

The Audit of Best Value and  
Community Planning

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# East Dunbartonshire Council



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared for the Accounts Commission  
May 2009

# The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is a statutory, independent body which, through the audit process, assists local authorities in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources. The Commission has four main responsibilities:

- securing the external audit, including the audit of Best Value and Community Planning
- following up issues of concern identified through the audit, to ensure satisfactory resolutions
- carrying out national performance studies to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local government
- issuing an annual direction to local authorities which sets out the range of performance information they are required to publish.

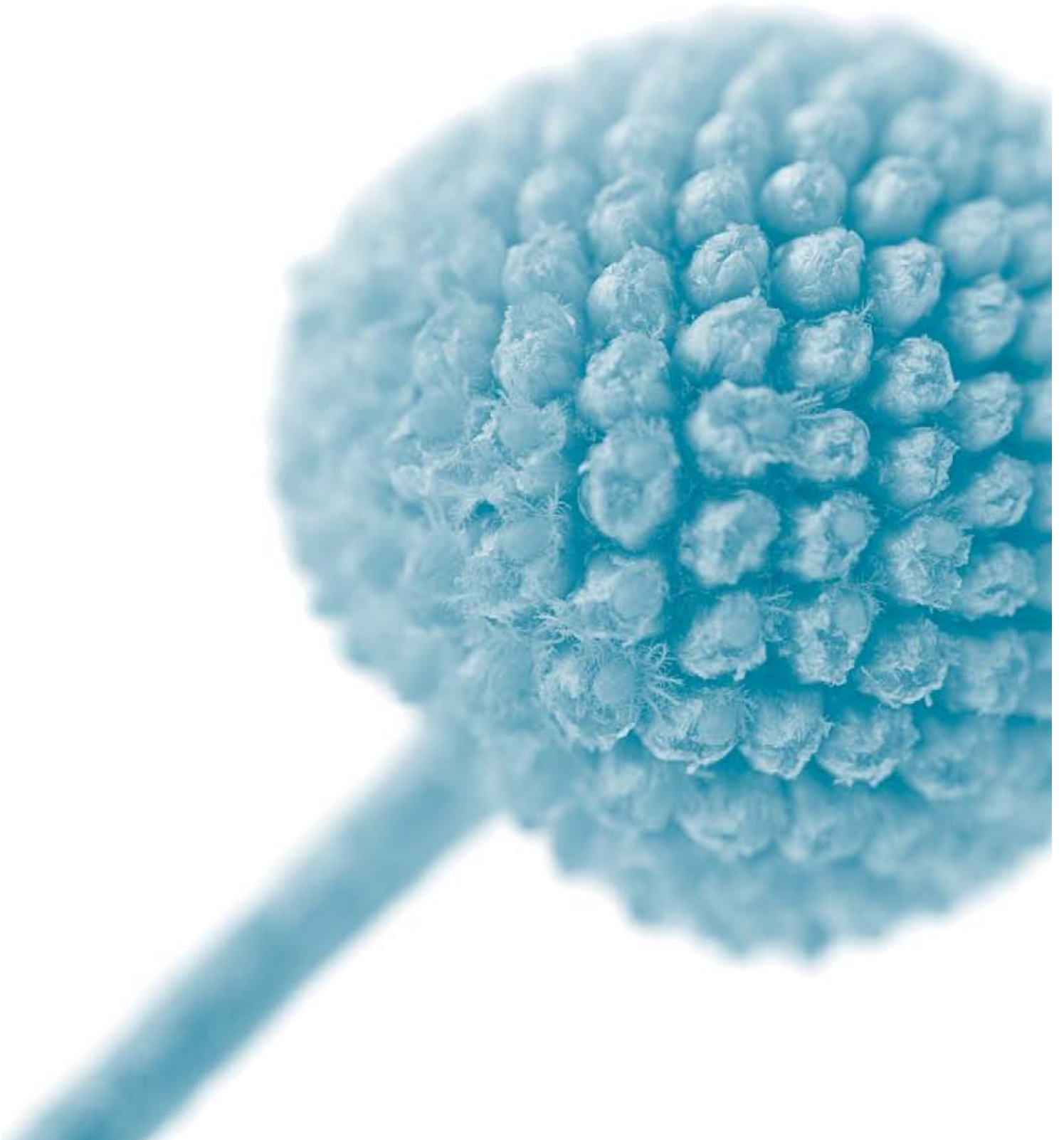
The Commission secures the audit of 32 councils and 41 joint boards (including police and fire and rescue services). Local authorities spend over £19 billion of public funds a year.

Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000 under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. Together they ensure that the Scottish Government and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

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# The Audit of Best Value



The report is made by the Controller of Audit to the Accounts Commission under section 102(1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. After considering it the Commission may do any or all of the following:

- direct the controller to carry out further investigations
- hold a hearing
- state its findings.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced new statutory duties relating to Best Value and Community Planning. The scope of Best Value and Community Planning is very broad but in general terms a successful council will:

- work with its partners to develop a clear set of priorities that respond to the needs of the community in both the short and longer term
- be organised to deliver these priorities
- meet and clearly demonstrate that it is meeting the community's needs
- operate in a way that drives continuous improvement in all its activities.

The challenge for local government is to find new ways of working across services and with other bodies to achieve the best results for citizens and service users. The key objectives of this audit were to:

- assess the extent to which East Dunbartonshire Council is meeting its duties under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003
- agree planned improvements with the council. These will be reviewed by the council's external auditor over the next three years.

As Best Value and Community Planning encompasses all the activities of a council it is not realistic to audit everything in depth, so we plan our detailed work in two ways:

- Where possible, we draw on the findings of other scrutiny processes, such as the work carried out by inspectorates. These are incorporated into our report.
- We select certain aspects of the council's performance for detailed investigation. A wide range of sources, including the council's own assessment of its performance, reports issues by external audit and inspections and national Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs), informs this selection.

The report reflects this selective approach, with detailed commentary in some areas and limited coverage in others. While we have made some comparisons with other councils, our overall approach has focused on performance trends and improvements within East Dunbartonshire Council. The report also reflects the picture available at the time our main audit work was conducted in September and October 2008. All references to the chief executive refer to Sue Bruce, who was the postholder during the audit.

We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation, assistance and hospitality provided to the audit team by Councillor Rhondda Geekie, leader of the council; Sue Bruce, the chief executive at the time; Tom Duncan, policy & improvement manager, and all other elected members and staff involved. We are also grateful to the representatives of community organisations and the council's community partners who agreed to participate in the audit.

# Commission findings



**1.** The Commission accepts this report on the performance of East Dunbartonshire Council's statutory duty to secure Best Value and to initiate and facilitate the community planning process. The Commission recognises that the report gives a broad picture of the council's performance based on the work of Audit Scotland and the findings of other scrutiny bodies, such as Inspectorates, and that it does not attempt a comprehensive review of all service delivery. We acknowledge the co-operation and assistance given to the audit process by members and officers of the council.

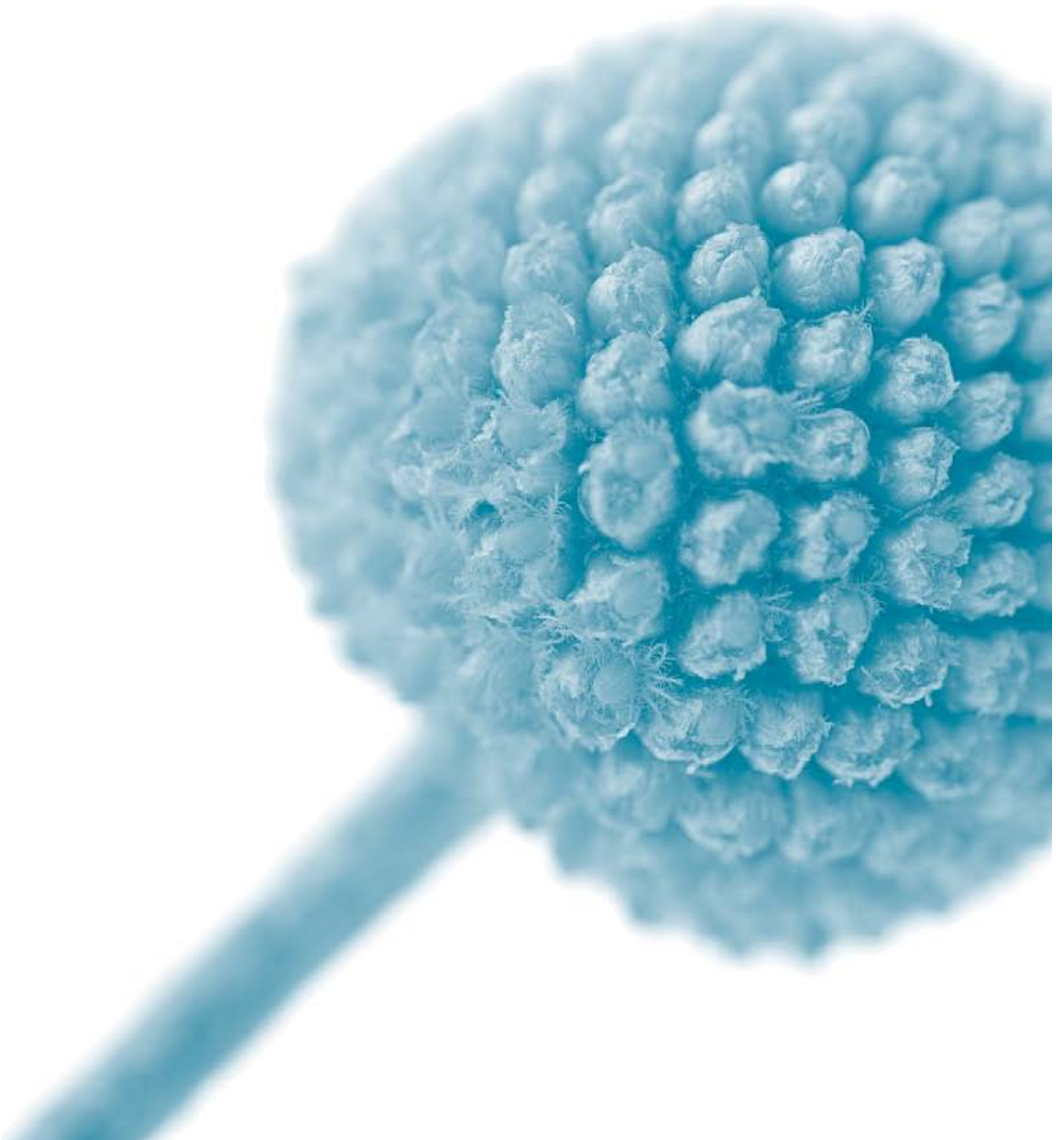
**2.** East Dunbartonshire Council has concentrated on improving its key services, and from a low base-line position in 2001, there has been considerable improvement in areas such as education, social work and housing. We note that the council has positive leadership, with elected members and officers working well together, although the council has seen significant changes in senior personnel over the past few years. The council has good working relationships with its partners, has demonstrated good self-awareness, including an understanding of the areas where improvement is needed, and has an open and 'can do' attitude.

**3.** However, while there has been good progress with aspects of Best Value, many of the building blocks of Best Value are not well developed, and we are concerned that the council still has a lot of work to do across a wide range of issues. We note that there has been slow progress in many significant areas including performance management, competitiveness, the strategic use of resources, customer service and workforce development. Elected members need to improve their leadership of Best Value by identifying

priorities for improvement and scrutinising improvement activity, and they should also be more involved in the scrutiny and challenge of community planning activity. We would encourage elected members to take every opportunity to adopt best practice as they develop their roles.

**4.** We encourage the council to take action on the areas highlighted in the report and to increase the momentum towards the achievement of Best Value. We look forward to receiving from the council an improvement plan with measurable and achievable outcomes that will address these issues.

# Overall conclusions





East Dunbartonshire Council is making good progress with aspects of Best Value and Community Planning, including leadership and culture; partnership and joint working; and improving services. Progress has been slower in some significant areas including customer service, competitiveness and the strategic use of resources.

Elected members and senior officers work well with each other towards a common goal of sustaining communities and improving public services, but elected members need to be more active in driving the improvement and best value agenda, and scrutinising performance, particularly of partnerships. The council has good working relationships with partners and a positive culture focused on delivering service improvements.

The council has concentrated on improving services over recent years and has been successful in doing so. Council services including education, social work and housing show significant improvement and the council has a good awareness of what still needs to be done.

The development of a customer service approach has been slow and, although there has been a recent increase in momentum, this needs to be maintained. The council does not have a systematic approach to testing the competitiveness of its commercial activities. It needs to increase the pace of its ongoing work to ensure that it directs its finances, assets, ICT and workforce more effectively towards delivering key priorities. It also needs to make sure that the improvement processes it has in place are used effectively, and that it consolidates, prioritises and manages service improvement activity more systematically at the corporate level.

- 1.** In recent years, East Dunbartonshire Council has embraced the best value agenda enthusiastically and addressed many of the weaknesses that were previously evident. In 2001, it received a very critical inspection report on its management of the education service. This report also noted that the council's budgetary problems and broader political and organisational change created challenging circumstances for establishing and delivering all policies across the council at that time.
- 2.** In the last eight years, there has been significant change and improvement. There is a positive culture and leadership is strong. The two largest services – social work and education – are performing well and improving year-on-year. The council's realistic and self-aware Best Value audit submission and corporate improvement plan reflect its commitment to sustain a good pace of improvement.
- 3.** East Dunbartonshire is an area of low deprivation, with relatively low unemployment and low levels of crime. Its main challenges are sustaining communities and providing services in the face of a significantly declining and ageing population. In consultation with local communities, the council and its partners have developed a clear vision and priorities for the area. The focus of the council is on sustaining all its communities and regenerating the pockets of deprivation.
- 4.** Elected members and senior officers provide strong leadership. There is a shared focus on improving the quality of life of local communities and a consensual political style, but elected members need to play a more active role in driving improvement and leading the best value agenda. Officers and members work well together, characterised by professionalism and respectful challenge. Members could be more involved in developing the services' improvement priorities and challenging the council's corporate improvement activity. Elected members could play a more active role in leading the council's community planning through better scrutiny and challenge. Member training plans are a recent development and these need to be reviewed to ensure their effectiveness, particularly in respect of scrutiny and the leadership of improvement.
- 5.** The council's management culture is open and supportive and has a 'can do' approach. Although it has recently seen a high turnover at senior level, with staff moving to other posts on promotion, effective measures are in place to minimise the risk associated with staff changes. There is an established process of acting up and deputising, from chief executive to third tier management level.
- 6.** Although single status negotiations have had a negative effect on some individuals, staff tell us morale generally remains good. The council's recent staff survey had a very low response rate so it does not provide comprehensive information about staff morale and satisfaction. Joint working across service teams, directorates and disciplines is the norm, with staff committed to improving services for the public.
- 7.** The council is committed to improvement and there is a lot of activity at service level. The council has a good level of awareness about where it needs to improve and has a record of responding positively and speedily to audit and inspection recommendations. However, improvement activity in services is not consolidated at the corporate level. The council could better prioritise what needs to improve and demonstrate what it has achieved if it developed a council-wide programme of service reviews and service-level improvement activity.
- 8.** The council has sound processes in place to manage and improve the performance of its services but needs

to be more systematic in ensuring services use them to maximise their improvement potential. In particular, the council needs to improve the quality and coverage of its local performance indicators and refine the information included in its performance reports, with more analysis and fuller coverage of service areas. Service plans and performance reports need to be further developed to capture all improvement activity and to align with the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) corporate and service outcomes.

