£2,500) and the SOLACE 'Golden Thread' project (c. £17,000). Overall total = £62,000.

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 5 workstreams are meeting regularly and detailed action plans and milestones have been developed to improve scrutiny.

8. Recommendations

8.1. That the Members of the Council review and comment on the progress of the Best Value Improvement Plan.

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Date: 9 December 2008

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Appendix 1: Best Value Improvement Plan – Progress Report

Background Papers: [Report to Council on Best Value Progress Report February 2007](#)

[Report to Council on Best Value Improvement Structures February 2007](#)

[Report to Council on Best Value Improvement Plan April 2007](#)

[Report to Council on Best Value Improvement Plan June 2007](#)

[Report to Council on Best Value Improvement Plan October 2007](#)

Wards Affected:

All Wards