

Best Value Review of the Policy Function

Current Service Report (BV2)

Statutory Role:

There is no provision in statute for a council to have a policy function, nevertheless there are various legislative drivers that require councils to employ policy-related staff to address these. The Local Government in Scotland 2003 Act requires local authorities to deliver 'Best Value', make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in performance and to report performance of services to the public. Furthermore, local authorities have a duty to collect a range of performance measures and submit them to various regulatory bodies. Other legislative requirements (such as those related to Community Planning, disability, diversity as well as service specific such as in housing social work & education) and Scottish Executive strategies & policies require local implementation.

Strategic Role:

Policy staff are engaged throughout the council in both corporate and departmental roles to deliver best value and meet the various governmentally imposed requirements. This network of policy officers is referred to as the 'Policy function' and mainly comprises officers who perform a variety of 'generic' roles. There are also a smaller number of officers in various departments who undertake strategy & research duties specific to department or service

The key generic tasks that are undertaken throughout the council are:

- *Corporate Planning, Service Planning and Performance Management*– To help achieve the Councils Vision, a Corporate Plan is produced which sets out the Council's priorities and objectives for the next four years in line with guidance produced and annually updated by the corporate policy team. Every year the plan is updated and every four years after the local elections the Council aims to have a major revision of the plan to reflect the aims of the new elected members. Annual departmental Service plans are created which provide a road map for services to use to not only contribute to meeting the Councils priorities, but also to meet their own operational day to day work. Policy Staff across the Council facilitate in the development of these plans and ensure that they are completed on time. Departmental service plans also include action plans that are entered into the Action Planning Database. This in-house system was developed by Policy Staff in conjunction with ICT staff. Services are also required to conduct Quarterly Performance Reviews that are reported to an appropriate committee. Policy staff are required to facilitate these processes ensuring that they are completed in line with agreed timescales.
- *Best Value and Continuous Improvement* – A number of Best Value service reviews have been undertaken in recent years and several are underway across the Council presently. Policy staff play a key role in facilitation, documentation, professional advice, peer review and project management. In addition, policy

staff play a key role in the submission of quality awards. Policy staff across the council are members of the Best Value Strategy Group and Best Value Development Group which have been set up to drive the continuous improvement agenda. Policy officers authored a corporate toolkit for BV service reviews.

- *Communication and Consultation* - Responsiveness and Consultation is one of the key criteria of Best Value. Recognising the importance of consultation within WDC, the Consultation Network (of policy officers) has been formed to developing electronic recording of consultation activity – initially via an intranet system – as well as developing systems to improve and better co-ordinate consultation activity. The network also provides an information link to services and liaises with the Citizens' Panel Steering Group all with the aim of promoting and sharing good practice. In addition, Council has recently approved a Consultation Strategy that was drafted up by members of the Consultation Network. Policy officers also have developed a 'Communicating Effectively' document which is a guide for communication with people from minority ethnic groups and with disabled people. Policy staff are also involved in staff communication (including team brief preparation)
- *Equalities and Diversity* - Staff responsible for equality & diversity have drawn up the council's overarching Equality and Diversity Strategy and the component strategies covering Race, Disability and (by April 2007) Gender. They work on the development of Council approaches to issues of age, sexual orientation and faith and belief. Work is underway on a number of the foundations of equality policy including communication (in which guidance has been produced), employee training and equality monitoring. Staff have based these strategies and approaches on their close links with local communities, and they have an advisory role for all council services. In addition, the section has responsibility for the Council's access improvement programme.
- *Sustainable Development* – The Sustainable Development Working Group has been set up within the Council to address the local implementation of the Executives new Sustainable Development Strategy. It is run by the corporate policy team and is currently working on the creation of a strategy and action plan as part of the Community Plan process. Other departmental policy staff are also involved in the work of the working group.
- *Community Planning* – The original community plan was created in 2000 and is currently being updated. Policy staff throughout the Council are involved in its development and also in the implementation of various aspects of the plan such as Health Improvement
- *Performance Indicators* – The Council has a duty to collect data for various indicators and policy staff are responsible for their collation and reporting. In addition other indicator data (such as key performance indicators, corporate and departmental indicators, quality-of-life indicators) are collated by policy staff and input to the corporate database

