

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council: 25 February 2009

Subject: Strategic Leadership & Organisational Culture

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report presents the outcomes of the member seminar in January on Strategic Leadership and seeks agreement to take forward a series of recommendations to improve the involvement of all members in the strategic decision making processes.

2. Background

- 2.1 A report on Strategic Leadership and Organisational Culture was considered by Council in November 2008. This included recommendations which proposed a number of ways of improving Decision Making & Scrutiny and Elected Member Development. Council agreed that “given that there are a range of options in the Appendix (to the report), Council agrees that this report is continued until Members have had the opportunity to attend a seminar to discuss the options outlined in the report”.
- 2.2 Subsequently, a seminar facilitated by Colin Mair, Chief Executive of the Improvement Service, was hosted on 21st January 2009, attended by five Members of the Administration, five Members of the Opposition, the Chief Executive and three Executive Directors.
- 2.3 The seminar focused on the need to develop our strategic leadership through a combined approach by members and officers to develop new ways of working. Open discussion within the seminar facilitated a frank debate on the key issues which influenced our ambition to work more collectively. This was followed by smaller mixed group work which considered the prioritisation and practicalities of implementing such recommendations.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1 In general, participants emphasised the importance of developing and implementing mechanisms which allow **all** Elected Members to have greater involvement in the early development of policy and strategy. The group also agreed the main focus of any Elected Member involvement should be on these wider strategic issues, rather than more operational matters.

- 3.2** The wider discussion within the seminar focussed on a number of key issues influencing how we work collectively, including the importance of developing a high level of trust between Members of different political parties, and also between Members and officers. It was acknowledged that this is something that cannot be imposed, but would develop through the strong commitment of everyone (members and officers alike) and by adopting new ways of working together. It was agreed that many of the recommendations previously proposed will, by facilitating collaborative working, encourage the development of increased levels of trust.
- 3.3** Equally, it was agreed that greater involvement of Elected Members and interaction with senior managers in the strategic planning process, as opposed to involvement in the detailed management of services, would support the development of trust. This will support a leadership approach which is less reactive, (which can be symbolic of crisis management). It was agreed that establishing clarity and direction within the strategic planning process is the starting point for a planned and managed framework which combines the efforts of members and officers in developing improved ways of working and delivering services.
- 3.4** Members also recognised other advantages from a more shared approach to decision making. Although processes will need to be planned and commenced at an earlier stage, there is considerable scope to reduce time and energy spent on developing totally separate positions, leading to an outcome of only one being successful in any vote. A recent example of this was the discussion at the Council budget meeting on 12th February; where members acknowledged there were positive elements in the proposals of both main parties, and also the importance of providing an opportunity for earlier discussion with Independent members and smaller parties. The willingness expressed to consider changes to the budget process, forms one very specific element of the recommendations and develops a process which pulls together the best ideas from all Members. This approach can only benefit the people of West Dunbartonshire.
- 3.5** Appendix 1 sets out the recommendations and discussion outcomes from the seminar, which are now recommended to Council. This is supplemented with members' ratings in considering if this was a high or medium priority, and also if the action could be initiated immediately as a 'quick win'. Detail is also provided on the general practicalities in relation to implementation. Appendix 2 details the development actions and timelines which are planned, to take forward the recommendations.

Impact on Organisational Culture

3.6 The detailed diagnostic review of the organisational culture within West Dunbartonshire is currently underway (Culture Web programme) and the outcomes are being communicated to senior managers. This highlights a strong perception from staff of Elected Members interfering in operational decisions and political behaviour which is unconstructive. Staff responses have indicated a need for a shift in organisational culture to one which demonstrates 'strong leadership and direction' and a climate of 'working together'. The recommendations put forward from the member seminar, will be a clear step forward in supporting and embedding this required shift.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 No personnel issues are anticipated at this stage.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications at this stage.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 There is a significant risk of being unable to deliver the required development and improvement plans of the Council if there is a lack of progress in terms of how we work, act, and behave with each other in our strategic developments, business operations and routines.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The report initially considered by Council in November has now been considered in more depth by the Elected Members who participated in the seminar on 21st January 2009 and consensus was reached in moving forward with the recommendations.

