

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council Meeting: 25 April 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 Hearing¹ 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 Report².

2.2 A report³ 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 subsequently submitted to the initial meetings of the Member/Officer Working Group on the Best Value Improvement Plan⁴ on 14th February and 21st February 2007 followed by a report to Council on 28th February 2007⁵. Further meetings of the Member-Officer Working Group took place on the 4th and 18th April 2007⁶.

3. Overall Progress

3.1 External Assistance: As agreed by the Council the Chief Executive has approved the appointment of several consultancy organisations to provide external assistance. These comprise:

- **Brodies** - whose study covers organisational structures, scrutiny and decision making processes,
- **Solace Enterprises** – who are reviewing efficient government and competitiveness,
- **K3 Consultants** (Jean Couper) who is reviewing Management Development arrangements,
- **IBP** – who are carrying out the staff survey, and
- **Hexagon Research** – who are undertaking a small consultation exercise on scrutiny arrangements

3.2 The 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 is also £440,000 of capital items. It is very likely that the external assistance will highlight the need for further resources in addition to this.

3.3 The detail of the improvement plan and the status of individual actions is shown in Appendix 1 and progress is summarised in Sections 4, 5 and 6 below.

4. Immediate Priorities

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

This is part of the Brodies study. A draft report is expected later this month and will be discussed by the CMT, the Member-Officer Working Group and with Trade Unions before being reported to Council.

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.***

A consultancy brief outlining a review of workforce-planning options has been prepared and appropriate external consultants are being reviewed; however we have now decided that this work should be delayed until the new management structures are agreed.

The recruitment of the Project Team to progress the procurement and implementation of the new HR system has been completed and the project is progressing satisfactorily. The brief will include developing establishment control mechanisms (which will start to address workforce planning issues). In addition we will engage in work being carried out in this area at a national level

A short-life officers' working group has been set-up to produce a financial strategy for the Council and to integrate this into revised annual planning and budget guidance planned to be issued to Departments in late August. Option appraisal training for senior officers has been carried out. The new Departmental Revenue Estimate Books are being issued in two phases. These will show budgets for 07/08 in one set of books and a second set (currently in draft) will show indicative budgets for the following two years.

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.*

Hexagon Research have undertaken a small consultation exercise on possible options for modifying our scrutiny arrangements. This will be integrated into the results of the Brodies study.

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

A brief for a consultant to review options for improving our culture of best value – including a review of our organisational arrangements – was prepared but is pending currently whilst a further assessment of our needs is carried out.

A further brief – covering a review of our arrangements for improving our approach to efficient government (including shared services) and competitiveness was sent to SOLACE Enterprises and draft reports have now been received. Recommendations arising from these studies are being reviewed. The format for an efficiency statement has been agreed by Cosla and a retrospective statement for 06/07 will be signed off by August.

A new officer project team (the Continuous Improvement Group) has been set up to manage the implementation of the new Public Services Improvement Framework (PSIF) and to address the cultural issues associated with improvement. A training programme for internal assessors has been agreed and the CMT have also agreed that the Group run some staff awareness events and produce publicity. The Project Team is also assessing our approach to Best Value Service Reviews and managing our quality accreditation strategy (Charter Mark and Investors in People). The Quality & Improvement officer – whose main task will be implementation of the PSIF- was recruited successfully and commences on 23rd April.

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

This is part of the Brodies study. An early draft has been received but is being expanded to include management structures to 4th tier. The final draft report is expected later this month and will be discussed by the CMT, the Member-Officer Working Group and with Trade Unions before being reported to Council.

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

An enhanced induction programme for new and existing members will be delivered immediately post the May elections (one-day event on 9th May). This will be supported by a further training needs assessment.

A consultancy brief to review approaches to improving Member-Officer relations and the protocol has been prepared and appropriate external consultants are being reviewed.

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 first draft of a new Community Plan is available based on a wide-ranging initial consultation. Further consultation and review of the Plan in line with the requirements of Strategic Environment Assessment and Integrated Impact Assessment is underway. This should be endorsed by the Partnership Board in June and will also be reported to Council. A review of progress on the outcomes highlighted in the Regeneration Outcome Agreement (ROA) is also on target for submission at the end of June. (The mid year 'stock take' received a positive response from Communities Scotland.)

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

The CMT are ensuring that Departments address all areas of poor service performance and that action plans continue to be brought forward to the CMT and respective thematic committees. In addition, regular reports covering progress of all Statutory and Key Performance Indicators are being submitted to the CMT and Audit & Performance Review Committee.

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

A review of performance reports going to members is underway to ensure their consistency and correct use of traffic lights and comparator groups, and this also forms part of a brief to external consultants for their observations. A proposal to review vendor performance management systems has been agreed by the CMT and a report prepared for the Tender Committee.

