

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee: 22 June 2011

Subject: West Dunbartonshire Advice Services Strategy

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report seeks committee approval for the West Dunbartonshire Council Advice Services Strategy (attached as Appendix 1).

2. Background

- 2.1** Between August and December 2010, a review of advice giving agencies in West Dunbartonshire was carried out by Blake Stevenson. The review was commissioned by the Council's Social Work Department at a cost of £17,950. The recommendations from this review are attached as appendix 2. The review found that the three main advice giving agencies in West Dunbartonshire deliver valuable services.
- 2.2** However, the review identified several issues that needed to be considered to ensure advice services in West Dunbartonshire continue to be high quality, effective and efficient.
- 2.3** In order to achieve this, the review recommended that all three advice agencies develop a strategy for a new, collaborative approach to delivering advice services in West Dunbartonshire.
- 2.4** The strategy has been developed through a comprehensive consultation process which included key advice giving partners. This focused on the challenges, priorities and issues for advice giving services in West Dunbartonshire.
- 2.5** The new strategic approach takes into account the findings of the Blake Stevenson report, but also the implications of significant and challenging reform to the UK welfare system. This reform agenda is likely to have a disproportionately negative effect in West Dunbartonshire, given the level of dependency on incapacity and disability related benefits and the focus of reform being on these benefits areas.
- 2.6** At the same time the ongoing recession is having a visible impact on demand for debt support services. Demand for money advice and support has increased in all partner agencies and this increase is anticipated to continue for the coming period.

- 2.7** The strategy will be supported by an action plan which is currently being developed. The action plan is scheduled for completion by August 2011. This action plan will detail:
- How the recommendations in the Blake Stevenson review will be implemented
 - The operational priorities developed in partnership between all key service providers
 - How the alignment of Employability and Community Learning and Development with Advice Services will be implemented

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The new advice services strategy approach sets out the challenges in terms of demand on services; what practical changes will be made to respond to these challenges; how agencies will work differently to ensure the response is effective and sustainable; how this will be measured.
- 3.2** The overarching aim of the Strategy is to deliver improvements to the provision of advice services through a more collaborative partnership based approach. The strategy will take full account of the complex challenges ahead in relation to UK Welfare Reforms and an existing and anticipated increase in demand for services.
- 3.3** The advice services strategy will be achieved through delivering the following targeted partnership activity:
- Shared needs assessment between key service providers
 - Sharing information, training, guidance and materials
 - Co-location of services where appropriate
 - Specific agencies leading on areas of expertise e.g. representation at Appeal Tribunals and Small Claims Court
 - Shared performance management system
 - Early intervention and prevention
 - Income maximisation, through debt management and in/out of work benefits
 - Connecting people to the right financial products and services and supporting them to use them in an effective way
 - Capacity building across services, in particular Employability and Community Learning & Development
- 3.4** The key Partners delivering advice giving services in West Dunbartonshire are:
- West Dunbartonshire Council
 - Clydebank Independent Resource Centre
 - Citizens Advice Bureaux

4. People Implications

- 4.1** There are no specific people implications as a direct consequence of the drafting of this report and attached strategy.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** There are no financial implications in relation to the development of the West Dunbartonshire Advice-Giving Strategy.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** Failure to develop a West Dunbartonshire Advice Strategy would result in a lack of strategic direction for the Council and its community planning partners advice giving services.

- 6.2** The strategy is a clear and sustainable shift into partnership models of service delivery. All partners will need to commit fully to the partnership model and this is emphasised by the transfer of all resources for financial inclusion to the Chief Executive's Department, and subject to community planning processes of performance management and financial controls. Failure to commit fully to new partnership based delivery models will weaken the impact of advice services overall in West Dunbartonshire.

7. Equalities, Health & Human Rights Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 7.1** The influence and impact of the West Dunbartonshire Advice Service Strategy is wide ranging. An equalities impact assessment has been carried out for the Council's advice service. Partner agencies will be encouraged to complete their own individual EIA.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 8.1** The proposed West Dunbartonshire Advice Services Strategy and action plan have been developed in consultation with partners to provide a strategy for advice service activity for West Dunbartonshire.

- 8.2** It is recommended that Committee approves the West Dunbartonshire Advice Partnership Strategy.

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David McMillan
Chief Executive
Date: 31 May 2011

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Appendices:

1. West Dunbartonshire Advice Partnership Strategy
2. Recommendations from Blake Stevenson

Background Papers:

Blake Stevenson Review of Advice Giving Agencies in West Dunbartonshire

Wards Affected:

All Wards