**9.** Elected members have an appetite for scrutiny and are keen to undertake thematic scrutiny reviews, but they need to dedicate more time to the scrutiny of service and community planning performance.

**10.** The council and its partners work well together and have been successful in delivering ambitious regeneration plans. High-profile projects include the Southbank Business Park expansion, investment in Westerhill Business Park, improvements in Bearsden town centre, new business premises in Milngavie and Lennoxton and regeneration initiatives in Kirkintilloch, Twechar and Lennoxton. An emphasis on partnership activity and community involvement has resulted in tangible improvements in local communities.

**11.** The Community Planning Partnership (CPP) has identified some weaknesses in its performance and developed a challenging improvement plan to make sure it can deliver the SOA. This recognises the need to strengthen elected member involvement in community planning; to improve scrutiny and challenge of community planning activity; to improve the effectiveness of some themed partnerships to enable them to deliver the SOA commitments; and to move from a focus on project reporting to measuring and reporting on the impact on communities.

**12.** The council has a history of involving communities in its decision-making and has embedded consultation into the way it works. However, it could be more systematic about feeding back how it has acted on the findings of consultation exercises, and work more effectively with its partners in planning joint consultation activity.

**13.** The council's services are good, with Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) around the Scottish average but improving at a faster than average rate. Areas of strong service performance include educational attainment, housing management, homeless services, and adult social work. The management of education and the performance of social work services have significantly improved from a low base in 2000/01. SPIs show an improving trend with performance now around the Scottish average. Performance is less good in relation to roads and lighting, refuse collection costs and the processing of planning applications.

**14.** The council has made progress in sustainable development, particularly in initiating and supporting community-based actions. The council is committed to diversity and equality and has effective structures in place to support its equalities agenda.

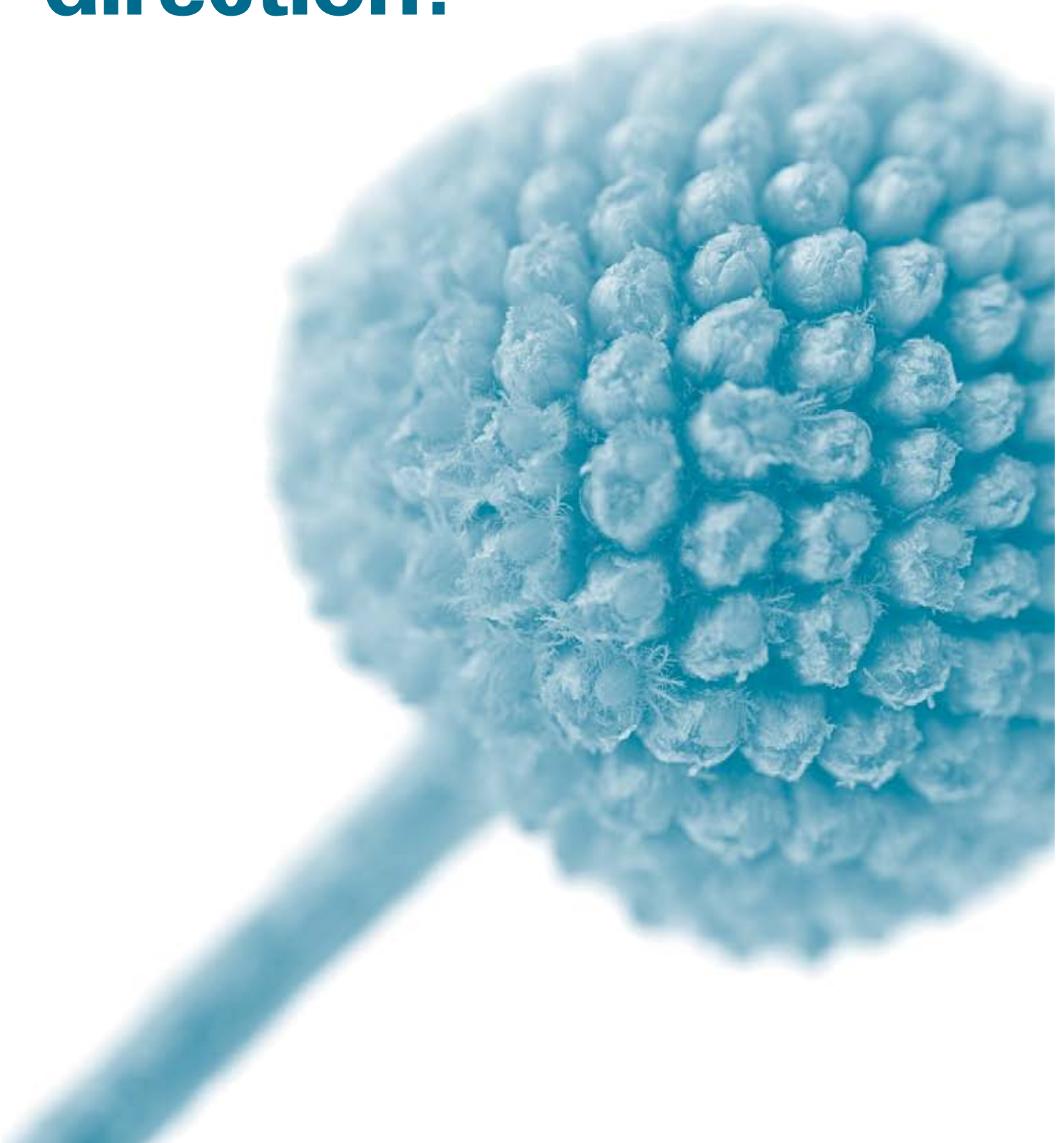
**15.** The council has been slow to develop a corporate approach to customer service. It agreed a corporate customer service strategy in March 2009. The corporate complaints procedure is not fully implemented. The contact centre is not well advertised and it is confusing to use due to the plethora of contact phone numbers.

**16.** Although there is some evidence of benchmarking and open tendering, the council does not have a systematic approach to testing the competitiveness of its commercial activities. Although corporate guidance supports in-house provision of services where they offer the best value compared with other providers,

there is no evidence that this is tested in a regular and systematic way. The council needs to do more to increase the level of challenge to existing ways of doing things.

**17.** The council needs to increase the pace in developing a more strategic approach to managing its resources. Progress on workforce planning, developing asset management and ICT has been slow. It needs to do more to ensure it directs financial and human resources to delivering key priorities. It is establishing a strategic approach to financial management but budgets are not yet fully linked with asset management and service plan priorities.

# Part 1. Does the council have clear strategic direction?



Elected members and senior officers provide strong leadership of the council, working well with each other towards a common goal of sustaining communities and improving public services. The council and its partners have set clear priorities that reflect the issues facing local communities in an area where the population is both ageing and declining significantly faster than the national picture.

Elected members need to be more active in their leadership of Best Value and Community Planning by defining key improvement priorities and increasing involvement in community planning activity. Service plans could be refined in order to capture all improvement activity and set better measures to judge success in meeting their objectives.

The council has an open culture focused on public service with a history of involving communities in setting its priorities. However, it needs to be more consistent about telling communities how they have influenced decisions and more proactive in coordinating consultation.

**The local context**

East Dunbartonshire is an area of low levels of deprivation, relatively low unemployment and low crime. However, it faces significant challenges in sustaining communities and providing services in the face of a significantly declining and ageing population.

**18.** East Dunbartonshire is located in central Scotland. It is the sixth

smallest local authority area in Scotland, with the 13th lowest population level but the seventh highest population density. It shares its borders with four local authorities; City of Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire, Stirling and North Lanarkshire.

**19.** There are five major towns in East Dunbartonshire – Bearsden (population 27,460), Bishopbriggs (23,080), Kirkintilloch (19,660), Milngavie (12,820) and Lenzie (8,770) (*Exhibit 1*).

**20.** The area has a comparatively low and declining population base. It has the second lowest population growth rate in Scotland. Population projections indicate it will decrease by 15 per cent between 2006 and 2031, compared to an expected increase for Scotland of five per cent. The area faces the largest percentage national

**Exhibit 1**

East Dunbartonshire geographical area



Source: East Dunbartonshire Council/Audit Scotland

decline in children, young people and people of working age. In contrast, the number of people aged 75 and over is projected to increase by 88 per cent by 2031.

**21.** The area benefits from comparatively low levels of crime (fifth lowest nationally behind the three island authorities and Aberdeenshire), high levels of employment (third highest nationally) and low levels of unemployment-related benefit claimants (fifth lowest nationally). 3.1 per cent of all dwellings in the area are in council tax band A (2007), which is much lower than the Scottish average of 23.1 per cent, while 29.3 per cent of dwellings are in bands F-H which is significantly higher than the 11.8 per cent average for Scotland.

**22.** The population is well educated with the second highest level of qualifications in Scotland. The proportion of working age adults whose highest qualification was less than Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 5 in 2006 was 9.1 per cent, which is significantly better than the Scottish average of 16.4 per cent.

**23.** Deprivation is low. In 2006, the area had the eighth lowest level of deprivation in Scotland. The percentage of primary school pupils entitled to free school meals was significantly below the Scottish average in 2007 and the second lowest in Scotland, while the percentage of secondary school pupils entitled to free school meals was the fourth lowest.

### The council

Since 2000, the council has significantly improved leadership and service performance in the key areas of education and social work. The council's political structures are not clearly related to service structures and priorities and could be simplified. The council is reviewing its structures to ensure a better fit with the priorities detailed in the SOA.

**24.** In 2001, East Dunbartonshire Council received a very critical inspection report on its management of the education service. This report also referred to the broader political and organisational change and budgetary problems being experienced by the council as a whole. The report identified that these conditions created challenging circumstances for establishing and delivering policies across the council at that time.

**25.** In the last eight years the pace of improvement has been good. The leadership and culture of the organisation have improved significantly and are now strengths. Both the social work and education services have responded positively and are now performing well and improving year-on-year.

**26.** The council has responded positively to external inspection and used these as opportunities to improve other service areas by transferring learning through self-evaluation. The Best Value audit submission and corporate improvement plan indicate that the council has the culture, awareness and commitment to sustain its pace of improvement.

**27.** At the 2007 local government election, the Scottish Liberal Democrats lost control of the council and the administration is now a minority Labour/Conservative coalition. The political make-up is Scottish National Party eight, Labour six, Conservative five, Liberal Democrats three and East Dunbartonshire Independent Alliance two. Half of members returned at the 2007 elections were new to the council.

**28.** The council's political management arrangements are shown in [Exhibit 2 \(overleaf\)](#).

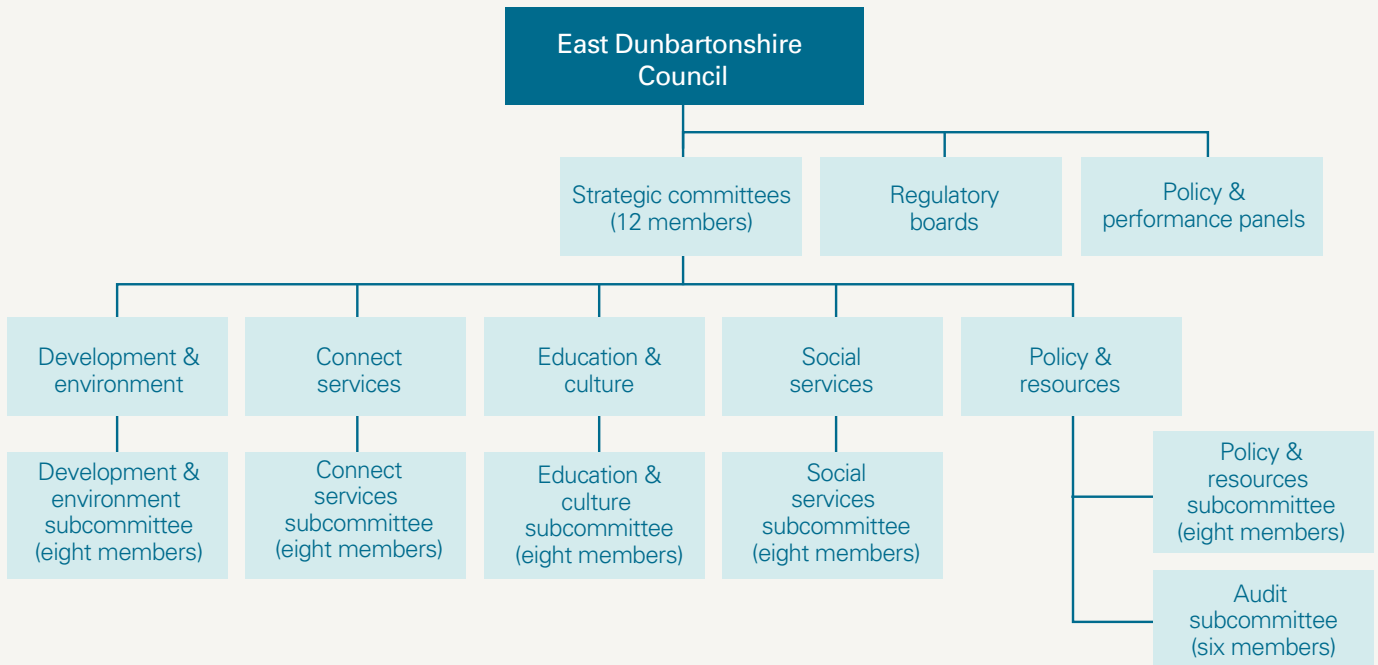
**29.** Twenty-four members cover eight multi-member wards. The political structures were reviewed in October 2000 and again in 2003. Eleven committees were replaced by the current five strategic committees (development and environment, connect, education and culture, social services, and policy and resources); four policy and performance panels (corporate resources, safe and sustainable communities, lifelong learning, and social inclusion and health); and two regulatory boards.

**30.** The role of the strategic committees is to ensure effective implementation of legislation and review service and budget performance. The policy and resources committee has responsibility for strategic direction, best value, and performance management and planning arrangements. A member of the administration chairs each committee.

**31.** The policy and performance panels (P&PPs) scrutinise policy development and implementation, reviewing performance across services, corporate objectives and

## Exhibit 2

### Political management structure



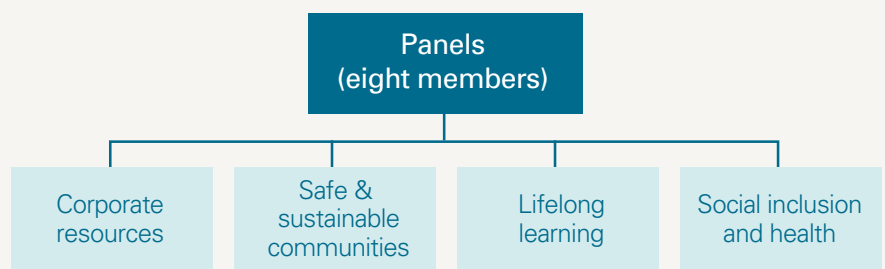
Source: East Dunbartonshire Council/Audit Scotland

cross-cutting policy issues (Exhibit 3). An opposition member leads each panel, which has a lead officer from the corporate management team (CMT). Each panel scrutinises one community plan theme and one cross-cutting policy area. The corporate resources panel scrutinises the corporate resources directorate, the lifelong learning panel scrutinises the community directorate and the social inclusion and health panel scrutinises the environment directorate.