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

The external consultants from SOLACE Enterprises are reviewing our approach to testing competitiveness and a draft report has been received.

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

A Risk Analysis Section is now part of the standard committee report template. A further tranche of risk management training from an external supplier was completed in March 2007. 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 issued. A review of appropriate software is underway in conjunction with the review of performance management systems as it is possible that a system could be procured that fulfils both areas.

5. Medium-Term Priorities

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

The Continuous Improvement Group has agreed a process of peer-review for all best value service reviews and existing action plans. The Group have recommended further training in service-delivery option appraisal.

5.2 *Implement a leadership and management development programme*

K3 Consultants have been engaged to develop and deliver a leadership & management development programme for the CMT. A survey of managers has taken place and Middle Management training is being progressed using a framework developed by the Improvement Service; one of our officers is attending a pilot of this programme and will be learning how to deliver the programme in-house. Progress is being maintained on developing appropriate programmes for supervisors and team leaders.

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

The Brodies study is reviewing the role of the Community Participation Committee within the decision making structure, and the CPC itself has considered a discussion paper on its role and made recommendations for the future. The consultation network is reviewing our consultation strategy, setting up more training, updating the database of consultations and reviewing the effectiveness of the recent budget consultation exercise.

6. Other Priorities

6.1 Human Resources: A consultants brief to review our dignity at work procedures and develop effective mediation and support arrangements for staff has been prepared. Appropriate consultants are being reviewed. A report was put to the JCF on processes for settling outstanding grievances. Consultants from IBP are progressing the new staff survey (commencing 23 April) 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 for this are part of the Brodies study.

- 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 was originally planned to go-live in May 2007 – but is slightly delayed due to the time required to undertake building conversion work. A phased implementation is now planned from June-August. The Customer Services Section Head has now been recruited and commenced 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 and linked departmental service plans. A report was prepared for the CMT and a consultants brief prepared for assistance in meeting the timescales and improving the quality and buy-in of these plans.
- 6.4** The **Asset Management** group are progressing with the collation of asset related data into the new asset management database. The collation of property-related data is on track; however, there are some issues to be resolved to fully populate the system with estates, occupancy and finance data. Work has started on producing an improved asset plan for the Council; a report on a new strategic approach (including options for engaging with external partners) will be prepared for the CMT in May. The training programme in Option appraisal (delivered by Finance staff) also covers asset decision making. Some progress has been made on the review of care homes; condition surveys are complete, property values estimated, improvement proposals prepared and suitability surveys are in progress. In addition the homes are part of a larger Best Value Review. A progress report - outlining some options – will be presented to the CMT in July.
- 6.5** **Procurement** is progressing well and a refresh of the corporate procurement strategy is to commence. The purchasing cards pilot continues within the Roads section and will commence for stationery in early May. The capital plan for 07/08 includes a sum to progress e-procurement and an officers working group is progressing the creation of approved contractor lists.
- 6.6** **Sustainable Development:** Recruitment of the new post of Sustainable Development Officer was successful and the new postholder commenced work on 16/4 and will progress the development of the sustainable development strategy and the various action plans. The recruitment of the Biodiversity Officer (jointly funded by ourselves, Scottish Natural Heritage and East Dunbartonshire Council) is progressing but was slightly delayed due to slippage in getting final agreement from EDC.

6.7 Equal Opportunities: Implementation of the Race and Disability Equality duties is progressing and a report to the Social Justice Committee on the options for addressing the Gender equality duty was presented in March 07. 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. A new Equal Opportunity Employment Officer commences later this month.

6.8 Public Performance Reporting: Work is on-track to continuously improve the balance of public performance reporting – which will also include a review of the style and content of the annual performance report.

7. Personnel Issues

7.1 Recruitment of the agreed posts is progressing well.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 Expenditure to date has been from the revenue (£420,000) and capital (£440,000) allocations previously agreed by Council.

9. Risk Analysis

9.1 No Risk Analysis is required at this stage.

10. Recommendations

10.1 Members are invited to note progress made to date.

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Date: 19 April 2007

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Appendices: Appendix 1 - Best Value Improvement Plan

Wards Affected: All

Background Papers: see list below

¹ [Public Hearing 29-30th November 2006 - Transcript](#)

² [Final Audit Scotland Report on the Best Value Audit in West Dunbartonshire Council February 2007](#)

³ [Report to Council 17th January 2007](#)

⁴ Reports to Member-Officer Working Group 14 February 2007 and 21 February 2007

⁵ [Report to Council 28th February 2007](#) plus [Appendix 1](#) and [Appendix 2](#)

⁶ Reports to Member-Officer Working Group 4 April 2007 and 18 April 2007