

The audit of Best Value and  
Community Planning

---

# West Dunbartonshire Council

Progress report



Prepared for the Accounts Commission  
July 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.

# Contents

**Commission findings**

**page 2**

**Introduction**

**page 4**

**Conclusions**

**page 6**

**Progress at West Dunbartonshire  
Council**

**page 8**

The improvement plan

Strategic leadership

**page 9**

Culture

Capacity

**page 11**

Community engagement

Managing performance

**page 12**

Scrutiny

**page 13**

Managing resources

**page 14**

Competitiveness

Service performance

**page 15**

# Commission findings



- 1.** When the Accounts Commission published its findings on the Best Value follow-up audit progress report on West Dunbartonshire Council in January 2008, it requested a further report from the Controller of Audit in 18 months. The Commission accepts this report as fulfilling that requirement. We recognise that the report gives a broad picture of the council's performance based on the work of Audit Scotland and does not attempt a comprehensive review of all service delivery. We also acknowledge the co-operation and assistance given to the audit process by the leader and senior officers of the council.
- 2.** The Commission recognises that a number of services continue to demonstrate good levels of performance. These include education, social work and benefits administration. We also recognise that some progress has been made in other areas, including improved corporate working and increased capacity at senior officer level. This performance demonstrates the positive commitment of council staff.
- 3.** We find, however, that the council has made insufficient progress against key improvement priorities identified in the 2008 report. We believe that this is because the relationships between elected members and the nature of the political conflict among elected members are having a negative effect on the operation and development of the council. Elected members across the political spectrum have not demonstrated the corporate leadership required. There has also been limited progress in developing working relationships between elected members and senior officers. These issues are inhibiting improvement and, until they are resolved, the council will not achieve the necessary shift in attitude and focus required to deliver best value for the people of West Dunbartonshire.
- 4.** Other councils that have experienced difficulties in implementing best value have benefited from external assistance from the local government community and elsewhere. We therefore recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the council secures appropriate external support from peers (both members and officers) and others to address these significant problems.
- 5.** We have now published 32 Best Value audit reports and findings, and nine follow-up reports. West Dunbartonshire Council is the only case to date where a follow-up report and findings has led the Commission seriously to criticise the lack of progress. This underlines both the significance of the difficulties facing the council and the need for immediate action.
- 6.** As part of the stream-lining of scrutiny that the Scottish Government has asked the Accounts Commission to be involved in, Audit Scotland is currently working closely with other scrutiny bodies to deliver a shared risk assessment of West Dunbartonshire Council. We expect the issues identified in this report to feature strongly in that risk assessment and, in the context of joint working with our scrutiny partners, require a further progress report from the Controller of Audit in early course. We will give consideration at that point to any further measures that need to be taken.

# Introduction



The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced statutory duties relating to Best Value and Community Planning. The first audit of Best Value and Community Planning for West Dunbartonshire Council was carried out in 2006. Due to the contents of the Controller of Audit's report and additional representations received by the Accounts Commission, a decision was taken to hold a public hearing in November 2006. The Accounts Commission published its findings in February 2007. These were based on the Controller of Audit's report, a written submission by West Dunbartonshire Council, evidence given at the hearing and documents referred to in evidence at the hearing.

The Commission found that the council was not in a position to deliver best value. It concluded that decision-making was not as open and transparent as it should have been, there were serious problems with staff morale, the scrutiny regime was inadequate, there were poor relationships between members and officers, and there was a lack of effective leadership from senior elected members and officers. The Commission required the council to prepare and formally adopt an improvement plan to address the findings.

The Controller of Audit made a further report on the council's progress in implementing its statutory Best Value duty as at 31 July 2007. The progress report and Commission's findings were published in January 2008.

In its findings, the Commission acknowledged the council's increased commitment to continuous improvement and the progress made by the council within a fairly short timescale. It urged the council to move forward as quickly as possible on the areas where limited progress

had been made. Priority was to be given to:

- continuing to develop member/officer relationships
- establishing arrangements to demonstrate the competitiveness of its services
- developing robust financial planning
- improving community engagement.

The Commission considered that the council needed a longer period to put in place the improvements required to demonstrate best value and encouraged it to increase the momentum of change. The Commission requested a further report from the Controller of Audit 18 months from the publication of the findings in January 2008.

The council is currently led by a minority Scottish National Party (SNP) administration. The council has 22 elected members with nine SNP, eight Labour, one Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) and four independent members.