**32.** The committee and panel structures and remits are not aligned with service structures and priorities. The coverage of the strategic committees does not clearly relate to the policy and performance panels' remits. Although the council has not experienced any problems with this, other than some dual reporting, it recognises that structures could be simpler. Almost a third of elected members who responded to our survey felt that the decision-making structures were not effective. However, 94 per cent felt

## Exhibit 3

### Policy & performance panels

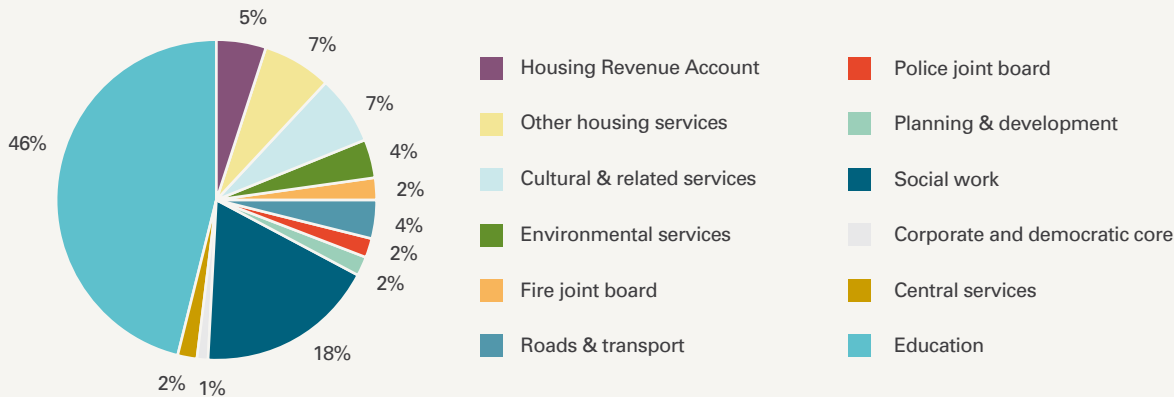


Source: East Dunbartonshire Council/Audit Scotland

that committees and panels' roles and remits were clear. The council plans to review the decision-making structures in light of the SOA.

**33.** Based on the Joint Staffing Watch figures (June 2006), the council employs 4,098 full-time equivalent staff, which equates to around 39 staff per 1,000 head of population, compared with the national average of 44.7.

**34.** The council's gross expenditure was £311 million in 2007/08. Exhibit 4 shows how this breaks down by service areas. The band D council tax for 2007/08 is £1,142, which is close to the Scottish average of £1,149. Expenditure per head of population is £2,964 compared with the Scottish average of £3,152, making it the eighth lowest nationally.

**Exhibit 4****East Dunbartonshire Council gross expenditure 2007/08**

Source: Audit Scotland

**Leadership and culture**

The political and managerial leadership of the council is strong. There is a shared focus on improving the quality of life of communities and individuals and a consensual political style. Members and officers work well together. The relationships are professional and members are respectfully challenging of officers, with a good level of debate at committees. The council's management culture is open and supportive.

Elected members are focused on delivering improving services for communities but have limited involvement in developing the services' improvement priorities, and need to be more active in driving the best value agenda and community planning. Member training plans are a recent development and these need to be reviewed to ensure their effectiveness.

**Political leadership**

**35.** The council's political leadership is focused on good outcomes for service users and communities. There is a delicate political balance and multi-party, multi-member wards and a

consensual political style with a good level of challenging but respectful debate.

**36.** Members are effective at setting direction, representing communities, leading improvement by focusing on delivering good services and understanding local issues. Member-officer relationships are good, characterised by respect and professionalism. Service managers experience positive and direct relationships with elected members with generally a clear understanding and acceptance of respective roles.

**37.** Elected members are focused on delivering improving services for communities but need to be more active in developing service improvement priorities and driving forward the best value agenda. Members have limited involvement in developing the services' improvement priorities. Members are clear that the council's approach to continuous improvement stems from its response to a critical Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) report in 2001, but show limited awareness of, or active involvement with, the council's improvement plans. Elected members could improve their leadership of

best value by identifying priorities for improvement and scrutinising improvement activity.

**38.** The leaders of the five political parties are represented on the CPP board with one member also represented on a themed partnership. The leader in particular has been very actively involved in leading and promoting community planning. However, there is room for more member involvement in the scrutiny and challenge of community planning activity. Some members express concern about their lack of involvement and the lack of information received at committees.

**39.** The findings of the Scottish Government's Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC report published September 2008) found that no councillors at East Dunbartonshire Council had job descriptions, training needs assessments, or had agreed personal development plans. Although all members had taken part in induction training, there were no details of participation in other training.

**40.** The council has made progress from this low base. At January 2009, 21 out of 24 elected members had personal development plans, with a generic plan in place for all 24. The

council recognises the importance of building on this and will review the effectiveness of the plans to ensure that future training is focused on priority areas such as scrutiny.

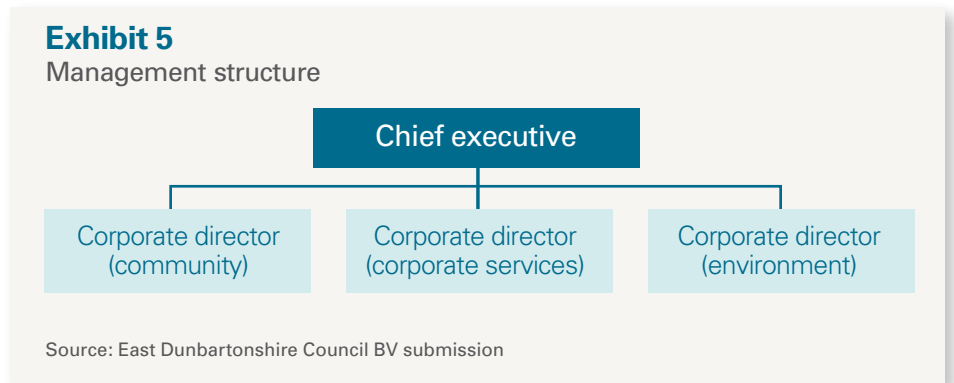
### Managerial leadership

**41.** The council's management structure is streamlined. The chief executive leads a small CMT of three corporate directors (Exhibit 5). There are 13 heads of service supporting the CMT.

**42.** The council's managerial leadership is strong. The streamlined CMT has reduced service 'silos' and facilitated joint working across service groupings and directorates. The council effectively manages the risk associated with officer turnover in the very slim management structure. The CMT is attuned to the issues facing the area and is committed to tackling them. The leadership style is characterised by working together to resolve issues. Officers describe CMT as supportive and positively challenging, with a clear accountability culture.

**43.** There are good working relationships between CMT and elected members and a complementary leadership style between the CMT and the leader. Relationships are characterised by a high degree of mutual respect and understanding about respective roles. The CMT and members work well together in identifying and promoting its strategic priorities.

**44.** The council has a recent history of senior management leaving the council to take up senior posts elsewhere, and during the course of the audit the entire CMT has changed. The council views this movement of staff as a positive indication of the strong performance of the council's senior officers. The council moves swiftly to address vacancies and uses a rota system of acting up and deputising to minimise the risk to service delivery and help maintain continuity of key relationships. Each director deputises for the chief executive on a six-month rotation. This model also applies between heads of service and directors, and third



tier managers and heads of service. The same process applies to acting up but on a three-month basis. The rota system of cover means there is understanding and ownership of the senior roles and the current issues and projects being managed.

**45.** CMT provides good strategic leadership, focusing on the bigger picture and cross service links. A survey of heads of service found that all of them think the CMT provides effective managerial leadership. Recent inspectorate reports also note strong managerial leadership. An extended CMT, including all heads of service, meets to discuss corporate issues. Senior officers feel there is potential to develop the role of this group.

### Culture

**46.** The council's professional culture is positive and service focused. A 'can do' approach is apparent. This is demonstrated, for example, in the council's approach to exploiting opportunities with partners to develop community projects such as the Kirkintilloch's Initiative. Senior managers recognise officers' professional skills and the input of individuals. This approach has fostered mutual respect and loyalty to the organisation. Staff say that the positive culture also results from the council's relatively small size, the necessity of cross-team and cross-discipline working and the clear commitment at all levels of the organisation to serving the public.

**47.** This style of working, where officers within different service teams and directorates know each other well, encourages career development and

makes visible an individual's input. One test of the positive culture has been the introduction of single status. While single status has undeniably affected the morale of some staff, our workshops with staff suggested that morale was generally good. Despite the difficulties in implementing single status, the evidence suggests that staff have remained professional and committed to delivering quality services.

**48.** The November 2008 employee satisfaction survey had a low response rate of just 7.3 per cent. This means that little reliance can be placed on the findings and there is therefore a gap in evidence available to the council about staff views and experiences. The council plans to undertake further work to identify the reasons for this low response.

### Vision and plans

The council and its partners, in consultation with its communities, have developed a clear vision for the area. The council has translated this into five core priorities in the community plan and corporate development plan. The council has developed service plans to deliver its priorities but more work is required to ensure that resources are matched to priorities. Service plans do not yet include a comprehensive list of improvement activity and reviews. Services also need to define more meaningful indicators, that measure impact as well as outputs, to support the SOA corporate and service outcomes.



**The community plan**

49. The big issues driving the council and its partners' agendas, as highlighted by public consultation, are sustaining communities, providing appropriate services for an ageing and declining population, improving the pockets of deprivation and regenerating the town centres. The

council describes a clear vision with five core themes in both the community plan and the corporate development plan (Exhibit 6). The community plan describes the five themed partnerships which take forward each of the themes and provides action plans for each. The community plan also describes five

cross-cutting themes – sustainability, equality and diversity, continuous improvement, accountability and adding value through working together.

**Exhibit 6**

**The community plan vision**

- An area for achievement, offering a wide range of opportunities and a safe, attractive and healthy environment.
- An area which is confident and ambitious, able to make and take advantage of opportunities for investment in jobs, enterprise and learning.
- An area where opportunities are accessible by everyone and which builds on the cultural diversity of our communities.
- An area which looks to the future, through supporting the potential of our young people and sustaining our environment.
- An area that plays a significant role in Scottish life, building effective relationships with surrounding areas and continually seeking to improve.

**The partnership core themes**

**Safer communities:**

- Sustaining and developing the partnership.
- Dealing with quality of life crimes and incidents.
- Accident and injury prevention and reduction.

**Enhancing learning and enterprise:**

- Confident and achieving young people.
- Learning and employment opportunities for all.
- Culture, tourism and heritage.
- Infrastructure, business growth and enterprise.
- Building the capacity of our communities.

**Protecting our environment:**

- Improve the quality of the local natural environment.
- Improve the quality of the lived environment.
- Improve in-house sustainability in East Dunbartonshire Council.
- Improve the sustainability of local developments and regeneration initiatives.
- Increase awareness and evidence of sustainability in local communities.

**Improving health and wellbeing:**

- Better joined-up working, planning and improved joint service delivery with community planning partners.
- Better care pathways for patients, including the priority of integrating primary and acute (hospital) care services.
- A long-term approach to health improvement and inequality across all Community Health Partnership services.
- Community participation.
- Improved quality of community health services for the local population.

**Delivering for children and young people:**

- Integrating children's services planning.
- Keeping our children and young people safe.
- Supporting families.
- Improving the health of children and young people.
- Supporting children and young people in their learning and achievement.
- Encouraging children's confidence, responsibility and creativity.
- Promoting young people and youth justice.
- Investing in our staff.

**The single outcome agreement**

**50.** The SOA strongly reflects the community plan and contains a clear analysis of local context and issues. In line with approximately half of Scottish councils, the first SOA was developed jointly with community planning partners, one year ahead of schedule. The council and partners describe the SOA as ‘the delivery plan for the community plan’. The community planning themed partnerships will deliver the SOAs strategic local outcomes.

**51.** The council’s priorities are based on a clear understanding of the issues affecting the area. Partners and officers support these priorities and have translated them into activities which staff find relevant to their day-to-day work. The council is aware that the supply of affordable housing and support services for adults and older people are significant issues affecting the area, and although reflected in the SOA, are not prominent among the community plan priorities. The CPP is reconfiguring the themed partnerships to better reflect these priorities. **Exhibit 7** describes how the SOA links to the other plans.

**The corporate development plan**

**52.** The corporate development plan is clearly linked to the community plan. It describes the council’s contribution to each of the five community planning themes and adds an additional council-only theme of investing in improvement.

**53.** The corporate development plan contains the council’s corporate improvement plan. The corporate improvement plan details the corporate-level projects that are required to deliver the council’s sixth priority of investing in improvement, eg integration of planning and budgeting and implementation of the corporate procurement strategy. Both the community plan and the corporate development plan clearly describe the main challenges affecting the area, with clear objectives and targets.

**Service plans**

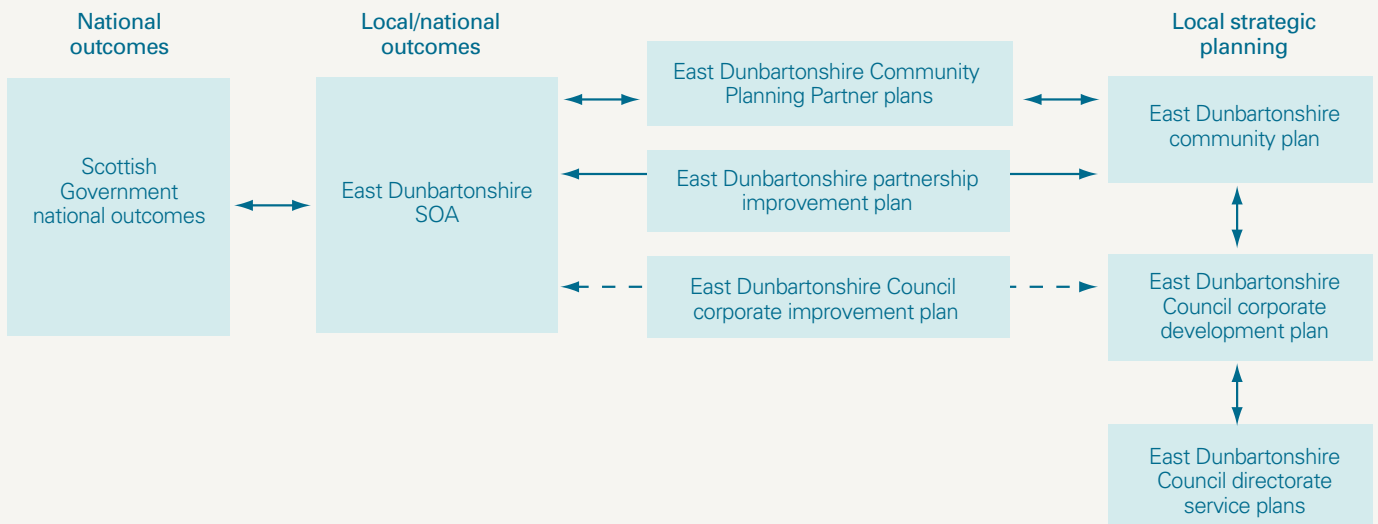
**54.** The council has a coherent business planning framework in place with clear links between the community plan, corporate development plan and service plans. The corporate development plan sets out the council’s contribution to the community plan, and the service plans for each of the three

directorates in turn set out the detailed activities to deliver the corporate development plan. The council’s guide for directorates, the ‘corporate planning and improvement framework’, explains and supports this system by providing corporate templates. The guide is clear and comprehensive detailing the business-planning framework and the core elements required in each service plan. The guide also includes a policy development framework that is a helpful resource for services providing comprehensive flowcharts and checklists to ensure that services take account of all the legislative and corporate requirements in developing policies.

**55.** The council describes the service plans as the key vehicle to capture performance measures and improvement activity, but they are not comprehensive. The three directorate service plans follow the corporate templates and contain detailed information about services and the context within which they operate. However, not all service plans include all the reviews or improvement activity that they are involved in, eg benchmarking.