Departments employ specific policy officers whose role is specific to the legislative and policy framework & environment of the department or service. For example the Housing service employs specific policy officers to deal with housing strategy and policy officers in other departments also have a specialised research role. There are some specific

specialised roles that are managed by the centralised policy unit which include police liaison, external funding and research into social justice.

Need/demand:

Much of the work of policy officers is driven by the external agenda of legislation, policies and guidance. Councillors and Directors also create demand for policy-related activities, mainly involving research and report writing. It is proving difficult to define the precise drivers that determine the work load of the function and to ascertain the specific demands on the departmental teams.

Service Targets and standards:

There are no specific targets and measures set-up to manage and monitor the function

Performance Measures:

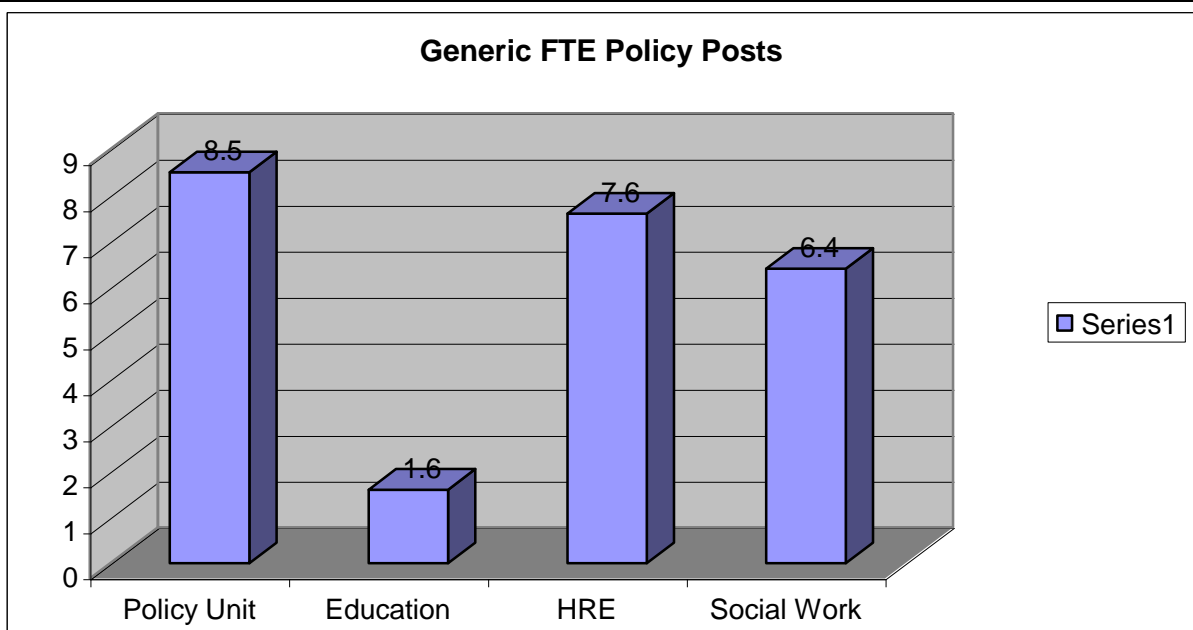
The performance of a Policy Service is not easy to measure. Nevertheless a number of potential indicators are under consideration. In addition, the BV Improvement Plan due to be discussed by Council at some point in the new year may have some impact on these. It is therefore proposed that performance measures for the policy service will be finalised at a later stage

Management and Service Planning:

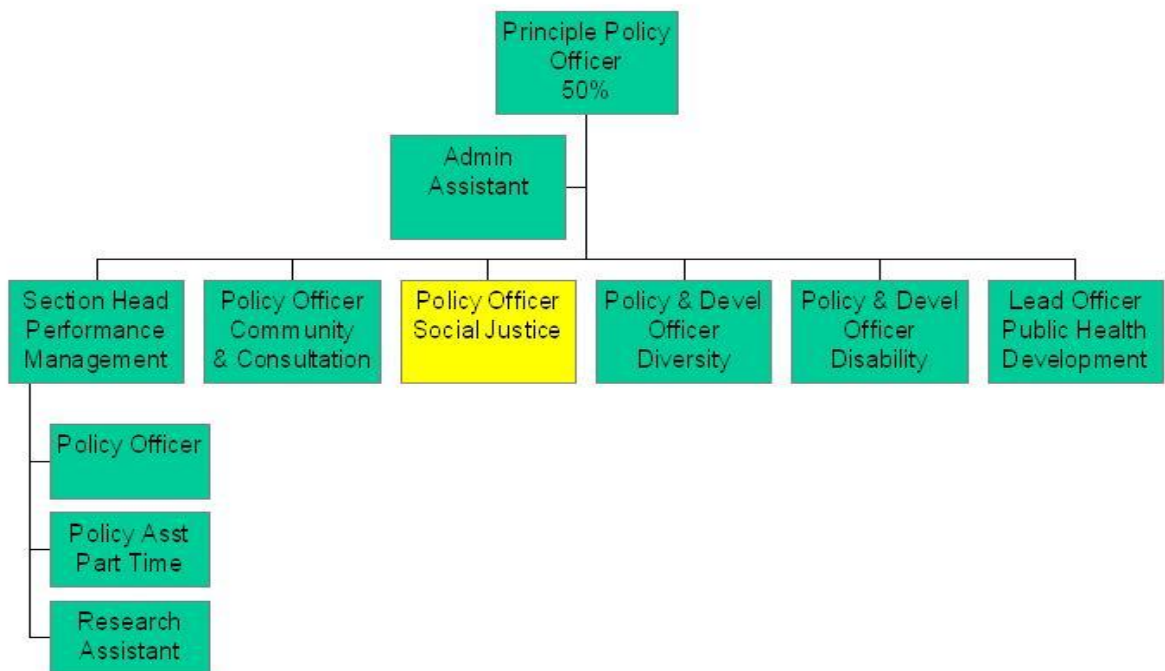
The work of the corporate policy team is a separate and specific part of the Chief Executives Departmental Service Plan. Other departmental service plans contain actions and outputs relating specifically to policy staff.

Service Structure:

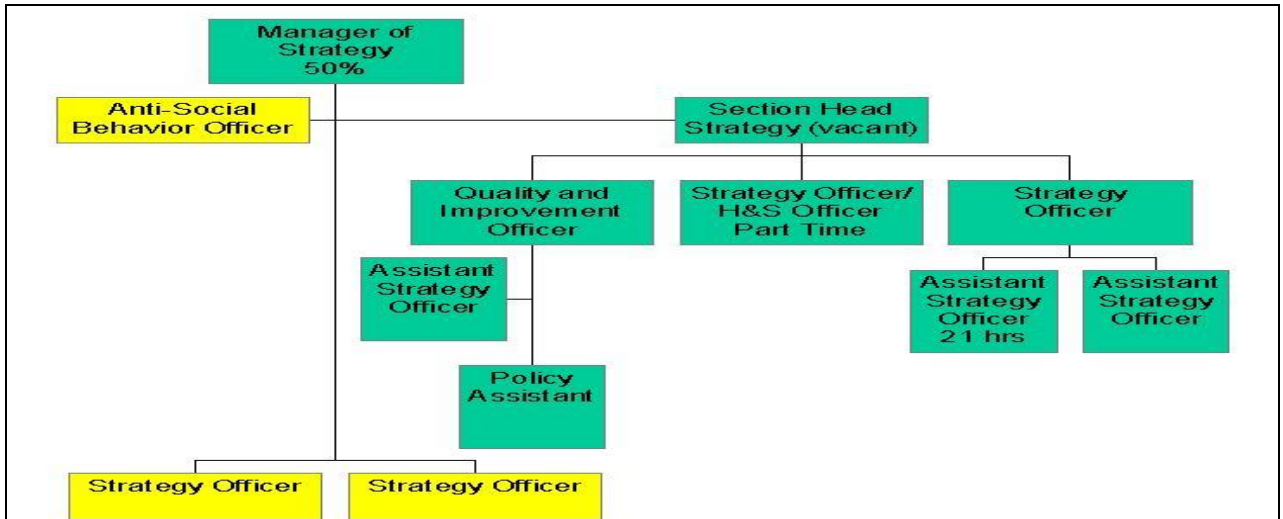
A total of 27 'generic' employees (24.1 FTE) perform policy related functions across the Council. This figure is excluding Admin support. When broken down by Service, there are 9 employees in the Policy Unit (8.5 FTE generic); 7 in Social Work (6.4FTE generic); 9 in HRE (7.6 FTE generic) and 2 in Education (1.6 FTE generic). The FTE generic staff are shown in the graph below:



The Corporate Policy Unit team below of 11 excludes the new external funding unit and the specialist seconded police liaison officer. The Policy Officer (social justice) post and half of the Principal Policy Officer post are deployed in specific strategy & research roles; whereas others have generic roles. The Principal Policy Officer reports directly to the Chief Executive. There are 9.5 FTE generic policy posts



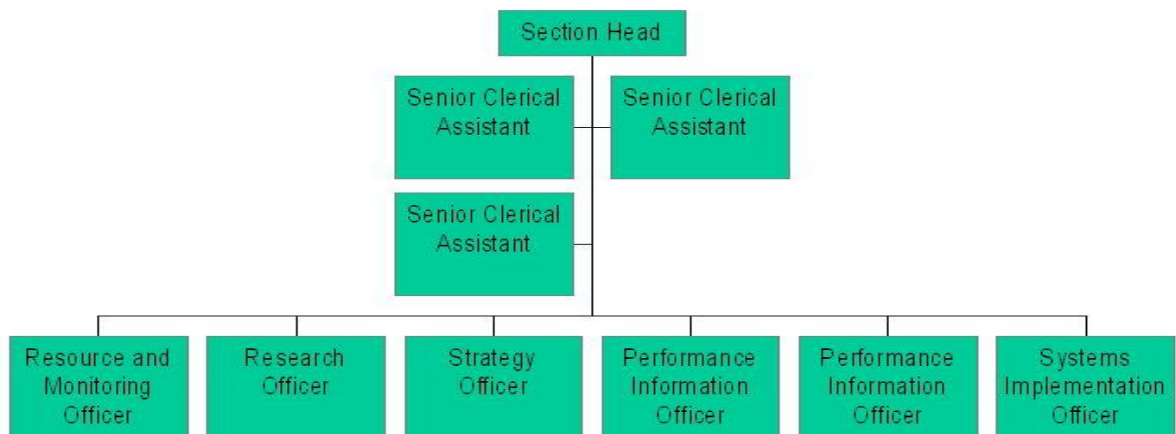
The structure of the policy function in Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services is shown below. There is currently 12 staff in the team reporting to a Manager of Strategy – who in turn reports to the Director. Employees who are highlighted in yellow are strategy & research staff specific to HRES (along with half of the manager of strategy post). The remainder of the team carry out generic policy duties of which the FTE is 7.6.



The Education and Cultural services structure is shown below. Recruitment of a full-time (but temporary) quality & improvement officer as an additional post is currently underway and is therefore shown below. 60% of the Section Heads post is generic, therefore the generic FTE is 1.6.