The detailed audit work for this progress report was undertaken during March 2009. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and assistance provided to the audit team by councillor Iain Robertson – leader of the council, David McMillan – chief executive, the corporate management team, David Webster – section head (performance management) and all other elected members and staff involved.

# Conclusions





The council has not made sufficient progress in dealing with the issues identified by the Accounts Commission in its 2008 progress report. While there is a focus on improvement activity, progress is inhibited by political conflict. The pace of change is slow and there is limited evidence of the impact of improvement, although a number of services continue to demonstrate good levels of performance. Elected members and chief officers need to work together better to provide strategic leadership and substantially increase and maintain the pace of change.

**1.** In 2007, the Accounts Commission found serious weaknesses in the council's corporate performance and behaviour. A further report in January 2008 noted some progress and identified some priorities for attention. However, since then the council has made slow or little progress on these priorities. There has been no progress in the council's arrangements for demonstrating the competitiveness of its services. Significant work is required to demonstrate improved member/officer relations. There has been little progress in improving community engagement. There is some progress in improving the council's approach to financial planning, although proposals for a robust financial framework have only recently been developed.

**2.** The council has made progress in other areas, such as improved corporate working and increased capacity within the corporate management team (CMT). It has an increased awareness of its own strengths and weaknesses including an improved understanding of the culture of the council and the barriers to change that this brings. The council has improved the coordination and reporting arrangements for the Best Value improvement programme.

**3.** The improvement work undertaken so far has put in place the foundations from which the council should be able to increase the pace of change, but the culture of the organisation continues to inhibit progress. Political conflict is making it difficult to sustain an agreed improvement programme. Elected members and senior officers need to work together better and demonstrate clear strategic leadership to improve the culture, increase the pace of change and take the difficult decisions necessary to manage the council's financial pressures.

**4.** Recent inspection activity and Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) information confirm the continuing good performance of a number of services, including education, social work and benefits administration, reflecting the commitment of council staff. Housing services remain an area of significant concern and are recognised by the council as a priority for improvement.

# Progress at West Dunbartonshire Council



## The improvement plan

Implementation of the council's improvement plan has been slow and there is limited evidence of the impact of improvement work. The council has strengthened coordination and reporting arrangements for the improvement plan, but it needs to prioritise improvement activity more effectively and increase the pace of change.

**5.** Following the January 2008 progress report the council revised its improvement plan, rearranging the work into five themed work streams and focusing on the immediate and medium-term priorities of the Accounts Commission's findings in the 2007 report, but it did not reprioritise the improvement plan. Progress against the four priorities highlighted by the Commission in the 2008 report has been disappointing. There has been limited progress in continuing to develop member/officer relationships, establishing arrangements to demonstrate the competitiveness of services and improving community engagement. However, there has been some progress in developing more robust arrangements for financial planning.

**6.** The clarity of the reporting framework and the coordination of the council's Best Value improvement plan (BVIP) have improved. In February 2008, the council set up an improvement and efficiency executive (I&EE), replacing the previous steering group and working group. Five work groups support the I&EE: resources; efficient government; risk and performance management; continuous improvement; and organisational development. A member of the CMT leads each group with support from nominated officers. The leader of the council chairs the I&EE and it includes eight other elected members, two SNP, four Labour, and two other opposition. The chief executive and other members of the CMT provide support to the I&EE.

**7.** The I&EE focuses on the implementation of the improvement plan and monitors progress in the five work streams. Progress is reported quarterly to the I&EE and to full council. Although the governance arrangements have improved, the group is not providing sufficiently strong leadership to the improvement work and is not driving forward the improvement agenda or challenging the pace of change.

**8.** While there is a significant amount of activity aimed at progressing the council's improvement plan, the pace of change has been slow and there is limited evidence of impact to date. [Exhibit 1 \(overleaf\)](#) illustrates the progress against the priorities identified in the 2007 Best Value report and the 2008 progress report.

**9.** Progress of the improvement plan is recorded and monitored through the Covalent performance management system. This assists reporting and coordination, although the approach for measuring progress is not fully effective and needs further development to better support monitoring of the impact of improvement activity.

## Strategic leadership

Elected members have not displayed the corporate leadership required to drive forward continuous improvement. Senior officers are working more corporately in support of members, but are struggling to achieve the required changes.

**10.** Elected members have a duty to demonstrate commitment to and leadership of Best Value and Community Planning. This includes complying with the principles of the Councillor's Code of Conduct. While member/officer relationships have remained generally positive on an individual basis, behaviour within the council chamber has at times fallen short of what is expected. Local media report these behaviours,

contributing to the challenging cultural issues faced by the council and adversely affecting staff morale.