**Exhibit 7**

**Business planning framework**



Source: East Dunbartonshire Council/Audit Scotland

**56.** The improvement plans within the service plans tend to be lists of actions and projects rather than actual plans to tackle identified areas where services need to improve. Directorates would be better able to demonstrate that they are improving if the service plans placed more emphasis on capturing comprehensive improvement and review activity, with less detail on contextual analysis and service information.

**57.** Services need to define more meaningful indicators that measure impact as well as outputs. The service plans list the local performance indicators that directorates have identified to show how successful they are at meeting their service objectives. The directorates have developed a large number of local performance indicators, however, these need to be improved as they are not always SMART and there are few measures of impact. The council needs to build on the progress made in developing measures of impact in the SOA and ensure these are included in the service plans.

#### Integrated planning and budgeting

**58.** The council's budget setting process is not sufficiently developed to show whether resources are shifting to meet changing priorities. It has evolved from a purely incremental approach to include identification of cost pressures over the medium term brought about through changes in legislation or local demographics, such as the council's revised waste collection policy and the continuing impact of single status implementation. The council has recognised the importance of aligning its financial budgeting with service planning to ensure that financial decision-making is linked to the delivery of corporate objectives and outcomes within the council's SOA. Corporate guidance has been developed as part of the budget planning cycle. However, more work is required to implement improvements.

#### Accountability and openness

The CMT promotes a culture of openness. The reporting of corporate performance information in the council magazine is clear but the council needs to report on directorate level performance, particularly against local performance indicators and other sources of performance information, in a more coordinated way.

**59.** The CMT promotes a culture of openness and the council employs a number of mechanisms by which people can access information. These include *Edlife* council magazine, the *Edreport* annual performance digest, the council website and the dedicated community planning website. *Edreport* is a readable corporate public performance report covering the priorities described in the corporate development plan. However, it could be improved by including local performance indicators, targets, improvement plans and reference to other individual directorate public performance reports.

**60.** The council could improve its public reporting arrangements by developing a coordinated and quality-controlled approach to directorate public performance reporting. The council's corporate public performance reporting framework is clear on what information it will report on a council-wide basis and by directorate. However, it is not clear how and when directorates should provide reports on their performance to the public. There is no corporate checking of directorates' approaches to public performance reporting. The desire for service-level public performance information is reflected by customer preferences indicated in the January 2008 citizens' panel questionnaire. Most panel members want to receive information about refuse collections and special uplifts (81 per cent), recycling levels (77 per cent), council

tax payment (72 per cent) and roads and lighting repairs (72 per cent).

**61.** The council's website contains a wide variety of information about the council, its plans, services and performance. Committee minutes, agendas and reports are also available. However, it can be difficult to find things easily. The council has commissioned consultants to help them improve the website. Accountability and openness could be further enhanced by including the policy and performance panels' agendas, minutes and reports on the website.

#### Community engagement

The council has a history of involving communities in its decision-making and each of the directorates has embedded consultation into the way it works. The council has arrangements in place to make access to consultation exercises as wide as possible, but it has not been systematic in the way it provides feedback on how the findings of consultation exercises have changed the way it does things. The council recognises that it could plan its activity to involve and consult with people more effectively across directorates and with its partners.

**62.** The council has a number of ways of engaging with the public. It issues periodic questionnaires to its citizens' panel to identify their improvement priorities for specific services. The council arranges community assembly events to ask people what their key priorities are to enable them to draw up the community plan. In addition, the council undertakes thematic household surveys twice a year. The most recent surveys covered Our Environment and Community Safety.

**63.** The council has also embedded consultation in the way the directorates work. Staff describe systematic processes for collecting

customer information and views. A workshop with a wide selection of community representatives confirmed that they are satisfied that the council actively seeks to involve service users and community groups and listens to their views.

**64.** The council does not currently plan its consultation and engagement activity across directorates or with its partners. The CPP developed a community engagement strategy in June 2006 and has identified that partners could work together more when consulting people. The partnership has developed a consultation website for sharing information and maximising involvement ([Exhibit 8](#)). However, it has yet to develop a joint programme of consultation linked to strategic and service priorities. This would maximise the impact of consultation activity and minimise the resources required.

**65.** The council has not been systematic about telling people how it has used, or plans to use, their feedback to change things. Participants in some exercises receive individual feedback, and the council reports the findings from major exercises, eg the recent household survey, in *Edlife*. However, the council does not have a systematic approach to feeding back findings and explaining what will change. The council and its partners could enhance the consultation website by including the action plans resulting from consultation exercises, and explanations where they cannot meet people's expectations or aspirations.

## Exhibit 8

[edcconsultation.org.uk](http://edcconsultation.org.uk)

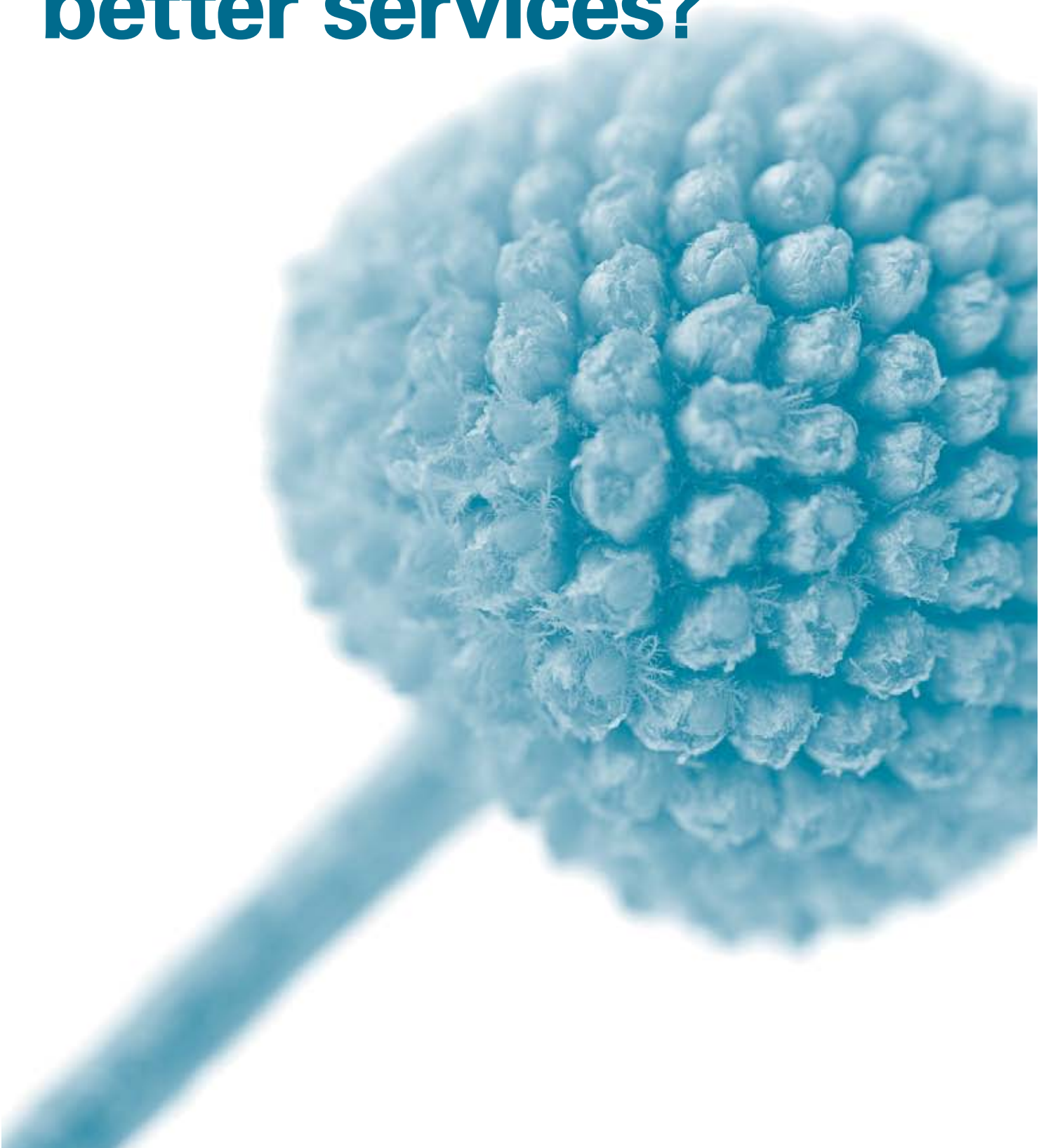
The East Dunbartonshire consultation and engagement website is a resource for council staff, partners, people and organisations involved in its consultations.

The website includes:

- up-to-date news of current consultation exercises
- links to consultation documents and questionnaires
- details of public meetings and other ways to get involved
- an archive of previous consultation exercise findings
- a timetable of planned consultations
- the opportunity to join its newsletter
- background sections including the community engagement strategy and links to other useful sites.

Source: Adapted from [edcconsultation.org.uk](http://edcconsultation.org.uk)

# Part 2. Is the council organised to deliver better services?



The council has an established record of working well with partners and delivering large-scale community projects. However, the council has identified weaknesses in its partnership work in performance reporting and member involvement and scrutiny, and addresses these in its recent improvement plan.

It has sound processes to manage and improve the performance of its services. There is room to be more systematic in checking how well these processes are applied, and scrutiny could be more focused on service performance and improvement. The council could develop a council-wide programme of improvement and review activity to better prioritise what needs to be done and demonstrate what it has achieved.

The council needs to increase its pace in developing a more strategic approach to managing its resources. It needs to do more to ensure that finance, assets, ICT and the workforce are directed to delivering key priorities, and gather comprehensive information about staff morale and satisfaction.

Although there is some evidence of the testing of the competitiveness of its commercial activities, the council does not do this in a regular and systematic way. The council has effective structures to support equality and diversity but needs to build on progress made in embedding equalities at the corporate and directorate level. The council has made progress in community-based sustainable development activities but can increase its impact through more mainstreaming and coordinated strategic activity.

**Working with partners**

The council has a long history of working well with partners and has a track record of delivering large projects. However, the council has identified weaknesses in its partnership work in performance reporting and member involvement and scrutiny, and addresses these in its recent improvement plan.

**66.** The key community planning partners include Strathclyde Police, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport. Other partners include Cumbernauld College, Job Centre Plus, the British Waterways Board, the Dunbartonshire Chamber of Commerce and the local Council for Voluntary Service.

**67.** The CPP structures are shown in Exhibit 9.

**Exhibit 9**

**Community planning partnership**



Source: East Dunbartonshire Council/Audit Scotland

**68.** The council works well with its partners at many levels, formally through the community planning structures and informally through networks and individual working relationships. Our survey of partners showed that they are generally positive and supportive of the council and community planning. These good relationships have enabled the council to work with its partners in exploiting local opportunities to develop joint community projects.

**69.** These include high-profile projects such as the Southbank Business Park expansion, investment in Westerhill Business Park, improvements in Bearsden town centre, new business premises in Milngavie and Lennoxtown and regeneration initiatives in Kirkintilloch ([Exhibit 10](#)), Twechar and Lennoxtown. An emphasis on partnership activity and community involvement has resulted in positive outcomes for the community.

**70.** The leader of the council chairs the CPP board and provides effective leadership of community planning. The leaders of the five political party groups are also represented on the board, while an elected member chairs the community safety partnership. However, only half of the partner representatives who responded to our survey felt that elected members, other than the leader, provide effective leadership of community planning.

**71.** There is a lack of wider officer and member scrutiny of community planning performance which limits transparency and challenge. Community planning themed partnership or board reports do not regularly appear on the CMT or committee agendas, and minutes of these groups have only recently begun to be submitted to the relevant council committee. Policy and performance panels do not examine community planning performance. Opposition members report limited engagement in community planning. The council has recognised that there is potential to strengthen the links between the themed partnerships and community

## Exhibit 10

### The Kirkintilloch's Initiative: a partnership approach to tackling regeneration

The Kirkintilloch's Initiative (KI) partnership between the council and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is a £56 million programme of 11 inter-linked projects to tackle social, economic and physical regeneration within the Kirkintilloch area. The first KI project, the Kirkintilloch Leisure Centre, opened in July 2007 and work is now under way on three projects, the Integrated Health and Social Care Centre, the Kirkintilloch Link Road and the redevelopment of the Southbank area. The planned disposal by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde of the former Woodilee hospital site acted as a catalyst and provided a unique opportunity for the partners to consider potential uses of the land. The council utilised asset disposal to fund its contribution to the partnership.

Community engagement has informed the development of the KI from the earliest days. A 1991 citizens' panel survey showed local community support for the principle of using council assets to fund regeneration in the area. In 2001, a comprehensive public consultation programme streamlined the proposed 14 KI projects to 11. KI partners have adapted consultation methods based on learning from previous activities. Early consultation gauged public support and informed programme development, but it also raised public expectations. This led to some local frustration, as actual site work did not begin until 2005. As a result, KI partners now plan the type and timing of stakeholder engagement more effectively and use more targeted local consultation.

Established in 2002, the KI Project Champions and Community Representatives forum is the main conduit for ongoing community engagement. The forum is a group of around 30 representatives who meet regularly to ensure programme development takes account of community feedback. Representatives have shown continued commitment over the years. They are knowledgeable and challenging about the programme, its strategic objectives and its priorities. Forum members also play an important role in communicating with local communities. In addition to playing an integral role in the overall planning and monitoring of the KI programme, there are many specific examples showing how feedback has influenced or altered project design and delivery. These include prioritising the top four projects of the initial tranche; adding two extra lanes to the Kirkintilloch Leisure Centre swimming pool and extending the pool to 25 metres; and locating the Integrated Health and Social Care Centre at the edge of Woodhead Park.

Due to open in September 2009, the Integrated Health and Social Care Centre will be the next major project to complete. The centre represents a fundamental shift in the provision of joint community and primary care services within East Dunbartonshire from joint planning to joint management and delivery. The majority of primary and community care services will be co-located and delivered from a single centre offering a one-stop service for service users. Consultation with community representatives and stakeholder groups began in 2006 to inform the design and build of the centre so that service delivery, access and privacy issues are balanced. When it opens, the centre will deliver improvements for service users across the authority area including a streamlined service, more out-of-hours provision and reduced waiting lists for services.

Source: Kirkintilloch's Initiative Limited and Audit Scotland

planning board with the council's governance arrangements. The partnership and elected members are in the process of agreeing plans to involve elected members in each themed partnership.

**72.** The early preparation of a joint SOA with partners indicates the maturity and commitment of the partnership. It has helped the partnership review its priorities, and governance and monitoring arrangements to ensure the partnership is fit for purpose. As a result, the partnership has approved a wide-ranging improvement plan. The plan recognises where existing priorities do not fully match the areas of identified need – affordable housing and support services to adults and older people – and these will become formalised within re-configured themed partnerships.

**73.** Some of the themed partnerships are less focused and task orientated than others. Half of the representatives who responded to our survey do not agree that their themed partnership is effective at delivering its priorities and have improved services. The partnership improvement plan acknowledges that in order to ensure it delivers its SOA outcomes, it needs to make sure the existing themed partnerships are effective. The council plans to support them to evaluate their effectiveness, develop work plans, and refresh their membership so they are able to deliver the SOA commitments.

**74.** The partnership needs to improve its performance measurement and monitoring arrangements in terms of the quality of information reported, developing indicators to measure success and capturing the activity of the themed partnership subgroups and its cross-cutting themes. The themed partnership action plans lack meaningful performance indicators, baseline information and targets, timescales, and identification of

who is responsible for activities. The biannual reports also do not adequately capture what is being achieved through the subgroups. In addition, there is limited use of performance information in partnership reports. The partnership has made progress in developing indicators to measure their progress against the SOA outcomes.