7.2 It was recognised that changes of this type will take time to embed, but the Members participating in the seminar expressed a real willingness to make this work. The greatest incentive for improving approaches to working together is that it will undoubtedly result in better decisions and better services for the people of West Dunbartonshire. For this reason the Members involved in the seminar unanimously agreed to the recommendations incorporated within the attached appendices.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Council is asked to agree the recommendations and outcomes presented in Appendix 1 and agree the action plan for developing further and implementation within Appendix 2.

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Date: 19 February 2009

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Recommendations & summary of outcomes
Appendix 2 – Action plan

Background Papers: Improvement Service Reports

Wards Affected: All

Appendix 1: Recommendations & Seminar outcomes

Objective		H/M/ L	Quick win (√)	Discussion outcomes & practicalities
<p>(1) Commitment of support to members</p>	<p>1 All officers commit to the principle of involving <u>all</u> Elected Members at the earliest opportunity, in proposals for decision by Council, and fully advise and support <u>all</u> Elected Members across all stages of the decision making process.</p>	High	√	<p>The principle(s) may be a ‘quick win’, however development of the planning processes may take longer. This approach should be led by the CMT, and a strong commitment communicated throughout departmental management structures. It’s recognised this will involve more rigorous planning processes when initiating proposals, particularly in terms of building in the time required.</p>
	<p>2 All members commit to the principle of participating in opportunities for involvement in all stages of the decision making processes – subject to their initial involvement in agreeing appropriate mechanisms.</p>	High	√	<p>It’s proposed, where possible, these mechanisms are scheduled to coincide with committee days; Wednesdays effectively becoming ‘business days’. Members involvement is vital in the development of processes required to underpin this, (see below). Following this, Members need to plan the time required to take advantage of these mechanisms.</p>
	<p>3 Once appropriate models of involvement are agreed, officers should ensure that members are fully briefed on the details of their operation.</p>	High	√	<p>Some mechanisms will operate at a corporate level and others departmental. The CE and CMT will be responsible for ensuring the necessary briefings.</p>
<p>(2) Defined areas for Council decision</p>	<p>4 The CMT produce a programme – for Members’ consideration, of key strategic issues for Council decision and Elected Member involvement for 2009/10, and develop an annual plan thereafter (finalised in March / April each year – following the Budget decisions) This should be linked clearly to the SOA and the Corporate Plan.</p>	High	√	<p>The initial draft of this programme should be available in October each year to facilitate informing the budget process. This will involve clarification of the decision making cycle and in particular the approach to Policy Led Budgeting. The programme of key strategic issues should also include a proposal for the appropriate development mechanism (see action 6).</p>
	<p>5 Complete a review of the Scheme of Delegation</p>	Med		<p>This is required to allow clarity on areas for officer decision which in turn releases committee time for more strategic issues.</p>

Appendix 1: Recommendations & Seminar outcomes

<p>(3) <i>Involvement in development and initial discussions</i></p>	6	Agree mechanisms for implementation following Council agreement of key strategic issues.	High		<p>As noted in action 4, the programme of strategic issues should include proposals for the most effective mechanism for progressing each item. Suitable mechanisms may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross party single issue groups (e.g. schools estate or care homes strategy) • Cross party groups on annual issues such as the Budget or the SOA/Corporate Plan <p>It's proposed the minutes of all such groups should be circulated to all members, the working groups should be established with a set remit and lifespan, and any continuation beyond this should be the subject of review.</p> <p>It's proposed that officers should reflect the views expressed through these mechanisms in any subsequent reports to committee, (subject to the need to ensure that professional advice and guidance is not compromised).</p>
	7	Pilot the introduction of monthly discussion forums to complement development of strategic issues; commence 3 month programme	Med	√	<p>Discussion forums would be open to all Members with the intention of allowing early debate on significant national, regional or local issues. (e.g. A Clyde Valley approach to Shared Services, the potential development of a waterbus service on the Clyde).</p>
	8	Scope development of an internal 'on-line' discussion forum for Elected Members & also possible Elected member blogs	Med		<p>The practicalities of setting up and operating such a Forum require further investigation. This would provide a mechanism for Members to comment on issues discussed in groups of which they are not a member; these views should also be considered by any officer preparing a report on the relevant topic.</p>

