

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Executive

Council : 24 June 2009

Subject: Best Value Audit

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report presents Audit's Scotland's Best Value Audit Progress Report

2. Background

- 2.1 Audit Scotland in their February 2007 report on Best Value identified 11 immediate and 3 medium-term improvement priorities for West Dunbartonshire Council. A Best Value Improvement Plan (BVIP) was developed to address these priorities.
- 2.2 Audit Scotland subsequently assessed progress against these 14 priorities in their February 2008 Progress Report and acknowledged the Council's increased commitment to continuous improvement and the progress made in a fairly short timescale. The council was urged to prioritise 4 key areas:
- Continuing to develop member/officer relationships
 - Establishing arrangements to demonstrate the competitiveness of its services
 - Developing robust financial planning
 - Improving community engagement
- 2.3 A revised improvement plan was developed in response and the Council agreed in February 2008 that the BVIP be progressed by five workstreams (Organisational Development, Continuous Improvement, Resource Management, Risk & Performance Management and Efficient Government). Each workstream is led by a member of the CMT, supported by a nominated lead officer and trade union representation.
- 2.4 The Council also agreed to set up an 'Improvement & Efficiency Executive' (I&EE) to oversee the progress of the five workstreams. Membership of the Group was agreed to total 8 Elected Members – comprised of 4 Labour, 2 Other Opposition and 2 SNP councillors. The group is supported by the Chief Executive, other members of the CMT and led by the Leader of the Council.
- 2.5 The BVIP is reported to Council on a quarterly basis following the quarterly meeting of the I&EE.

- 2.6** Audit Scotland carried out fieldwork for their 2009 Progress Report in March 2009. A draft report was received on 15th May and a response from the Council was returned on 25th May as requested. Audit Scotland is due to present their report to the Accounts Commission on the 17th June and formally publishes the integrated findings on 16th July.
- 2.7** Audit Scotland's report to the Accounts Commission has now been received and is presented as Appendix 1.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** Audit Scotland has acknowledged the Council's commitment to continuous improvement and recognised that a number of services continue to demonstrate good levels of performance.
- 3.2** However, Audit Scotland has concluded that insufficient progress has been made in dealing with the four priority issues identified by the Accounts Commission in its 2008 progress report.
- 3.3** The report later confirms that progress has been made in developing robust financial planning arrangements and that individually, some council services have demonstrated good levels of engagement with the local community.
- 3.4** The report acknowledges that the improvement work undertaken so far has put in place the foundations that should allow the Council to increase the pace of change but concludes that at this time the pace of change is slow and there is limited evidence of the impact of improvement.
- 3.5** There is significant focus within the Report on political conflict and the impact that this is having on the progress of improvement plans. It is noted that Elected Members and Chief Officers need to work better together to provide strategic leadership and substantially increase and maintain the pace of change.
- 3.6** The report confirms recent inspection activity and highlights the continuing good performance of education services, social work, child protection and benefits administration. Whilst the report includes the findings of the most recent Social Work Inspection, it does not include the findings of the 2009 HMIE inspection of Education services, despite a request from the Chief Executive to have this included.
- 3.7** The report highlights Housing services as an ongoing concern but recognises that the council is making progress on its housing improvement plan.
- 3.8** The report concludes that Service performance is improving and the Statutory Performance Indicators show good performance improvement overall since 20005/06.

- 3.9 Following formal publication of the Audit Scotland Report, the Improvement & Efficiency Executive (I&EE) will meet on 24th July to enable Officers and Members to develop a revised Best Value Improvement Plan to address the report findings.
- 3.10 A draft plan will be presented to Council in August and a finalised version submitted for approval in September following the subsequent meeting of the I&EE on 4th September.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1 There are no personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1 Unless the Council demonstrates significant improvement there remains the risk of further reputational damage locally and nationally, and significant damage to staff moral.

7. Conclusions and Officer's Recommendations

- 7.1 The Best Value Audit Progress report concludes that although the Council has made progress in some areas and has a number of services that continue to perform well, it has not made sufficient progress in delivering Best Value.
- 7.2 The Council must focus on improving strategic leadership through an improved political climate and improved member-officer relationships in order to increase the pace of change sufficiently.
- 7.3 Elected Members are requested to consider the Audit Scotland report and the Council's public response and consider how they can best contribute to the next Best Value Improvement Plan.

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Date: 11 June 2009

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Appendix 1: Best Value Audit Progress Report

Wards Affected: All