### Joint working

There is a substantial amount of joint working both across service teams and across directorates. Service managers are involved in many cross-cutting working groups with other services and partners.

**75.** Joint working across service teams and directorates is the norm. Staff tell us that this approach is the result of looking at customer needs as the basis of delivering services rather than service structures. CMT and heads of service are proactive in identifying links across services and directorates. Joint working opportunities occur at all levels, through short-term working groups across services, directorates and with partners. The working groups are made up of the people with the most relevant skills and experience, irrespective of seniority or directorate.

**76.** For example, officers across different services are involved in specific projects working with partners supporting the Kirkintilloch's Initiative. Officers in different directorates, providing services related to the council housing stock, work closely, and in some cases are located close together to aid joint working. The council attributes cross-discipline and cross-team working, and a good understanding of others' roles as major factors in the success of this approach.

### Managing performance

The corporate approach to performance management is sound, but the quality and comprehensiveness of information captured in the corporate reporting template varies across the council. The council has developed a large number of its own local performance indicators but the directorates need to improve the quality and balance of these indicators.

**77.** The council has sound processes and guidance in place to support performance management. There is a good template for services to report their performance and a clear timetable and process for reporting that all services adhere to. The council has introduced the Covalent performance management system to assist services, senior officers and members to access performance information on an ongoing basis, and is developing 'dashboard' performance reports to supplement the more detailed six monthly reports and provide a more summarised presentation of key performance indicators.

**78.** The quality and comprehensiveness of information captured in the corporate reporting template varies between and within directorates. Some performance reports are excessively lengthy, with long lists of data, but do not capture a comprehensive picture of other performance information such as customer satisfaction and benchmarking. Services need to present an analysed and summarised picture of performance, which covers all aspects of performance information and not just performance data.

**79.** Reports often lack analysis of the data provided, a summary of overall performance and performance trends that would allow members to make judgements about whether the services are improving. Members find the reports contain too much data and lack narrative to explain underperformance. Services should provide a clear overview of performance, signposting the



existence of more detailed data to support those conclusions. The council's template provides an opportunity to do this.

**80.** The council uses a good number of locally defined performance indicators (LPIs). For example, communities directorate use 93 LPIs, which represents 69 per cent of all the indicators they use to measure their performance. Examples include 'the number of families with children housed in B&Bs', 'the average number of days to remove graffiti', and 'the number of staff undertaking professional development training'.

**81.** The quality of LPIs is variable. Local indicators tend to focus more on efficiency and economy measures and less so on measures of impact. Some entries described as indicators are in fact lists of tasks, activities or projects. Others are unmeasurable, unquantified or vague, eg 'extend the range of specialist services' and 'maintain progress'.

**82.** There is room for more systematic quality assurance and challenge of performance reports. In addition, though 77 per cent of heads of service think that CMT are effective at addressing under or declining performance, only half think that directorate management teams are effective for monitoring performance, tackling performance issues and addressing under or declining performance. The council introduced quarterly reports in February 2009, based on a pre-defined set of key indicators for each directorate, in conjunction with the more in-depth six monthly reports.

## Scrutiny

Elected members have an appetite for scrutiny but need to dedicate more time to the scrutiny of service and community planning performance and improvement, as well as undertaking themed scrutiny reviews. The effectiveness of member training plans should be reviewed and directed to scrutiny and the leadership of improvement.

**83.** Members scrutinise council policy development and implementation and performance through the four policy and performance panels. Opposition members lead the panels. Annual work plans are produced which identify topics or themes for in-depth scrutiny.

**84.** Elected members show commitment to the scrutiny of council business. Involvement and attendance at the policy and performance panels is high and members are keen to undertake themed scrutiny reviews, devoting time and effort to producing their reports.

**85.** However, there is insufficient focus on the scrutiny of performance and improvement. Only half of heads of service think that members effectively scrutinise performance. The balance of scrutiny activity is too heavily biased towards studies of themes and topics, eg customer service, rather than the performance of services. The selective approach to scrutiny items means that panels that meet infrequently pursue limited issues for too long. The scrutiny reviews take a large proportion of panels' time and effort, with some taking up to ten months. Each panel has two reviews in its work plan for 2008/09, leaving little time for other scrutiny activity.

**86.** The council has attempted to address this imbalance by nominating a director to assist each panel in defining its work plan and guiding its activities. The council's new quarterly performance reporting arrangements will also be helpful in redressing the balance of activity. However, there is still an issue of members not asking the right questions and focusing on the right issues. The council is developing individual training plans for members related to their portfolios to address this. It is important that the council reviews the effectiveness of these training plans. Training should be directed at improving the leadership of improvement activity and scrutiny of performance.

**87.** Although there is clear guidance for the panels to use in deciding what they want to look at, some topic reports duplicate council review or development activity. In these instances, the benefit of the panels pursuing work in advance of the conclusion of council activity is not clear. Scrutiny reviews follow a 'service review' type approach in some instances, eg including benchmarking and consultation, but there is no clarity as to if or how these are integrated with other review activity. It is also not clear why some reviews sit with the panels to progress rather than become the subject of a full service review.

**88.** Comprehensive, summarised performance reports signposted to the detailed data available would help members form clearer judgements about performance. There is also potential to involve the panels in scrutinising the appropriateness of the LPIs used by services to measure their success.

## Continuous improvement

The council is committed to improving services and there is a lot of improvement activity within the directorates. The systems to support the directorates to improve are generally sound, but the council needs to consolidate, coordinate and prioritise its existing improvement activity at a corporate level. This would improve the council's ability to target improvement activity where it is most needed and demonstrate continuous improvement.

**89.** The council's arrangements for helping services improve are generally sound. The council's approach is based on the corporate improvement plan, each directorate's service plan, and performance reports. In addition, the Strategic Best Value and Service Review Group (SBV&SRG) was set up in March 2007 to oversee strategic reviews aimed at improving efficiency, customer focus, accessibility of services and financial efficiencies.

This group, consisting of senior managers chaired by the chief executive and including trade union representatives, provides an inclusive and confidential arena to challenge and consider alternatives to existing service delivery.

**90.** The council has produced a helpful guide for review teams on how to undertake a service review. The guide includes a checklist for selecting reviews, templates, and process maps. The council could improve it further by developing a set of agreed criteria and weightings that review teams should use to score different service delivery options.

**91.** New review guidance, approved by full council in September 2008, confuses the council's approach to continuous improvement. The 'organisational development and service review strategy' aims to 'generate improved performance through people'. The first pilot service reviews using the strategy are clearly aimed at organisational structures, working patterns, roles and job descriptions. There is no application of best value principles of customer focus, consultation, improvement of performance, option appraisal and benchmarking. The strategy and its supporting tools are not yet fully developed but it is not clear what it adds to the existing review guidance. The council needs to make the relationship and status of each clear for officers who may be involved in undertaking reviews.

**92.** It is clear from individual committee reports, performance reports, discussions with members and senior officers, and workshops with staff that improving services is a principle by which people in the council work. There is a significant amount of ongoing activity across all directorates focused on continuously improving services. Managers in each directorate describe ad hoc and issue-driven informal benchmarking with contacts in other councils as the norm.

**93.** However, the council's approach to capturing and reporting improvement is not comprehensive, particularly in relation to performance information such as complaints, customer evaluation and satisfaction, and benchmarking. Only some services list comparative data in their six monthly performance reports and none go on to describe any benchmarking opportunities or explain variances. This presents a risk that the directorates cannot show all the improvements they have made. Improvement information is spread between service plans, performance reports and project reports, which does not assist council-wide prioritisation. Members and the public may find it difficult to form clear judgements about whether services are improving.

**94.** There is not a single, clear corporate programme of service reviews. CMT does not currently check and challenge performance reports or service plans on a systematic basis. Not all the SBV&SRG work-streams are listed in the service plans. Some directorates duplicate reviews in both their efficiency and review plans, but there is no mention of review activity linked to the policy and performance panel scrutiny reviews.

**95.** The council has moved from a programme of service reviews and, following a hiatus, has undertaken higher-level and strategic reviews, for example, primary school estate review, income and charging and procurement. Ongoing and future reviews include leisure and cultural services business model and trading accounts.

**96.** The council would be better able to manage its improvement activity within resources, and demonstrate continuous improvement, if it consolidated its service-level improvement activity and service reviews into a council-wide prioritised programme. This, along with the improvements to performance reporting, would help the council to demonstrate that its improvement activity is self-generated and sustainable, and provide better opportunity for challenge.

**97.** Audit and inspection work has defined the council's improvement journey in recent years ([Exhibit 11](#)).

**98.** The organisation has a learning culture and all the inspection agencies found that the council responded positively to their findings, with good progress recorded in follow-up work. The council is aware of areas needing improvement and the reasons behind poorer performance. There are indications of the transfer of learning across services and partners, and that the council can self-generate and sustain improvement.

### Competitiveness

Although there is some evidence of benchmarking and open tendering, the council does not have a systematic approach to testing the competitiveness of its commercial activities. The council needs to do more to increase the level of challenge to existing ways of doing things.

**99.** Up until 31 March 2008, the council operated seven statutory trading accounts for its property maintenance, roads, environment, fleet management, vehicle maintenance, facilities management and grounds maintenance activities. These had a cumulative turnover of almost £44 million in 2007/08. Three of the trading accounts failed to achieve the statutory objective to break even over a rolling three-year period to 31 March 2008, due to equal pay and single status costs.

**100.** The council undertook a review of its trading accounts during 2007/08 and in January 2008 agreed that from 1 April 2008 all significant trading operations (STOs) would be re-integrated to services, with the exception of property maintenance. The council's intention is that service delivery will focus on customer needs and efficiencies with recharging between services based on cost. Property maintenance will remain separate, primarily due to the ability to trade outwith the council. Reduction

**Exhibit 11**

## Inspection activity

Date	Inspection agency and coverage
February 2001	HMIE full inspection of education function
May 2003	HMIE follow-up inspection of education function
March 2004	Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) inspection of criminal justice partnership
September 2004	HMIE inspection of community learning and development
August 2006	HMIE follow-up inspection of community learning and development
August 2007	HMIE follow-up inspection of services to protect children and young people
March 2008	Scottish Housing Regulator's (SHR) inspection of housing function
August 2008	SWIA full inspection of social work services
2008	HMIE district inspector's report

Source: Audit Scotland

of STOs is a national trend and can provide efficiencies in terms of internal billing/finance records and monitoring. However, the council needs to demonstrate that its operations continue to be competitive.

**101.** Although there is some evidence of benchmarking activity and open tendering, the council does not have a systematic process to test the competitiveness of its commercial activities. The key high-value areas such as property maintenance, facilities management and environment have not been market tested for more than ten years. The council has outlined a suite of measures through which it will seek to demonstrate best value of these operations including environmental analysis benchmarking, market and stakeholder analysis, peer review and challenge, competition, and development of service level agreements.

**102.** Guidance on reviews and option appraisal includes reference to competitiveness but there is no evidence that this is applied.

**Managing people**

The council's approach to people management is generally good. The council experiences relatively low absence levels with good communication and access to training. It has improved recruitment and retention rates in areas of national shortage. However, the council needs to increase the pace of development of strategic workforce planning, ensure full implementation of the performance appraisal process, and establish comprehensive information about staff morale and satisfaction.

**103.** Staffing watch survey figures (June 2008) show that East Dunbartonshire Council employed 4,098 full-time equivalent (FTE), or 39 FTE staff per 1,000 head of population, which is below the average for all Scottish councils of 44.7. The council is currently developing a workforce planning strategy.

**104.** The council's positive culture is evidence of the council's good approach to managing people. Our workshops with staff indicate the culture of the council is one of a professional and loyal workforce, committed to improving services.

**105.** The council has been successful in improving recruitment and retention rates in some key service areas of national shortage. Social work has successfully reduced high-vacancy rates in key areas, such as homecare, through a combination of enhanced terms and conditions, investment in training and development opportunities, protected caseloads and annual service and improvement planning events for staff. Between 2002 and 2007, vacancy rates for social workers fell from 36.8 per cent to ten per cent (Scottish average 7.4 per cent). Vacancy rates in planning have reduced from nearly 50 per cent to almost zero. Retention levels for probationer teachers are among the highest in Scotland. However, the council also needs to ensure that it monitors and manages increased turnover of staff identified in other service areas, such as legal services, and because of single status.

**106.** The council has below average absence levels and, with the exception of teaching staff, these are falling. Communication with staff is good, with the council holding a variety of events to provide staff with the opportunity for feedback and dialogue with managers, for example the 'world café' events during the development of the corporate development plan. However, the trades unions have a concern about the over-reliance on electronic means of communication, with staff outside the corporate centre experiencing poorer communication. In 2008, the council undertook an employee satisfaction survey, but achieved only a very low response rate of 7.3 per cent. The council undertook a previous survey in 2002, but the findings of that survey are no longer available. The council needs to gather comprehensive information about staff morale and satisfaction.

**107.** The human resources and organisational development service has focused on the key priorities of recruitment and retention and single status, and, as a consequence, has made less progress in managing the implementation of the performance management and development planning process (PMDP), the council's formal staff appraisal process. Less than half the workforce have undertaken a PMDP assessment this year, and the human resources service does not currently monitor the process centrally, limiting the corporate capacity to identify wider organisational development needs and accrue economies of scale. The service has developed plans to address this and to begin full monitoring of PMDP from April 2009.

**108.** Workshops with staff indicate there is general satisfaction with access to training and development opportunities in the council. There are good links between directorates and the human resources service, with good internal courses designed around particular service needs. Each directorate develops its own service level training plans that inform the corporate training plan.

**109.** Until relatively recently, the council has had a positive record of industrial relations. Collaborative working between the council and trades unions partners was formalised in 2004 in the partnership at work agreement. The subsequent partnership at work forum included senior elected members, officers and trades unions convenors. The forum improved working relationships between employers and trades unions; however, it did not meet between March 2007 and September 2008, due to regular single status meetings. As a result, the trades unions became disillusioned with the forum as a means of dialogue with management at that time. The forum now meets regularly again and the council reports that the relationship with trades unions has improved.

#### Single status and equal pay

**110.** Single status negotiations have been a protracted and difficult process for the council and have had a negative impact on staff morale and industrial relations. The council reached individual single status agreements with 88 per cent of its staff between April and May 2008, and made payments to these individuals representing back pay of their revised terms and conditions to 1 April 2006. The council made these payments from the provision built up over 2006/07 and 2007/08 for this purpose. In September 2008, the council moved to implement the single status agreement to the remaining 12 per cent of staff who had not yet accepted the offer to address potential equalities liability. All staff transferred to the new terms and conditions on 22 December 2008.

**111.** The council made provision at 31 March 2008 for all identified costs in respect of single status implementation and equal pay costs. It also disclosed a contingent liability for future, as yet untested, equal pay claims.

## Managing finance

The council's approach to financial management is sound. It has restored its reserves to more prudent levels following significant equal pay settlements in previous years. The council, however, needs to continue to take forward its plans to integrate its medium to long-term strategic financial planning with the council's corporate development plan and its single outcome agreement, as well as to enhance its strategic budget planning beyond the current financial year.

**112.** The council has managed its overall financial position well in the past. It has received unqualified opinions on its accounts in all recent years. In addition, external audit reports on the financial stewardship and governance of the council have been positive.

**113.** In common with other local authorities, the council reduced its reserves during 2005/06 as part of its settlement of equal pay claims. At 31 March 2007, the council's unallocated reserves were below its set target level of reserves and were forecast to remain so for the following year. The council reported to its policy and resources committee on the financial pressures it faces through its budget projections for 2008–11.