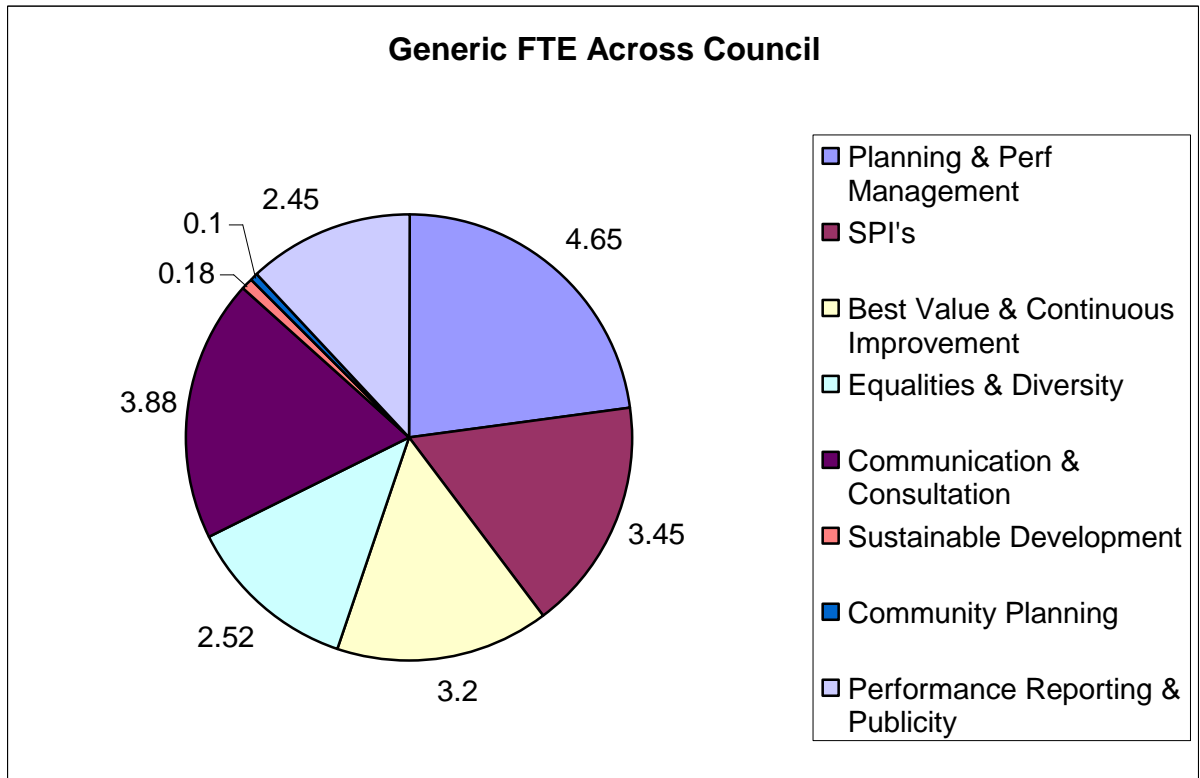


Social Work employs 6 staff in policy roles reporting to the Manager of Resources – who reports to the Director of Social Work. Of those shown below, there are 6.4 FTE generic policy posts.