**11.** Elected members do not always display high standards of conduct. The Standards Commission has recently suspended one elected member for nine months. This is his second suspension from the council. The elected member contravened the Councillor's Code of Conduct in a number of areas, in particular the key principle of respect. Following a series of particularly difficult meetings where members' behaviour towards senior officers was poor, the chief executive wrote to all elected members about their conduct at council meetings.

**12.** Elected members have not displayed the corporate leadership required to drive forward continuous improvement. Some members continue to display behaviours that do not support change and improvement and in many cases serve to inhibit progress. Political behaviour is characterised by in-fighting and partisan positions on important corporate decisions. This is a barrier to improving staff morale and the external reputation of the council.

**13.** In its findings on the 2008 progress report, the Accounts Commission urged the council to give priority to continuing the development of member/officer relationships. There has been limited work in this area, with the council only recently approving much of the improvement work. Progress has been slow, primarily because of the council's failure to agree what was required.

**14.** Officers first presented a report to council on improving member/officer relationships in November 2007. A seminar was held in April 2008, which was not attended by all political parties. A further report and action plan was presented to the council in November 2008. A second seminar was held in January 2009 and a report finally approved in February 2009. This was not unanimously agreed and

**Exhibit 1**

## Progress against improvement priorities

	Best Value report February 2007	Best Value progress report January 2008	Progress January 2008 March 2009
Immediate priorities	Establish arrangements that demonstrate openness and accountability in strategic decision-making processes.	Some progress	Some progress
	Develop and implement strategies to ensure effective management of resources.	Limited progress	Limited progress
	Ensure robust and effective scrutiny arrangements.	Some change but too early to fully assess effectiveness	Some progress
	Develop culture to support best value and continuous improvement.	Limited progress	Limited progress
	Review political and managerial structures.	Improvement	Improvement
	Provide elected member training.	Limited progress	Limited progress
	Agree and adopt community plan.	Improvement	
	Adopt action plans for areas of poor performance – housing in particular.	No progress	Some progress
	Refine and embed the new performance management framework.	No progress	Some progress – too early to assess effectiveness
	Establish arrangements to show competitiveness of services.	Limited progress	No progress
	Develop and embed risk management culture.	Some progress	Some progress
Medium term priorities	Ensure robust review and options appraisal on all services.	Improvement	Some progress
	Implement a leadership and management development programme.	Limited progress	Some progress – too early to assess effectiveness
	Review community engagement activity for efficiency and effectiveness.	Limited progress	Limited progress

**Improvement** – work undertaken to address identified priority.

**Some progress** – elements of improvement work in place, but does not fully meet identified priority.

**Limited progress** – work not sufficiently progressed.

**No progress** – work has not been progressed to address identified priority.

Source: Audit Scotland

was taken to a vote, with 12 elected members in favour, nine against and one abstention.

**15.** The approved recommendations from the report are broad principles. These include better working arrangements between officers and elected members, 'bitesize' development sessions for elected members and facilitated sessions with the Improvement Service. The recommendations will require further development and time for implementation before any impact on member/officer relations and culture can be assessed.

**16.** Members need to focus on achieving better outcomes for the area and their local communities. Lengthy discussions and politicised disputes on internal issues such as elected member development, while important, limit the time available to focus on delivering outcomes for communities and deflect staff resources from other priorities.

**17.** Senior officers recognise the need to change the culture in the organisation and some good initiatives have been put in place, albeit recently. They are working more corporately to support elected members and encouraging them to take the difficult decisions when required. However, the chief executive and his senior colleagues are still not succeeding in achieving the changes that are required.

## Culture

Progress with addressing cultural issues has been slow, staff morale is low and the culture of the council remains a barrier to moving the council forward.

**18.** The culture of the organisation is complex but is characterised by challenging political behaviours and low staff morale. These cultural issues prolong decision-making processes and make long-term planning difficult.

They also negatively affect the levels of engagement in improvement work across the council, inhibiting progress towards change.

**19.** Chief officers show an improved level of self-awareness, as well as an increased commitment to addressing the improvement programme and the wider cultural challenges facing the council. However, there has been little real impact to date and the slow pace of change indicates that there are barriers to the organisation's improvement.