**114.** Strong financial management during 2007/08 has, however, increased the council's overall general fund balance by £2.1 million to a cumulative surplus on the general fund of £8.9 million as at 31 March 2008. The council has earmarked £5.3 million for specific purposes, leaving £3.6 million of uncommitted reserves. This is in excess of the revised £2.5 million target for free reserves set during 2007/08. The council's target is equivalent to approximately one per cent of net revenue expenditure and it recognises that while it has currently restored its reserves target, this target is comparatively low when viewed against other Scottish local authorities.

**115.** As part of the 2008/09 budget setting process, members were provided for the first time with a three-year budget outlook identifying the key cost pressures facing the council in the medium term. In setting its budget, the council met the Scottish Government's target of a council tax freeze for 2008/09. The indicative budgets for future years included transfer to reserves of £0.5 million per annum to augment the council's reserves position. During the 2009/10 budget setting process, members were provided with the five-year financial model which sets out the cost pressures facing the council.

**116.** A comprehensive system of effective budget monitoring is in place with regular reporting to members through service committees. High-level reporting on revenue and capital budgets are presented to the policy and resources committee. The monitoring reports provide members with a clear picture of the main financial issues and overall financial position against the agreed budgets on a timely basis throughout the year. Members do not, however, receive a detailed outturn report for the year until after submission of the unaudited accounts for the year in June. The timing of the submission of the outturn report has been addressed in the procedures for the 2008/09 annual accounts.

**117.** The council is currently undertaking significant investment through its capital programme. The 2008/09 general services capital budget approved spend of £34 million in 2008/09 of which the Kirkintilloch's Initiative represents the single largest area. The funding for this programme included estimated borrowing of £9.7 million, which the council considered affordable, sustainable and prudent. The council approved a further £4.7 million capital expenditure to the council's housing stock to achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.

### Delivering efficiencies

**118.** The council has reported efficiency savings of £2.7 million in its 2007/08 annual efficiency statement (2006/07: £4.0 million), compared to the target of £2.3 million that was included within its revenue budget for the year. The majority of these savings were achieved within streamlining bureaucracy (£1.5 million) and workforce planning (£0.7 million), with only £0.2 million and £0.06 million in procurement and asset management respectively.

**119.** The council identified a requirement for additional cashable savings of £3.0 million in setting the 2008/09 budget, with a requirement to develop ongoing sustainable efficiencies to meet cost pressures. The council has established an all-party resources group to identify and agree a prioritised list of efficiencies for the medium term in order to meet the future financial pressures identified.

**120.** The council has built efficiency savings into its budget setting processes over the last two years. However, it is not possible to monitor progress throughout the year as this is built into budgets and monitored in overall terms through the budget outturn. It would be helpful to members and the CMT if processes were in place for directorates to collect information on efficiency savings. Enhancement of the system for recording and monitoring efficiencies through closer linkage with service delivery and outcomes will enable the council to demonstrate that it has achieved genuine efficiencies.

### Managing assets

The council is developing a comprehensive corporate asset management plan. The 2009/10 capital programme has been based on the interim asset management plan. Integration of its corporate asset management plan with long-term capital investment decisions and identification of revenue budget savings is still in development.

**121.** The council's operational assets are currently valued at approximately £445 million at 31 March 2008. The council uses 236 premises to deliver services, with occupation of 19 key establishments. In addition, the council has 3,731 council houses within the housing revenue account. The council has a corporate asset management group chaired by the corporate director of environment, with heads of service and key officers from across departments. The group reports through the CMT and full council.

**122.** The council is developing a corporate asset management plan covering property, schools, housing, road, green space, fleet and ICT. This is not yet complete, however, council agreed an interim asset management plan in October 2008 that identifies the capital programme for 2009/10, with the intention that a ten-year capital investment programme will be completed in 2009.

**123.** Some elements of asset management planning are further progressed, with a school estate management plan submitted to the Scottish Government in 2004. As a result of this, and based on school condition survey information, the council entered into a public private partnership (PPP) project to replace six of its existing secondary schools. The council reached a financial close on the project in August 2007, with the schools due to come into service operation during 2009. In addition, the property asset management plan is now complete and the property condition survey information is captured in the council's dedicated asset management software.

**124.** The council has not set specific efficiency savings targets yet in respect of asset management, and savings reported within the annual efficiency statement to date are minimal. The council has therefore still to realise the benefits of its investment in asset management.

## Managing ICT

The council has not made sufficient use of information and communications technology (ICT) in modernising service delivery. A comprehensive, revised ICT strategy has only been in place since early 2008. Performance reporting for ICT services has only just commenced.

**125.** The council approved a revised corporate ICT strategy in February 2008 following an external review by the Society of Information Technology Management (SOCITM). The strategy is designed to assist the council in modernising service delivery.

**126.** The external review identified that while elements of good practice were in place, there was a need for significant change in key areas. While the council had in place a number of strategies covering customer services and modernising government, until recently there was no overarching strategy. Performance management was not well developed within ICT, with no internal or external comparators. No method of establishing the quality and value for money provided by the ICT service was in place.

**127.** Activity undertaken through its business diagnostic report has confirmed a large number of ICT systems in place across the council. There is a lack of integration of systems, which leads to duplicate, inconsistent or inaccurate data with a consequent impact on service delivery. The council has improved its governance arrangements by establishing a corporate ICT steering group. There is also a recognition that the ICT service must transform from simply delivering technology to shaping the council's strategy for transformation of customer services. This will include linkage of the ICT service to work undertaken by the customer first steering group and the aims and objectives of the customer first strategy.

**128.** The council presented its first annual performance report for ICT services to the policy and resources committee in September 2008 including performance indicators based on recommendations from SOCITM.

## Managing risk

The council has a corporate risk management strategy and risk register but needs to do more to embed risk management within its processes.

**129.** The council approved an initial risk management strategy in 2005, with investment in a corporate risk manager post to coordinate the process across the council. The council remodelled the audit subcommittee as the audit and risk management subcommittee to raise the profile of risk management with members and across the council.

**130.** The council has prepared service risk registers, although progress with a corporate risk register has been slow despite the council identifying it within the corporate improvement plan in December 2007. The council agreed the corporate risk register in September 2008, although the report noted that with the importance of the SOA, a detailed risk analysis of the agreement was outstanding and requiring urgent completion.

**131.** The corporate risk register identifies 11 key risks and a further 18 less critical risks. The report to council notes that a detailed review of each of the key risks will be undertaken every six months by the CMT, with an annual report to the audit and risk subcommittee. This review timescale is somewhat infrequent in terms of the key risks facing the council.

**132.** The council needs to do more to ensure that risk management is now embedded across its processes and procedures. For example, there has been limited follow-up reporting to the subcommittee on the management of the service risks. While the 2008/09 financial risk register has

been monitored during the year by the CMT, with extracts provided to the all-party resource group, the detail of the financial risk register was only presented to the audit and risk management subcommittee in November 2008. The standard format of council reports does not include a risk section as a standard item.

**133.** The council has taken steps to respond quickly to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The council's strategy was nominated as business continuity strategy of the year 2007 by *Continuity Insurance and Risk Magazine*, the only public sector organisation nominated in this category.

## Managing procurement

The council demonstrates commitment to improving its procurement practices. The full benefits of this commitment have yet to be fully realised. The council needs to harmonise working practices to implement e-procurement across all services.

**134.** The council has a specialist corporate procurement team and has largely implemented its 2004–07 procurement strategy. The council has set a target of £300,000 of efficiency savings to be realised in 2008/09 through its procurement activity.

**135.** The council's annual expenditure on supplies, services and works totals more than £90 million but the council needs to improve its monitoring and reporting of performance in respect of this expenditure. To this end, the council has adopted the Scottish Procurement Directorate's best practice indicators in procurement.

**136.** The council has reviewed and reduced the number of its suppliers, through targeting of common suppliers, to maximise its purchasing power. However, it has not fully implemented e-procurement technology to reduce costs and transaction times. The council has identified the benefits that e-procurement can bring but needs

to establish consistent working practice across the council before e-procurement can be implemented.

**137.** The council has introduced a contracts register and a tender register, available on its intranet, which allows better monitoring of information. The council's external website also provides a resource for potential suppliers, advertising its tender list and providing key contact information as well as the council's procurement strategy and information on the regulatory framework. The council is also participating in the Scotland Excel project.

**138.** The council recently revised their service review guidance to cover procurement decisions, but there is no clear evidence yet to show how well services use option appraisal when undertaking procurement decisions.

**139.** The council's strategy commits the council to sustainable procurement. East Dunbartonshire is a fair trade zone and the procurement strategy highlights the need to promote and expand the use and supply of fair trade products throughout its facilities.

**140.** During 2007/08, the corporate director - environment commissioned internal audit to investigate the procurement of construction contracts. Internal audit concluded that there had been technical breaches of the contract standing orders and tendering process. Internal audit's report to the audit and risk committee made 12 high-priority recommendations for action, which management responded to promptly, with a number of improvements to working practices now agreed and implemented.

## Equalities

The council is committed to equality and diversity and has effective structures in place to support the equalities agenda. The council needs to build on progress made in embedding equalities at corporate and directorate management level. The council lacks comprehensive

information about black and minority ethnic groups in the area and their service needs. The council also needs to improve disabled access to council buildings.

**141.** The council has an overarching corporate equality and diversity policy and has implemented an equality and diversity scheme (2006–09), in line with statutory requirements, accommodating the three duties of race, disability and gender. The social inclusion policy and performance panel scrutinises the equality and diversity issues within the council. The panel receives verbal updates on the council's progress throughout the year and an annual progress report on the implementation of the equality and diversity scheme, which is also submitted to council. The council is revising the guidance for policy and performance panels and, in recognition of its cross-cutting nature, is reviewing the best way to scrutinise equalities.

**142.** The chief executive and the leader of the council both demonstrate commitment to equal opportunities, but the council needs to build on progress made in embedding equalities and diversity issues at both corporate and directorate management level. Although progress reports on the implementation of the equality action plans are submitted to the departmental management teams and CMT, senior management should consider including equality and diversity issues more routinely at service and team meetings.

**143.** There are structures in place to mainstream equalities within the council. However, the effectiveness of the directorate subgroups, which are tasked with the implementation of the equalities agenda at the service level, is variable. The communities' executive director has corporate responsibility for equalities. A corporate equalities development group, chaired by the director, leads and cascades equalities work to directorate equalities subgroups to ensure implementation at service level. The council recently established a new equality engagement group, replacing

the equality and diversity CPP and the ethnic minority liaison committee to renew partner focus. The council now needs to ensure that all the directorate equality subgroups operate effectively.

**144.** The council is engaging with staff on equal opportunities issues but training is currently limited. The council recently developed its first equality and diversity bulletin, communicating the council's equalities work to staff. Equality and diversity training is now built into the induction process to ensure new staff are familiar with the council's commitment and duty to equalities issues. Equalities training for members has taken place on an ad hoc basis but needs to be more systematic.

**145.** Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) employees account for less than one per cent of the workforce, compared with a BME working age population of 1.97 per cent living in the area. While the council has done some work to address this variance and understand the reasons behind it, no formal targets have been set to improve the council's BME workforce representation.

**146.** The council has made good progress in carrying out equalities impact assessments (EIA). The council has assessed the impact of a number of new and existing policies. The directorate equality groups collate prospective impact assessments on an ongoing basis. The council's equalities impact assessment toolkit has recently been refreshed and is designed to simplify the assessment process for council staff.

**147.** In common with many other councils, East Dunbartonshire Council has relatively limited information on equalities groups within the area. The council uses 2001 census data, which is now considerably outdated, and there is no information on population forecasts for minority ethnic groups in the area for the next ten years. While the council has undertaken significant consultation and engagement activity to identify the relevant issues facing different equality groups, the council lacks comprehensive information about BME groups in the area and their service needs.

**148.** A national study for the Accounts Commission, published in November 2008, reported that the race equality duty has not yet had a significant impact on the delivery of council services or on minority ethnic communities. This conclusion applies to East Dunbartonshire Council as it does to other councils.

**149.** The council performs well in terms of the top two and five per cent of council earners that are women holding senior management positions, ranking second and eighth in Scotland respectively. Both indicators have improved significantly since 2005/06. In contrast, the council ranks 27th for the percentage of council buildings suitable and accessible to disabled people. The council recently conducted an audit of all its access points for disabled access and a prioritised programme of activity is contained within the asset management plan to address performance in this area.

### Sustainable development

The council has made progress in sustainable development, particularly in initiating and supporting community-based actions. Progress in mainstreaming sustainable development within wider corporate and service planning activity has been slower. There is now an opportunity to enhance impact through more strategic coordinated action.

**150.** The council's vision reflects the importance of sustainable development. The sustainable development strategy 2004 separates sustainable development activities into in-house day-to-day activities of the council, and community-based actions. The overall strategy sets a range of broad social, economic and environmental goals. Specific objectives and targets are contained in detailed action plans and strategies for particular themes, for example, waste management, green-space, biodiversity and energy.

**151.** There is a range of progress reporting on sustainable development but

internal monitoring tends to be ad hoc. The council produces annual updates of the sustainable action plan to CMT and appropriate strategic committee, biannual reports to the community planning environment themed partnership and regular briefing reports to the depute leader. Progress reports tend to be collations of all activities and actions from the complementing strategies, rather than describing strategic or joint action. A strategic approach to monitoring and coordinating arrangements would better support joint action on sustainable development.

**152.** There is recent evidence of mainstreaming. The corporate planning and improvement framework contains a sustainable development checklist for services to apply when developing new policies. The new corporate procurement strategy incorporates sustainable development and the council has recently commissioned a sustainable design policy. There is a new requirement for each directorate to cover sustainable development within service plans. Directorates have

made varying progress in addressing this requirement and monitoring of directorate commitments has not yet started.

**153.** To date, the council's approach to sustainable development has focused on facilitating community and in-house projects, rather than strategic action. Limited resources have partly influenced this. However, there is evidence of community-based and outreach work to support sustainable development activities in the community including local businesses ([Exhibit 12](#)).

**154.** The council has a good record of joint working with local communities, through well-targeted and responsive outreach work. There is some evidence of sharing good practice through the council's participation in the Sustainable Scotland Network. Joint working at a strategic level is less well developed. Although sustainable development is a cross-cutting community planning theme, it is not clear how the council manages and monitors this activity.

### Exhibit 12 Sustainable development

#### Community impact

- Maintaining and promoting the fair trade status across East Dunbartonshire.
- Initiating a plastic bag free area campaign in partnership with local businesses.
- Developing a community action website that provides advice, guidance and contacts to community organisations on sustainable development.
- Increasing waste recycling rates to more than 32 per cent (greater than Scottish Government targets).
- Establishment of an air quality management area in Bishopbriggs.
- Continuing to support the Eco Schools programme, for example the introduction of the GLOW website for schools.

