

**RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL**

To: Council

On: 7 September 2006

Report  
by  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**Audit of Best Value and Community Planning: Renfrewshire Council's  
Improvement Plan**

**1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report outlines the Best Value Audit process and summarises the key findings arising from the Council's Audit of Best Value and Community Planning which was carried out between November 2005 - April 2006. The final Audit report was published on 6 July 2006.
- 1.2 The report also sets out an Improvement Plan to deliver the 12 improvement actions identified by the Accounts Commission in the Audit report. The Council is required to agree an Improvement Plan and submit it to the Accounts Commission by October 2006.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Council:
- (i) Notes the audit process and timescale for the publication of the Council's response to the Audit Report.
  - (ii) Approves the Improvement Plan set out in Annex 1 to this report.
  - (iii) Agrees the arrangements to monitor the implementation of the Improvement Plan.

**3 THE BEST VALUE AUDIT REPORT**

- 3.1 The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced new statutory duties relating to Best Value and Community Planning. Audit Scotland has been charged with auditing each authority to assess the extent to which councils are meeting their duties under the Act.

- 3.2 Renfrewshire Council's Best Value audit was carried out between November 2005 - April 2006. The final Best Value report for the Council, which includes the Accounts Commissions findings, was published on 6 July 2006.
- 3.3 Audit Scotland has distributed this report widely and published it on their website. Each member of the Council and all our community planning partners have been sent a copy of the report and it has also been published on the Council's website.
- 3.4 The audit report presents a very positive assessment of the approach the Council has adopted in delivering Best Value and indeed, it is one of the best reports published to date. This is particularly gratifying given the significant demographic, social and economic problems that exist in Renfrewshire and which impact on the ability of the Council to deliver the level of services that are required to meet the needs of our residents. The Council has been commended in most areas covered by the audit and a number of significant strengths have been identified. Some examples of these drawn from the audit report are set out below:
- "The Council has adopted a modernising agenda to ensure it is in a good position to meet the changing demands on public services within its areas".
  - "The Council has a clear set of strategic priorities which reflect its context, and elected members and officers provide strong and effective leadership".
  - "There is a strong managerial culture within the Council which demonstrates a good understanding of what Best Value requires".
  - "The Council has established a well integrated strategic planning framework based on the areas broader community objectives".
  - "The Council demonstrates a clear understanding of the systems and processes required to support Best Value, and has a positive staff culture which supports continuous improvement".
  - "Overall the Council has in place effective communications arrangements. Public Performance reporting is well presented in Renfrewshire".
  - "The Council demonstrates a clear understanding of the systems and the processes required to support Best Value".
  - "The Council's investment in improving its approach to customer care is resulting in significant improvements".
  - "Council services are well managed and are customer focused".
  - "The Council makes good use of quality awards and other external accreditation to engage, involve and focus its resources, including staff, on achieving continuous improvement".
- 3.5 The overall conclusion in the Best Value audit report is that the Council demonstrates a strong commitment to delivering continuous improvement and is

embedding the appropriate corporate systems to support this. This commitment to continuous improvement is reflected across all services.

- 3.6 As we have already stated in the Best Value audit submission while we have made significant progress in delivering Best Value we know that there always be more to be done. Customer expectations and our determination to deliver high quality, modern, accessible customer focused services which offer Best Value lie at the heart of everything we do in Renfrewshire. We have always known that we have to continue to improve and demonstrate improvement and some of the ways in which we will do this are set out in the Improvement Plan. We recognise the Improvement Plan attached as a valuable contribution to the ongoing process of pursuing Best Value and continuous improvement. The Improvement Plan should be seen in the context of being a contribution to all of the other significant actions plans for improvement which the Council has agreed and to our overall planning framework for improvement.