Appendix 1: Recommendations & Seminar outcomes

	9	Facilitate more direct links between the Chief Executive, CMT and Group Leaders	High	<p>The frequency of meetings with the CE would require consideration in relation to competing demands on time. It's suggested these are piloted on a monthly basis, but subject to review.</p> <p>It is proposed to establish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a regular programme of meetings between the CE & group leaders to discuss important current developments. - A schedule of discussion topics (circulated to Independents and members of minority parties providing opportunity for their involvement & to raise issues with the CE) - Leaders of the Administration & Opposition (jointly), regularly attend a session within meetings of the CMT; this would allow discussion of key agenda items (these would also be circulated to Independents and members of minority parties to allow them to raise any issues of particular concern with the CMT).
(4) Report Preparation	10	Consider practical revisions to the reporting format including presentation, distribution, recording, and accessibility arrangements.	High	<p>Part completed through the review of standing orders; Council has already agreed to a timescale change for distribution of reports, to 9 days in advance of Committee/Council meetings. .</p> <p>In addition, a further report is proposed on the options for amending the format of reports to ensure that they are as focussed and accessible as possible.</p>

	11	Develop a system of briefing notes – rather than committee reports, where decisions are not required. This will include format, distribution mechanisms, publication arrangements & record management.	High		It is proposed that items not requiring a Council/Committee decision – or which are not part of the performance reporting frameworks – should be issued to all members as Briefing Notes. This will facilitate Members requesting Council/Committee reports on these matters where appropriate, but release the time of Council/Committees to focus on the main strategic issues. There are issues to be addressed regarding how such briefing notes would be recorded, stored and how they would be made available to the public.
(5) Pre Agenda meetings	12	Develop scope and parameters for pre-agenda meetings.	High	√	<p>It is proposed that the role of pre-agenda meetings will be to consider the content and structure of agendas, and to seek clarification where necessary; this new approach will include a range of opportunities, prior to the pre agenda stage, for all members to express their views on key strategic issues.</p> <p>Participants agreed to recommend joint pre agenda meetings, as this would facilitate efficient use of officer resources, and generate some helpful discussion between groups. This is on the understanding that reports would still be subject to discussion at group meetings and it would not necessarily be appropriate for the convener/shadow to express a view at the pre agenda stage.</p> <p>It was further proposed that conveners and shadows should report back to the relevant Director on anything significant arising from subsequent group meetings</p>

	13	Develop diary of pre-agenda meetings.	High	√	It's proposed to develop a cycle of pre agenda meetings to fit in with the new arrangements for the issue of agenda papers. The Executive Director of Corporate Services will ensure the development of a diary of meetings which meet member & officer requirements including the timescales for distribution of agenda papers.
	14	Develop operational arrangements for pre-agenda meetings	High	√	The CMT and Committee Administration will need to address issues surrounding appropriate officer attendance.
	15	Briefing sessions for members and officers on key purpose of these meetings	High	√	The CE will need to arrange appropriate briefings for members and officers.
	16	Implement review and evaluation process.	Med		It's proposed once established, this pre agenda system should be subject to evaluation and review at the end of the 1 st year of operation (unless any concerns are raised prior to this).
(6) Seeking clarification and further information	17	Elected members commit to the principle of requesting the fullest information in advance of Council/Committee meetings	High	√	The new timescales for the issue of agenda papers (9 days in advance) will support members in making this commitment
	18	Elected members commit to the principal of discussing motions in full with the appropriate Directors in good time before meetings	High	√	The new timescales for the issue of agenda papers (9 days in advance) will support members in making this commitment
	19	Officers give priority to any such requests for information	High	√	It's noted this may require some reprioritisation of workloads, however the new timescales will support this.
	20	Organisation of development forums to support elected members in most effective use of committee structure (through use of case studies)	Med		This requirement could be met through CPD arrangements for Elected Members
	21	Complete a review of current timescales & issuing of agendas (including a review of checking processes)	High	√	Review of timescales for issuing reports is complete, with Council agreeing a 9 day timeframe (officer arrangements for checking reports etc still to be finalised).