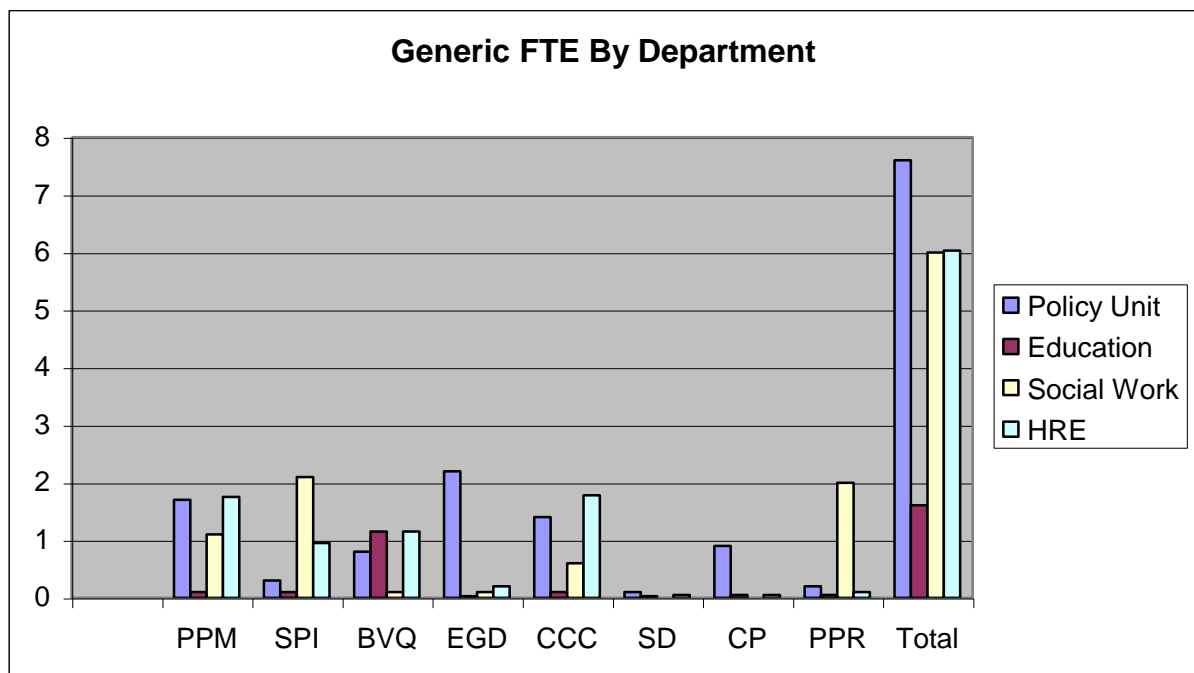


Staffing:

The resources deployed in the main areas of policy work across the Council is summarised in the pie chart below:



The level of resources allocated to each area of activity within each service was recorded and compared. This is shown in the graph below:



PPM =Planning & performance Management, SPI=statutory Performance indicators, BVQ=Best Value & quality, EGD,=equalities, CCC=consultation, communication, SD=sustainable development, CP=Community planning, PPR=public performance reporting,

<p>The research highlights the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education seem to have a low number of policy staff – though will be increased by one by the end of 2006. 			
<p>Other Resources: Some external consultancy has been used in the past by various departments but this is not extensive and is on a one-off basis.</p>			
<p>Costs and Budgets:</p>			
<p>Public Performance Reporting: The key mechanism through which the Policy Function reports its performance is through the Annual Performance Report of the Corporate Plan.</p>			
<p>Summary of current service: The policy function consists of 27 staff spread over the 4 directorates who work on a number of different strategic areas. The FTE of these staff is 24.1. The corporate Policy Unit is located in the Chief Executives Service while the other three directorates contain policy staff at a departmental level. Not only does the Policy Unit provide services to its own directorate, it works in tandem with policy staff in other directorates on both corporate and departmental issues. The following is a summary of the strategic roles that policy staff have taken responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning & Performance Management • SPI (or other external indicator) data collation • BV Reviews coordination, Quality (including Chartermark / liP), Continuous improvement • Equalities, diversity, disability • Communication, Consultation, Customer Services, Complaints • Sustainability • Community Planning • Public Performance Reporting <p>The need/demand and performance of the policy function is proving difficult to measure accurately. As discussed previously, much of the work of policy officers is driven by the external agenda of legislation, policies and guidance. Councillors and Directors also create demand for policy-related activities involving research and report writing but this is not on a predictable basis. Several Performance Indicators exist in the Action Planning Database that are directly/indirectly influenced by the various policy staff.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the consultation process will shed more light on these issues of need/demand and performance.</p>			
Lead Officer	Date	For Project Board	Date