#### **4 IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

- 4.1 In the report Audit Scotland identified 12 areas where the Council could improve its performance. Most of these broad areas had already been identified by the Council and were included in the Council's own Improvement Plan that formed part of the Best Value submission. The improvement issues identified by Audit Scotland are set out on page 56 of the Best Value Audit report. In its findings the Accounts Commission highlighted four areas for attention covering the role of elected members in scrutiny, the need to adopt a broader approach when examining options for service delivery, the management structure and the Council's performance on the statutory performance indicators.
- 4.2 The Council must agree an Improvement Plan to address the issues raised in the audit and submit it to the Accounts Commission by October 2006. Thereafter the Commission will visit the Council to discuss the audit process and its findings. The Council is also required to publish a notice in the local press outlining the Council's response to the Accounts Commission's findings.
- 4.3 The Improvement Plan set out in Annex 1 details the actions that will be implemented by the Council to address the issues raised in the audit report. The Council will have to submit an update on the Improvement Plan to the Accounts Commission by October 2007 and progress in implementing the actions will also be reviewed by the Council's external auditor as part of the annual audit process. The implementation progress will also be monitored by the Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team on a regular basis. It is also recommended that progress should be reported to the Scrutiny Board on a six monthly basis.

#### **Chief Executive**

For further information on this report contact Ron Morrison, Head of Policy, on 0141-840-3228.

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## **IMPLICATIONS OF THIS REPORT**

1 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS** - None

2 **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS** - none

3 **COMMUNITY PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

*Social inclusion* - The Improvement Plan covers a range of actions that will help improve the social and economic opportunities for individuals and communities in Renfrewshire.

*Modernising government* - The Council has been commended in the audit for its approach to best value and modernising government. Actions in the Improvement plan will ensure that this work continues.

*Sustainable development* - Measures have been identified in the audit which promote sustainability across the Council. The Improvement Plan will ensure that these approaches are continually developed.

4 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS** - none

5 **PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS** - none

6 **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS** - none

7 **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS** - Equal opportunities is a key requirement of best value. The measures set out in the Improvement Plan will build on the approaches that are already in place across the Council.

## Annex 1 - Renfrewshire Council : Best Value Improvement Plan

Improvement Issue	Proposed Actions	Lead Officer(s)	Timescale
<b>HIGH PRIORITY</b>			
1. Set out more clearly how the Council will contribute to achieving community planning objectives and establish clear targets for its four additional corporate objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report annual progress to the Leadership Board on the Council's contribution to the 6 strategic objectives which we share with our Community Planning partners.</li> </ul>	Head of Policy	December 2006
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agree targets and performance indicators for the Council's 4 strategic objectives.</li> </ul>	Head of Policy	October 2006
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report progress on the Council's 4 strategic objectives annually to the Leadership Board.</li> </ul>	Head of Policy	April 2007
2. Improve the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for scrutinising decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review current scrutiny arrangements and assess options in preparation for electoral change in May 2007</li> </ul>	Chief Executive Director of Corporate Services.	March 2007
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider and implement findings from the review following the 2007 local elections.</li> </ul>	Chief Executive Director of Corporate Services	May/June 2007
3. Increase the level of challenge on options for how services are delivered, including, private sector benchmarking where appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review service delivery options in each of the Trading Operations.</li> </ul>	Directors of Housing and Property, Environmental Services, Planning and Transport and Finance and IT.	December 2006

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an Efficient Government Strategy.</li> <li>• Identify next phase of strategic, cross cutting service reviews involving Community Planning partners where appropriate.</li> <li>• Review the use of benchmarking across the Council.</li> </ul>	<p>Director of Finance and IT Head of Policy.</p> <p>All Directors Head of Policy.</p> <p>Head of Policy</p>	<p>November 2006</p> <p>November 2006</p> <p>December 2006</p>
4. Further develop the Council's relationship with the voluntary sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish the Voluntary Sector Compact.</li> <li>• Establish a joint Voluntary Sector working group to act as a pathway for consultation and involvement between the Council and the voluntary sector</li> <li>• Develop indicators for the Compact outcomes and agree an implementation Action Plan.</li> <li>• Work with the voluntary sector to facilitate the Council's External Funding Strategy.</li> <li>• Report to the Leadership Board, RCVS Board and the Learning and Work Community planning group on the implementation of the Voluntary Sector Compact Action Plan.</li> </ul>	<p>Head of Policy</p> <p>Head of Policy</p> <p>Head of Policy</p> <p>Head of Policy All Directors</p> <p>Head of Policy</p>	<p>August 2006</p> <p>August 2006</p> <p>December 2006</p> <p>October 2006</p> <p>Annually from April 2007</p>

