

IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY EXECUTIVE WORKING GROUP

Note of Meeting of the Improvement and Efficiency Executive Working Group held in the Council Chambers, Council Offices, Garshake Road, Dumbarton, on Tuesday, 13 April 2010 at 4.00 p.m.

Present: Councillor Iain Robertson (Chair)
Provost Denis Agnew
Councillor Jim Brown
Councillor Geoff Calvert
Councillor Jim Finn
Councillor William Hendrie
Councillor David McBride
Councillor Jonathan McColl
Councillor Jim McElhill
Councillor Marie McNair
Councillor Martin Rooney
Councillor May Smillie
David McMillan, Chief Executive
Joyce White, Executive Director of Corporate Services
Elaine Melrose, Executive Director of Housing, Environmental & Economic Development
Dave Clarke, Head of Service (Resources), Educational Services
Stephen West, Interim Executive Director of Social Work & Health
John McKerracher, Head of Property and Technical Services
Tricia O'Neill, Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development
Lorraine Coyne, Manager of Audit
Colin Mair, Chief Executive, Improvement Service
Craig Stewart, Committee Officer, Legal, Administrative and Regulatory Services

Apologies: Councillors Jim Bolland, Margaret Bootland, Ronnie McColl and Terry Lanagan, Executive Director of Corporate Services.

Councillor Iain Robertson in the Chair

NOTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Note of Meeting of the Working Group held on 9 March 2010 were submitted and noted as a correct record.

MOTION APPROVED BY COUNCIL MEETING ON 24 MARCH 2010 – AUDIT OF BEST VALUE – UPDATE ON BEST VALUE PROGRESS REPORT SUBMITTED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND TO THE ACCOUNTS COMMISSION – FEBRUARY 2010

An Excerpt Minute of the above meeting was circulated to Members of the Working Group, for their information.

The Chair, Councillor Robertson, made reference to the Excerpt Minute and explained the background and current position the Council found itself in with regard to this matter.

In this connection, the Working Group noted the remarks made by Councillor Robertson and the Chief Executive on the importance in terms of focusing on the four Best Value Workstreams. It was therefore agreed to note the following which was approved at the Meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council on 24 March 2010:-

This Council recognises the positive comments received within the Best Value Progress Update report on the good levels of performance across a wide range of services, including education and social work.

Council also recognises that whilst the Best Value Improvement Plan addresses the Accounts Commission findings there are still serious concerns about the Council's pace of change and its ability to demonstrate progress.

It further recognises that the Accounts Commission welcomes the Council's arrangements for external support for both elected members and senior officers and that they recommend that Council takes urgent steps to make the most effective use of this support.

Council agrees that the Best Value Improvement Plan is reviewed as a matter of urgency to ensure that its priority and focus delivers the increased pace of change to meet the Accounts Commission's findings.

It also agrees that the Improvement and Efficiency Executive Working Group considers a change to the Working Group format to encourage a more pro-active participation of all elected members in the drive for improvement, whilst recognising its scrutiny role.

The Improvement and Efficiency Executive Working Group should address these issues at its next meeting on 13 April 2010, and this meeting should be open to all elected members to ensure the widest range of ideas and views.

Furthermore, the Council seeks clarification from the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland on the comments regarding member officer relationships. This can be explored during the Council's follow up meeting with the Accounts Commission on 15 April 2010.

After discussion and having heard the Chief Executive in further explanation and in answer to Members' questions, the Working Group also agreed:-

- (1) to note that the up-to-date Best Value Improvement Plan would be submitted to the Council meeting in May for consideration; and
- (2) to note the importance of ensuring that early engagement took place with Members in terms of driving forward the Best Value and Competitiveness Framework agenda;
- (3) that the Working Group should be opened up to all Members to attend, but that it retain a core membership;
- (4) to note that it was essential that Members scrutinised the key issues involved at meetings of the Working Group and that it was suggested that Members particularly review the content of the Best Value Improvement Plan as a matter of urgency in order to ensure it best fitted the Council's improving performance priorities and focused on increasing delivery of the pace of change in order to address the Audit Commission's findings;
- (5) to review the frequency of meetings of the Working Group in order that it achieved its purpose and was primarily focused on encouraging a pro-active participation from all elected members in delivering the change necessary in terms of improvement, whilst taking cognisance of its scrutiny role; and
- (6) to note that Council had now agreed a revised approach to strategic decision making – which included the development of 'Business Days'. A programme for 6 Business Days in 2010/11 was being developed, however Council had agreed that the 1st Business Day on 14th April 2010 should focus on a review of the current strategic priorities, and it would also offer an opportunity to consider the options for marketing West Dunbartonshire as a place to live, work and visit.

PROGRESS ON EXTERNAL SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS

A report was submitted by the Improvement Service providing an update on developments since the December 2009 meeting of the Executive and to agree timescales for future work.

After discussion and having heard Colin Mair and relevant officers in further explanation and in answer to Members' questions, the Working Group agreed:-

- (1) to note the context of the Accounts Commission's recent update report on the Council and its emphasis on continuing concern about 'member/officer' relations and 'strategic leadership' by elected members;
- (2) to note that the Accounts Commission did, however, endorse the proposals agreed at the December 2009 meeting of the Executive for formalisation of peer support for the political and executive leadership of the Council; development sessions for elected members led by the Improvement Service and a 'critical friend' arrangement for the Executive chaired by the President of COSLA – these now required to be scheduled in and progressed without any delay;
- (3) to note that the Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development would prepare a briefing note for Members on the training and development issues in supporting elected Members to undertake their roles more effectively and with much more focus; and
- (4) to note that the Chief Executive already had in place arrangements in regard to peer support and continuing professional development.

Note: Colin Mair left the meeting at this point. The Chair, Councillor Robertson, on behalf of the Working Group thanked Mr Mair for his attendance and his most helpful contributions.

AN OVERVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SCOTLAND 2009 – REPORT BY AUDIT SCOTLAND

A report was submitted by the Chief Executive on the recent Overview of Local Government in Scotland 2009 report by Audit Scotland and in particular Appendix 1 which was a list of questions Members may wish to ask to help identify how West Dunbartonshire Council was dealing with the issues raised in the report.

After discussion and having heard the Chief Executive and relevant officers in elaboration and in answer to Members' questions, the Working Group agreed:-

- (1) to note the contents of the report, particularly the suggested questions at Appendix 1, and the terms of the discussion that had taken place in respect of the issues involved;
- (2) to note that it would be helpful for officers to provide 'model answers' with regard to the suggested questions at Appendix 1;
- (3) that the Executive further consider the content, and provide early engagement, of the Overview report prior to consideration of the document at the May Council meeting; and
- (4) to note that given the difficult financial outlook, the emphasis for Councils must be on improved outcomes which provided value for money, with a focus on managing costs, long term planning and seeking the most effective methods of service delivery.

REVIEW OF MEETING FREQUENCY

It was noted that, as had been agreed earlier, a review should take place - involving the Chair, Councillor Robertson, Chief Executive and appropriate officers - with regard to looking at the frequency of meetings of the Working Group, in order to ensure that the Executive was fully achieving its primary objective and purpose in terms of driving forward the Best Value and Improvement agenda for the Council, and in addressing the concerns highlighted by the Accounts Commission in its recent report.

The meeting closed at 5.50 p.m.