(7) Use of scrutiny systems	22	Complete a review of the scrutiny function.	High	√	The Improvement Service has offered to undertake further work with members – which could include the consideration of additional options for scrutiny. A further seminar is proposed to consider additional options for improving the scrutiny function
	23	Provide further development sessions for Elected members in this area	High		This requirement could be met through CPD arrangements for elected members
(8) Elected member development	24	Development of role descriptions for Elected Members	High		
	25	Develop a programme of ‘bite-size’ development sessions for Elected Members (top 5 areas to be developed as a pilot)	High		The Improvement Service has offered to undertake further work with members.
	26	Develop a programme of bi-monthly/monthly shared development forums for the CMT & Elected Members	High		These sessions could be linked with the Discussion Forums (action 7), but this element would have a particular emphasis on areas for improvement in the working arrangements.
(9) Member / officer relations	27	Set up further workshops between Improvement Service and Elected Members	High	√	This action links to actions 22 and 25, but would also be of value in continuing to address issues surrounding member / officer and member / member relations
	28	Arrange a programme of facilitated sessions in consultation with the Improvement Service	High	√	

Abbreviations

CE – Chief Executive

CMT – Corporate Management Team (Chief Executive and all Executive Directors)

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

Appendix 2: Action plan

Steps & outcomes	Tasks	Lead	Timescale	Monitoring & evaluation
Define principles for working together: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined statement of principles • Published within member/officer protocol • Cascaded to all members and senior officers (Recommendations 1-3, 17-19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop draft statement of principles • Consultation & feedback with members and senior managers • Incorporate amendments & develop final version • Incorporate principles within member/officer protocol • Cascade to members & SMT's 	AT/LC	Complete all by 31/03/09	Set of principles Revision to member /officer protocol Ownership by members and officers
Develop the strategic planning process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined & agreed strategic priorities • Implementation of consultation & involvement programme • Increased link and effective working between members and officers to effect strategic planning process • Strategic priorities incorporated within service planning process (Recommendations 4-9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop draft strategic priorities • Circulate to members for feedback • Incorporate feedback & agree strategic priorities • Develop consultation & involvement plan, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - regular discussion forums - investigate feasibility of 'on-line' discussion forum - programme of meetings with CMT • Publish & cascade to members/senior officers • Evaluate participation & outcomes 	CMT AT/LC	31/03/09 30/04/09 15/05/09 31/05/09 30/11/09	Agreed strategic priorities Implementation of development process to support strategic planning Participation levels and discussion outcomes

Steps & outcomes	Tasks	Lead	Timescale	Monitoring & evaluation
<p>Develop functional and operative framework for collective working & member involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised & effective report structure • Develop a robust briefing process • Implement strong pre-agenda forums • Effective exchange of information <p><i>(Recommendations 10-23)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete full review of Council/Committee report format and distribution framework • Report outcomes & recommendations for improvement: CMT & Members • Develop frameworks for pre-agenda meetings • Cascade and implement structure • Evaluate participation & outcomes • Complete review of scrutiny function • Feedback outcomes & agree recommendations for implementation 	<p>AL/LC</p> <p>AT</p> <p>LC</p>	<p>30/4/09</p> <p>30/04/09</p> <p>31/10/09 30/6/09</p>	<p>Revisions to report format and distribution</p> <p>Agreed pre-agenda structure & implementation</p> <p>Review of scrutiny function</p>
<p>Implement a framework which supports and develops the Elected Member role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly defined role descriptions for members • Implementation of development programme • Development of continuous development culture and framework <p><i>(Recommendations 20, 24-28)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop draft job descriptions • Consultation with members and senior officers • Design development programme to incorporate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - personal development plan (PDP) requirements - link to strategic planning process - role specific requirements - link to committee structure • Evaluate development programme and outcomes 	<p>AT</p>	<p>Complete by 31/03/09</p> <p>30/04/09</p> <p>31/12/09</p>	<p>Defined job descriptions issued to all Elected Members</p> <p>Published development programme</p> <p>Evaluation report</p>