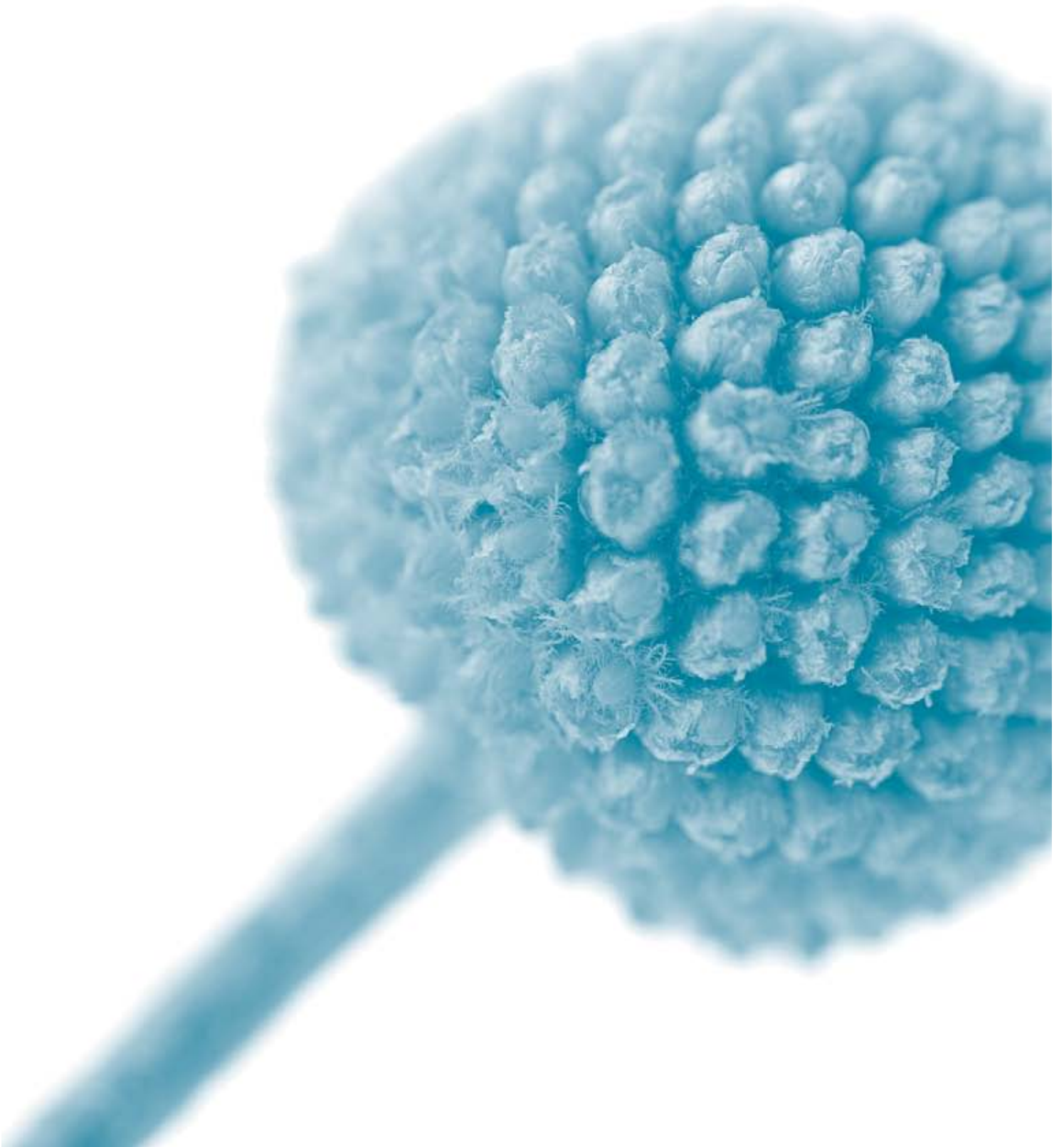
#### In-house impact

- Integrating sustainable development into building control guidance for the public and local plan.
- Expansion of green office policy through green office champions and waste prevention action plan.
- Extending the range of fair trade products in council catering facilities.

Source: East Dunbartonshire Council's Sustainable Development Action Plan



# Part 3. How are services performing?



The council's services are good, with SPIs around the Scottish average but improving at a faster rate than average. The council has some areas of strong performance including educational attainment, housing management, homeless services, and adult social work. Performance is less good in relation to roads and lighting, refuse collection costs, and processing planning applications. The council has been slow to implement a corporate approach to customer service. The council needs to increase the pace of recent activity and ensure the implementation of its new customer service strategy.

### Statutory performance indicators

**155.** Each year local authorities are required to report and publish information about their performance. This is done through SPIs. On behalf of the Accounts Commission, Audit Scotland collates the information

received from all councils and publishes on its website a compendium of all SPIs and council profiles. The council profiles contain 82 measures taken from the SPIs. While these do not give a comprehensive picture of performance across all services, they do allow some comparisons to be made between councils and over time.

**156.** An analysis of the SPIs shows that overall the council performs around the Scottish average. While the majority of indicators are in the middle quartiles, there are two more indicators in the upper quartile and two more indicators in the lower quartile compared with the Scottish average (Exhibit 13). The council ranks one of the top three performing councils for nine indicators, mostly in the areas of adult social work, corporate management and housing. However, it also ranks one of the worst three performing councils on six indicators, in a number of different

areas including development services, roads and lighting, and waste management.

**157.** The council reported two unreliable indicators as the data submitted was incomplete. These were both in asset management – the proportion of floor area that is in satisfactory condition and the percentage of operational buildings that are suitable for their current use.

**158.** The ratio of improvement to decline over the two years to 2007/08 was 2.1, which is higher than the national improvement to decline ratio of 1.7. Exhibit 14 shows the numbers of indicators improving compared with those that have deteriorated.

## Exhibit 13

Council profile of SPIs 2007/08: number in each quartile by service area

	Upper quartile	Middle quartiles	Lower quartile	No service	Failure to report/unreliable
Adult social work	8	11	1	1	0
Benefits administration	1	1	0	0	0
Education and children's services	2	5	1	0	0
Corporate management	4	4	2	0	2
Cultural and community services	3	3	4	0	0
Development services	0	0	2	0	0
Housing	5	5	1	0	0
Protective services	0	4	2	0	0
Roads and lighting	0	1	3	0	0
Waste management	0	4	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Scottish average</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>1</b>

**Exhibit 14**

Performance change between 2005/06 and 2007/08

	Measures that worsened by...			Measures that improved by...		
	>15%	10 14%	5 9%	5 9%	10 14%	>15%
Scotland	10	3	4	6	5	18
East Dunbartonshire	11	4	2	5	7	24

Source: Audit Scotland

**159.** Of the 23 indicators in the highest quartile, eight of these have improved by at least 15 per cent since 2005/06. These are:

- percentage of care staff who are qualified, working in care homes for other adults
- percentage of residential places occupied by other adults that have en suite facilities
- percentage of children made subject to a supervision order that were seen by a supervising officer within 15 days
- percentage of highest paid two per cent of earners among the council that are women
- percentage of highest paid five per cent of earners among the council that are women
- indoor facilities – the number of attendances per 1,000 population
- percentage of the national target met for replenishing library lending stock for adults
- percentage of the national target met for replenishing library lending stock for children and teenagers.

**160.** Of those 18 indicators ranked in the lowest quartile, four have got worse by at least 15 per cent or more since 2005/06. These are:

- learning centre and learning access points – number of users as a percentage of the resident population
- learning centre and learning access points – number of times terminals are used per 1,000 population
- processing time – the percentage of householder planning applications dealt with within two months
- refuse collection – the net cost per property of refuse collection.

**Customer service**

The council has been slow to implement some fundamental elements of customer service and has only recently developed a corporate customer service strategy. The corporate complaints procedure is not fully implemented. There has been recent increased momentum to develop a more systematic approach but the council needs to ensure this is maintained.

**161.** The council has been slow to develop and implement a customer service strategy. The council developed a strategy in 2004, but did not implement it. In 2007, the council appointed external consultants to help develop and implement a new customer service strategy by November 2008, which was finally agreed in March 2009.

**162.** The council has concentrated its customer service activity on areas funded by the national modernising government fund. The council needs to build on recent momentum and ensure that the new strategy is implemented, monitored and reported on.

**163.** The council established a customer contact centre in 2005 but it is not publicised effectively. There is limited awareness about the contact centre among council staff and the wider community. Contacting the centre is confusing due to a large number of contact telephone numbers. The findings of a consultation event in June 2008 on customer service supported the need for enhanced clarity for customers contacting the council. The overall efficiency and responsiveness of the service would benefit from streamlining the telephone numbers associated with the contact centre and promoting it more extensively, both internally and externally.

**164.** Despite being ranked in the top three council websites by SOCITM in 2005, the council is now no longer ranked. This is due to limitations of the website's content management system and the need for a strategic approach to online services. The council is developing a website development strategy to improve performance. The launch of the new website is expected in October 2009.

**165.** The council recognises the importance of the role of staff in providing high-quality customer care but needs to do more to ensure everyone who needs training receives it. The council has a corporate customer-training course for all front-line staff. However, the training is not compulsory and the council has only recently identified all customer-facing posts in order to prioritise training.

**166.** The council has a corporate comments, compliments and complaints procedure, 'Your Say'. However, the policy is only in operation in some areas of the council. Currently, the council does not capture customer complaints data, meaning there is an incomplete picture of complaints across the council. The council is developing a detailed implementation plan for the introduction of corporate complaints management across the whole council.

**167.** The council's 2006 household survey suggests that the public are relatively satisfied with the council. Findings indicate people are more likely to express satisfaction than dissatisfaction about the council and its services, and 21 per cent of respondents are more likely to think East Dunbartonshire Council is better than other councils, compared with 16 per cent of respondents who think the council is worse than other councils. Forty-one per cent of people would either strongly agree or agree that they are satisfied with the council as a provider of local services, compared with 27 per cent who would either disagree or strongly disagree.

**168.** Schools and libraries achieve very positive satisfaction levels, with 60 per cent and 84 per cent of respondents satisfied respectively. This compares with a performance range of 26 per cent to 56 per cent range for schools and 67 per cent to 92 per cent for libraries, as measured by the consultants for comparator councils. Good satisfaction ratings are also achieved for refuse collection and street lighting, with 79 per cent and 53 per cent of respondents satisfied respectively.

**169.** In contrast, satisfaction with road maintenance is poor, with 64 per cent of respondents expressing dissatisfaction. Relatively poor ratings are also achieved for issues relating to planning and building control, with only eight per cent of respondents satisfied with these services.

### Education and lifelong learning

The council has a strong record of improvement in education from a low base in 2001. Attainment levels remain high and are improving. The council needs to press on with decisions about the school estate.

**170.** There are 17 pre-school centres and nurseries, 36 primary schools, eight secondary schools and two special schools in East Dunbartonshire. The council entered into a PPP in August 2007 which will deliver significant improvements to the council's secondary school estate. When complete in August 2009, it will remodel six of the eight secondary schools.

**171.** Attainment levels at secondary and primary schools are high and continue to improve year-on-year. The 2007/08 Scottish Qualifications Authority Examination results show that attainment levels at secondary are well above the Scottish averages for all three Scottish Qualifications Authority attainment measures at S4. There is a similar picture for primary attainment at reading, writing and numeracy. Absence and exclusions are consistently lower than the national averages.

**172.** The 2001 HMIE inspection of the education functions of local authorities (INEA) found a number of key weaknesses in the management of the education authority, although schools performance was generally positive. It highlighted required improvements in partnership working, consultation and communications with stakeholders, quality assurance, systematic service planning and clearer linkages with national priorities.

**173.** Subsequent reports show significant and sustained improvement in the council's management of education. An interim HMIE follow-up inspection took place in 2002, and the full follow-up in February 2003, (published May 2003). The full follow-up inspection concluded that

the council had achieved significant improvements in performance of the education authority, including capacity to sustain improvements, better joint working, more effective structures for supporting children and families, good progress in meeting national priorities in education objectives and pupil attainment significantly above the national average.

**174.** Due to the sustained progress reported in the 2002 and 2003 follow-up reports, HMIE concluded that no further follow-up inspections were required. Subsequently, HMIE has continued to monitor progress through the annual district inspector's report and regular schools inspections programme. Subsequent schools inspections and district inspector reports highlight sustained improvement, while schools performance has remained high.

**175.** The council has strengthened its quality improvement framework, including its central quality improvement team and quality assurance approaches, leading to acknowledgement by other Scottish councils as demonstrating good practice.

**176.** The council has made good progress improving services to protect children and young people. In July 2005, HMIE published a report on the pilot joint inspection of services to protect children and young people in the area. Overall, the 2005 pilot inspection concluded that the professionals working in the East Dunbartonshire area provided a good service for children who had been identified as being at risk of harm. Joint working between key agencies was working well, joint planning was effective and leadership of services for protecting children was good. The report highlighted a number of weaknesses in information sharing and risk assessment to ensure services were aware of all children in need of help and ensuring consistent application of processes across agencies.

**177.** The inspection report identified five main points for action to address these weaknesses. The 2007 joint follow-through inspection report ([Exhibit 15](#)) identified that the council had implemented the recommendations in the 2005 pilot inspection report effectively. The council had made very good progress in four of five action points and good progress in one. It concluded, 'as a result of the strong performance shown by services in taking forward improvements, HMIE will make no further visits in relation to the pilot inspection report published in July 2005.'

**178.** HMIE has carried out two inspections of community learning and development areas, Kirkintilloch and Lennoxton (2004) and the Hillhead area in Kirkintilloch (2002). These were rated good and fair overall respectively. HMIE concluded that the council provided a good service to the two communities, with particular strengths in adult learning programmes. Subsequent follow-up inspections confirmed the council was making good progress on three action points and fair progress on two action points.

**179.** The council's ratio of pupils to available places of between 61 and 100 per cent is lower than the national averages for both primary and secondary. The 2007/08 SPLs show 58.3 per cent of the council's primary schools are in this category, below the Scottish average of 62.9 per cent. The equivalent measure for secondary schools is 50 per cent, significantly less than the national average of 74.1 per cent. The Scottish Government's school estate statistics 2008 bulletin states that 24 primary schools are operating at less than 75 per cent capacity, at September 2007.

**180.** In addition, the council acknowledges the need to consider options for the modernisation of the primary schools estate in its *Schools Estate Management Plan 2007*. The council's own assessment of school conditions identifies seven primary schools in poor condition,

### Exhibit 15

Findings of the 2007 joint follow-through inspection of services to protect children and young people

2005 Inspection main points for action	2007 progress
Ensure that all children and young people have the right to be heard and to be consulted about decisions which affect their lives.	Very good
Improve arrangements for initial assessment of situations where any professional or service has concerns about a child or family to ensure that all professionals have access to confidential advice and that all services, including health, are consulted.	Good
Better sharing of information and assessment of risks so that decisions are taken on the basis of the fullest possible knowledge available.	Very good
Increasing the range and accessibility of services to help intervene early to support vulnerable families and help children and young people recover from abuse or neglect.	Very good
Implementing planned reviews and improvements identified in previous audits, including the plans for reviewing the functions and composition of the child protection committee (CPC) and improvements in training.	Very good

Source: HMIE follow-through Inspection (August 2007)

with 28 satisfactory and one good. This, combined with factors such as reductions in early years' class sizes and changing stakeholder expectations of accommodation suitable for modern schools, means the council faces some tough challenges in managing its primary school estate. The council has initiated a strategic review group to explore various methods of funding.

### Social work

The social work service has shown significant improvement from a low base in 2000. SPI performance is good and shows an improving trend across the service. The Social Work Inspection Agency's (SWIA) assessment of the council's social work service indicates several areas of good performance.

**181.** SWIA rated the service positively in its August 2008 report ([Exhibit 16, overleaf](#)).

**182.** SWIA uses a six-point scale in its inspection of council social work services, ranging from 'unsatisfactory' (level 1) to 'excellent' (level 6). On this scale 'good' performance means 'important strengths with some areas for improvement', and 'adequate' performance indicates 'strengths just outweigh weaknesses'.

**183.** The inspection identified a number of strengths including good quality assurance measures in child protection and in criminal justice services; strong corporate and political support for social work; good leadership of social work services; service users generally satisfied with the quality of services; good partnership working in child protection and youth justice; increasing investment in multi-agency training to support collaborative working; and improved recruitment and retention.