**MEDIUM PRIORITY**

<p>5. Ensure that political and management structures are effective in delivering a modernising agenda and fully support the delivery of strategic objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review decision making structures and assess options in preparation for electoral change in May 2007</li> <li>Consider and implement findings from the review following the 2007 local elections.</li> </ul>	<p>Chief Executive Director of Corporate Services</p> <p>Chief Executive Director of Corporate Services</p>	<p>March 2007</p> <p>Summer 2007</p>
<p>6. Reconsider how the Council will ensure that continuous improvement and challenge is sustained within individual services, in the absence of planned best value review activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the Council's rankings in the Audit Scotland SPI profiles and report progress annually to the Scrutiny Board.</li> <li>Continue to improve the Council's performance in other locally determined PIs and ensure the successful delivery of the Council's key corporate projects.</li> <li>Continue to develop the annual review process between the Chief Executive and Directors to drive service performance and continuous improvement.</li> <li>Scrutiny Board to carry out a review on the performance of SPIs that fall in the lower quartile (Rank 25 - 32)</li> <li>Continue to subject services to external accreditation using quality models such as Charter Mark, ISO etc.</li> </ul>	<p>All Directors</p> <p>Chief Executive All Directors</p> <p>Chief Executive</p> <p>All Directors Head of Policy</p> <p>All Directors</p>	<p>Ongoing process Annual review</p> <p>Ongoing process Annual review</p> <p>Annually, July - Sept</p> <p>February 2007</p> <p>Ongoing over three years.</p>

<p>7. Improve how equalities issues are monitored and reported to elected members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate equalities monitoring and reporting into the Council's corporate complaints system.</li> <li>• Review the Council's race equalities scheme and action plan following the publication of the Scottish Executive's National Race Equality Strategy.</li> <li>• Report annually to the Leadership Board on the development of the equalities agenda across the Council.</li> <li>• Implement and report annually on the Council's Disability and Gender Equality duties to the Leadership Board.</li> </ul>	<p>Head of Policy</p> <p>Head of Policy</p> <p>Head of Policy</p> <p>All Directors Head of Policy</p>	<p>August 2006</p> <p>December 2006</p> <p>December 2006</p> <p>From December 2006 and April 2007</p>
<p>8. Develop the range of services available through the web portal and the customer contact and service centres and increase the profile of community planning on the web portal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the Portal Development Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- achieve transactional ("T") status for the Portal</li> <li>- deliver 50 new services on-line</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Implement the Customer Services Strategy Action Plan.</li> <li>• Open the new HQ Customer Service Centre.</li> </ul>	<p>All Directors Head of Policy/Head of IT</p> <p>Director of Finance and IT</p> <p>Director of Corporate Services</p>	<p>Ongoing over 3 years</p> <p>November 2006</p> <p>February 2007</p> <p>Ongoing over 3 years</p> <p>March 2007</p>
<p>9. Report progress on how the Council's core values are being embedded and develop impact measures for this</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree the framework and measures to assess how the Council's core values are being embedded across the organisation.</li> </ul>	<p>Head of Policy</p>	<p>October 2006</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report annually to the Leadership Board on how well the corporate core values are being delivered across the Council.</li> <li>Review and update the Corporate Statement following the 2007 local elections.</li> </ul>	Head of Policy	May 2007
		Head of Policy	August 2007
10. Continue to develop performance management and ensure that measures of cost as well as quality are developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the roll out of the Covalent performance management system and use the information generated to drive service performance and value for money services.</li> </ul>	All Directors	Ongoing over 3 years
11. Develop improved strategic approaches to resource management and procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop the Council's Asset Management Strategy.</li> </ul>	Director of Planning and Transport	Ongoing over 3 years
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead on the development of the Scotland Excel Initiative.</li> </ul>	Director of Finance and IT	Ongoing over 3 years
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a long term financial strategy for the Council.</li> </ul>	Director of Finance and IT	March 2007
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a corporate strategy for workforce planning.</li> </ul>	Director of Corporate Services Head of Personnel	March 2007
12. Work with partners to develop public performance reporting for the Community Plan and report to the public in a more balanced way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop joint performance reporting with Community Planning partners and agree action plan.</li> </ul>	Head of Policy	December 2006
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate reporting of Community Planning targets into the Council's quarterly "How Are We Doing?"</li> </ul>	Head of Policy	November 2006