## Exhibit 16

### SWIA evaluation of East Dunbartonshire Council's social work service

Area for Evaluation	Evaluation
Outcomes for people who use services	Adequate
Impact on people who use services and on other stakeholders	Good
Impact on staff	Good
Impact on the community	Good
Delivery of key processes	Adequate
Policy and service development, planning and performance management	Adequate
Management and support of staff	Good
Resources and capacity building	Adequate
Leadership and direction	Good
Capacity for improvement	Good

Source: SWIA Inspection (August 2008)

**184.** Social work 2007/08 SPI performance indicates an overall improvement trend across the service. Performance in ten of the 27 indicators ranks in the top quartile with only one SPI ranked in the bottom quartile. Eleven SPIs have improved by more than 15 per cent since 2005/06, while performance has declined by the same percentage in three measures, all of which relate to respite care services for adults. There have been sustained improvements in homecare for adults 65+ since 2005/06 and the performance trend in children and families is improving overall.

**185.** Providing sufficient and appropriate support and services to meet the needs of older people continues to be a major challenge for the service and its health partners given the demographic pattern of the

area. The SWIA report notes evidence of recent progress in joint planning with partners and developing integrated care packages to make access to services easier for older people.

**186.** The council has responded constructively to SWIA's recommendations for improvement. However, addressing some areas may require difficult decisions by elected members, particularly around shifting the balance of funding towards services for older people. The council has addressed the SWIA recommendations through the development of a draft action plan (November 2008) which is the subject of ongoing discussion between the council and SWIA.

**187.** Joint working with key partners and stakeholders is well established. The 2004 inspection report of the Argyll & Bute and Dunbartonshire's Criminal Justice Social Work partnership commended the partnership's approach to working together. Joint working with health partners is particularly strong despite the council's 2004 decision to establish a Community Health Partnership (CHP), as opposed to a full community Community Health & Care Partnership (CHCP), when negotiations on the CHCP were already at an advanced stage. The integrated health and social care centre, which is due to open in September 2009, is an example of an important joint project between NHS partners and the council.

### Housing

The housing service performs well overall. The recent Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) inspection found many strengths in housing management and services to homeless people, with scope for improvement in asset management and repairs. Tackling affordable housing continues to be a significant challenge for the council.

**188.** The 2007/08 SPI figures show variable performance with an overall improving trend. Seven indicators have improved since 2006/07, two measures have declined and two are static over the same period. Four measures have improved by more than 15 per cent since 2005/06, with the percentage of council house sales completed within 26 weeks showing greatest improvement. Performance has fallen by the same amount for one indicator, ie tenancy changes – the percentage of rent loss due to voids. The council ranks in the top quartile for five indicators with only one measure in the bottom quartile. Both homelessness indicators show sustained improvements since 2005/06.

**189.** The service received a positive report by the SHR in March 2008 (Exhibit 17).

**190.** SHR found the strategy and policy framework comprehensive, integrated and clear; strong leadership of the housing service; good internal joint working; commitment to continuous improvement; good engagement with service users; commitment to equality issues; and Scottish housing quality standard investment levels on target.

**191.** The report highlights many strengths in all aspects of the housing service, including supporting tenancies; well-maintained estates; dealing with antisocial behaviour; tenant participation and focus; stock in good condition; improved repairs performance; capital projects on track; improved gas safety performance; focus on prevention of homelessness; and good quality temporary accommodation. The council has responded well to improvement recommendations and is developing an improvement plan.

**192.** The report makes a number of service improvement recommendations for the C-graded service of asset management and repairs. These include the council's capacity to meet duties for managing asbestos in common areas; recording completion of repairs against targets more accurately; improving performance against targets for urgent and routine repairs and monitoring the quality of response repairs more effectively; and improving the value for money focus in procurement.

**193.** At a strategic level, tackling affordable housing continues to be a significant challenge for the council and partners but has recently been adopted as a key strategic priority.

### Planning, development and property assets

Performance in processing planning applications is well below the Scottish average. The council has been successful in addressing staff

### Exhibit 17

#### Scottish housing regulator's assessment of the council's housing service

Service	Assessment
Housing management	B grade (good performance)
Services to homeless people	B grade (good performance)
Asset management and repairs	C grade (fair performance)

Source: Scottish Housing Regulator's Inspection of East Dunbartonshire Council housing service (March 2008)

### Exhibit 18

#### Interactive local planning

In 2006, the council launched its online interactive local plan. The map-based tool links information from the geographical information system with the local plan database. The system allows visitors to the site to search for information on current planning policy in particular areas. Using the planning application e-register, users can view details and the progress of current planning applications online and read about councillors' decisions.

In 2008, the council launched an interactive consultation on its new local plan. Using the website-based tool, users were able to log on to make comments on the council's proposals for the future planning framework for the area. The online system allows users to track their comments throughout the process and search for other comments relating to the same topic. The key successes of the online consultation have included improving the accessibility and ease of contributing comments, encouraging responses from local communities about local issues and increasing transparency.

Source: East Dunbartonshire Council

shortages in some service areas but needs to monitor recruitment and retention across the service and ensure higher staffing levels lead to service improvements.

**194.** Planning performance remains well below the Scottish average. The 2007/08 SPI figures show a significant decline in performance for planning processing. The council attributes poor performance to staffing shortages and increased workload associated with large strategic projects such as the Kirkintilloch marina development. Since staffing levels have stabilised, the council has reduced its planning applications backlog but performance remains well below the national average. It has implemented an improvement plan to manage performance recovery and reduce the backlog.

**195.** There is a mixed picture of performance for asset management and the council has made slow progress in improving access to public buildings for disabled people. The 2007/08 SPIs indicate that 93.4 per cent of operational accommodation is in a satisfactory condition (compared to the Scottish average of 67.6 per cent), but just over half (51.7 per cent) is considered suitable for current use compared to the 69.7 per cent Scottish average. Only 35.8 per cent of public buildings are accessible for disabled people. Although this represents a significant increase on 2006/07 performance, it is well below the Scottish average of 56.6 per cent.

**196.** The service has a strong record of community engagement. It has been proactive in exploring innovative methods of consultation, such as the development of an online interactive consultation tool for the local plan (Exhibit 18).

## Roads, waste management and green space

Waste recycling rates are good and improving. SPIs for road condition and maintenance are poor and declining, although the council is increasing investment in its roads. There is a clear strategic framework for managing green spaces, which is bringing tangible improvements to local communities.

**197.** The council's performance on waste recycling rates has been good and is showing an improving trend. There is a clear waste management strategy and monitoring arrangements in place. The council has a dedicated recycling and waste advice telephone line for residents, and community and education awareness activities such as roadshows and school visits.

**198.** At 32.2 per cent (Scottish average 31.7 per cent), recycling has improved by more than 15 per cent since 2005/06, but this is currently below the council's own target of 35 per cent. However, the 2007 return to weekly refuse collections has slowed down the improvement trend. There have been significant increases in the cost per property of refuse collection and refuse disposal since 2005/06 because of recycling measures and free special uplifts. Performance on complaints about refuse collection has improved in 2007/08, falling to below the Scottish average.

**199.** The SPI figures in 2007/08 indicate poor performance for the roads service. Three of the four indicators are in the bottom quartile, with both traffic light and street light repairs having worsened since 2005/06. The council cites staffing shortages and sustained under-investment in the roads network as significant factors in poor performance. Although this indicator includes the condition of unclassified roads, the council made the decision to target investment at the more heavily used A, B and C class roads, with £3.5 million capital investment

earmarked and an accelerated programme of works for 2009-10. Local performance indicator data indicates an inconsistent approach to customer care monitoring, and the council acknowledges there has been an overall deterioration in dealing with customer complaints and correspondence.

**200.** The council has a clear strategic approach for managing its green and open spaces, and employs a dedicated green-space officer. The green-space strategy is monitored and reported biannually to Scottish National Heritage. Impacts include the consideration of green space in the assessment of planning applications, and a programme of improvements to community woodlands.

## Leisure

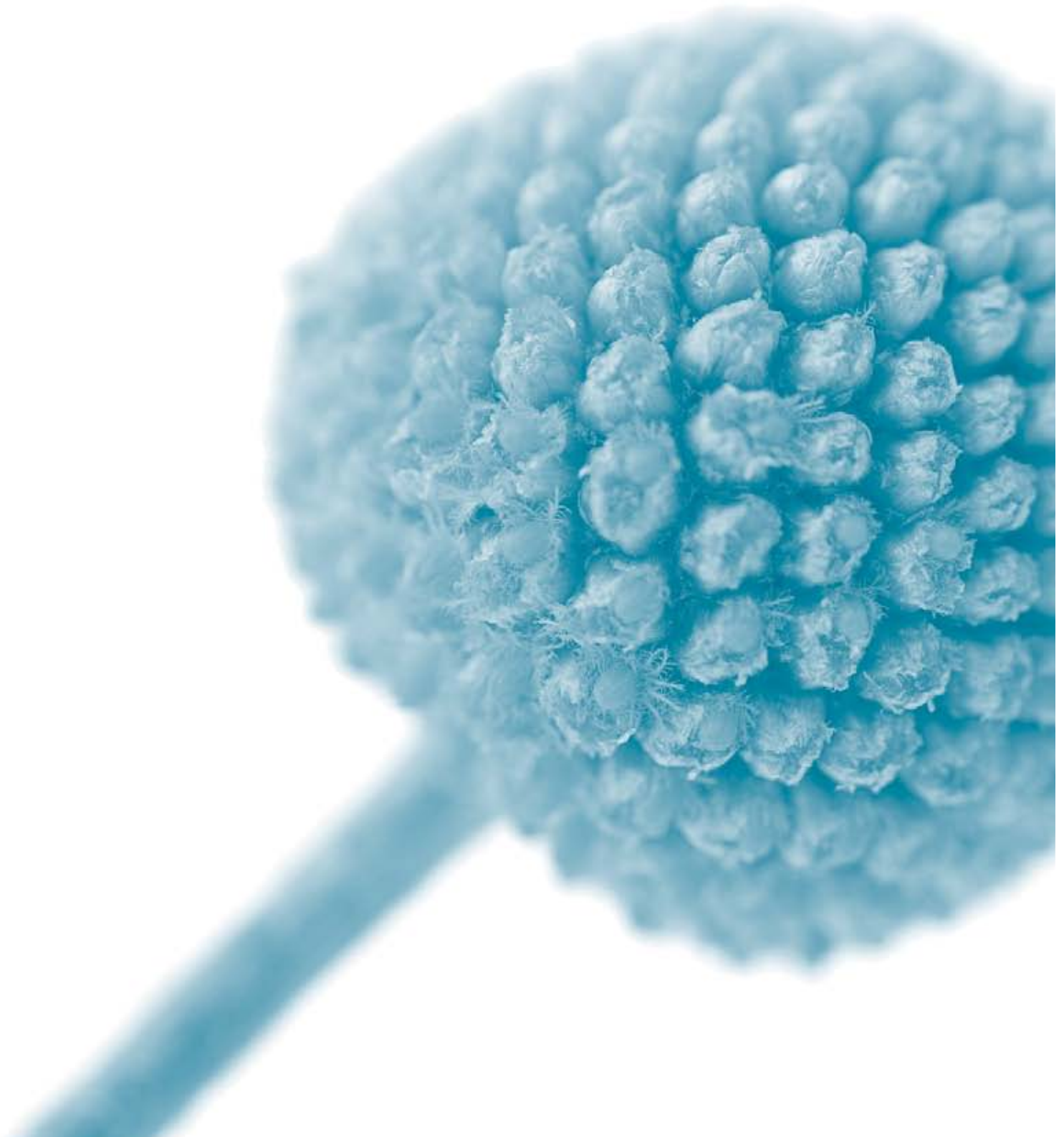
The council has made good progress in increasing participation in leisure activities and has invested in new and upgraded facilities.

**201.** In 2008, the council developed a new integrated leisure strategy, contributing to its priority of improving health and wellbeing. SPI data for 2007/08 shows increased usage of the council's sport and leisure facilities, up by more than ten per cent in the number of attendances at pools and indoor sports facilities.

**202.** In July 2008, as part of the Kirkintilloch's Initiative partnership, the council opened a major new leisure facility, the Kirkintilloch Leisure Centre. The council has also invested in existing facilities in Bearsden and Bishopbriggs. These have contributed to the increased participation rates. The service is focusing on quality assurance accreditation, and further increasing swimming and football usage at leisure centres.



# Part 4. What needs to improve?



East Dunbartonshire Council has a good awareness of where it needs to improve and is continuing to develop its approach to best value and continuous improvement. It has a sound track record of responding positively to audit and inspection recommendations. The council has concentrated on improving services over recent years and has been successful in doing so. It now needs to ensure that the directorates and service teams use the council's corporate improvement processes effectively to maximise their improvement potential.

**203.** Continuous improvement in public services and local governance lie at the heart of the Best Value and Community Planning policy framework. Elected members must focus on key policy objectives and the needs of service users and communities, driven by a desire to achieve the highest possible standards in service delivery. This requires a culture where areas in need of improvement are identified and openly discussed and in which service performance is constructively challenged.

**204.** The council has become increasingly engaged in improvement activity and has achieved a lot in a few years to improve the leadership and culture of the organisation and improve services. There is more to do to demonstrate best value and some of these things are significant – customer service, strategic use of resources and competitiveness.

**205.** The council's Best Value audit submission was a realistic and self-aware assessment reflecting the council's existing corporate improvement plan. This demonstrates the council's awareness of where it needs to improve and its commitment to do so. The council needs to be more systematic in checking that all services properly use the processes it has in place to help them improve. The council needs to capture and prioritise all the service-

level improvement activity to help it better demonstrate self-generated continuous improvement where it is most needed.

**206.** The council has developed a culture focused on improving the services it provides. Members and senior management provide effective

leadership and, along with staff, are consistent in their commitment to improve quality of life in their communities. This creates a strong environment for the council to address areas for improvement.

**207.** The table sets out the key areas where the council needs to improve.

### East Dunbartonshire Council improvement agenda

- Increase the pace of development in relation to customer services, including simplifying access to the council, implementation and monitoring of complaints and the new corporate customer service strategy.
- Improve resource management to ensure that finance, assets, ICT and workforce are considered together, and used strategically to deliver key priorities.
- Increase the level of challenge to existing ways of doing things through a programme of service and strategic reviews, and a clear approach to testing competitiveness.
- Draw up and manage a council-wide programme of service-level improvement priorities.
- Extend the involvement of elected members in leading Best Value and Community Planning, including involvement in prioritising and challenging service-level improvement activity.
- Review effectiveness of training for elected members and determine an improvement plan for delivering training in future.
- Improve the capture and reporting of benchmarking information, satisfaction levels and customer evaluation feedback, and reduce the reliance on data through better analysis and narrative summary.
- Refine the local performance indicators within the service plans to ensure that they are SMART, reflect priorities, and provide a better balance of service coverage, efficiency, economy, effectiveness and impact measures.
- Systematically apply a process of corporate quality assurance and challenge the content of service plans, performance reports and directorate-level public performance reporting; and the quality and balance of local performance indicators.
- Increase scrutiny of directorate and service performance, and community planning performance.
- Improve the effectiveness of consultation by coordinating activity between services and partners, and systematically feed back to communities how their views have changed things and explain where aspirations cannot be met.
- Establish comprehensive and continuing information about staff morale and satisfaction.
- Fully implement PMDP across all services and monitor results.
- Ensure implementation of the community planning improvement plan, particularly in relation to addressing the capacity of the themed partnerships to take forward the SOA outcomes, and developing a monitoring framework.

# East Dunbartonshire Council

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