**20.** The CMT recognises the need to address the wider cultural issues within the organisation but so far has not managed to bring about significant improvement. With support from external consultants, the council has recently started an organisational culture change project. The project involves: assessing the current culture; setting a goal of where it should be in the future; assessing what the challenges to achieving this are; planning what needs to change and what needs to be done; and implementing a change process.

**21.** The initial work to assess and map the current culture has involved eight focus groups of approximately 150 staff in total. The findings reflect those issues highlighted in the 2007 Best Value report and in the council's own 2007 staff survey, including poor staff morale; lack of empowerment; staff not feeling valued; poor internal communication; and a lack of visible leadership.

**22.** While recent activity, such as the culture change project, shows a commitment to improvement, the delay in dealing with the cultural challenges faced by the council continues to have a negative impact on the organisation and its ability to move forward effectively.

## Capacity

The council has enhanced its strategic capacity by revising structures and appointing new senior managers. It now needs to ensure it has the capacity across the organisation to take forward improvement activity. Progress has been slow in establishing development programmes for elected members and officers.

**23.** The revised political and managerial structures agreed by council in June 2007 are now well established. The implementation of the revised management structure, which includes the corporate services directorate and a range of new posts such as an organisational development manager and public relations and marketing manager, is helping to improve internal capacity.

**24.** The CMT now comprises the chief executive and four executive directors. Three of the executive directors were appointed at the end of 2007; two were external appointments, with one joining from the private sector. Both of these directors took up post early in 2008. Officers and elected members we spoke to during the follow-up audit indicated that the team is working well together.

**25.** There has been some progress in improving arrangements for elected member development, but full implementation is some way off. The council is one of seven local authorities involved in the Improvement Service's pilot leadership programme for elected members. Eleven elected members have undertaken a self-assessment and ten have participated in a 360-degree assessment. The supporting training and development programme has yet to be implemented.

**26.** Elected members need to make better use of learning and development opportunities. The uptake by elected members for courses and seminars is variable:

- Attendance at training on regulatory activities is good with all required members attending licensing and planning training.
- Training arranged on the council appeals process for employee disciplinary and grievance procedures had no attendance from the ten elected members invited to attend.
- Attendance at training on other issues has been disappointing: risk management (four of 22), performance management and scrutiny (eight of 22), and equalities and diversity (ten of 22).

**27.** Progress has continued to be slow in improving opportunities for leadership and management development. This was identified as a medium priority in the initial Best Value report and the lack of progress was commented on in the 2008 progress report. Some elements are beginning to be put in place:

- A new individual performance management and personal development framework including a comprehensive competency framework. The CMT and some heads of service are now using this framework. This now needs to be adapted for wider deployment.
- Establishing a training framework for frontline managers and middle managers, which includes piloting three courses with Clydebank College which started in March 2009, covering 42 managers.

**28.** Improved leadership and management development is required to address cultural issues and capacity for improvement. However, it will take some time for all of the leadership and management development training arrangements, including

the individual performance and development framework, to be rolled out and start to contribute positively to the culture and capacity of the organisation.

**29.** Corporate improvement activity is heavily dependent on the skills and commitment of a small number of key individuals. The council needs to build sustainable internal capacity to ensure the improvement work streams are taken forward at an appropriate pace. Much of the improvement activity will require significant effort to progress and successfully implement. The council currently does not demonstrate the capacity to roll out some areas of work to which it has committed itself, including the public sector improvement framework (PSIF) and the introduction of the Kaizen Blitz approach to service improvement.

**30.** A regular management forum, the senior managers network (SMN), is encouraging more interaction and engagement between managers. The CMT should continue to develop this forum to assist in the delivery of the Best Value improvement programme.

### Community engagement

The council has agreed a community engagement strategy, but overall there has been limited progress in improving community engagement.

**31.** The council has made limited progress in improving community engagement activity, which was highlighted as a priority by the Commission in the 2008 progress report. However, it has made some progress with developing a community engagement framework.

**32.** The council has agreed a community engagement strategy and a consultation strategy, and a joint action plan is being developed. These strategies and the action plan provide a framework for the council to improve the current arrangements. The council plans to develop and

integrate its community engagement approach further as part of the community planning partnership arrangements, which are currently under review.

**33.** Individually, some council services have demonstrated good levels of engagement with the local community. The Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) report on social work services published in April 2009 highlighted 'high levels of community involvement in social work activities and the community work team fulfilled a positive community development role'. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) in its 2003 INEA inspection report judged the mechanisms for consultation and communication to be 'very good' for education services. Early indications from the 2009 HMIE inspection suggest that the service continues to perform well in this area.

### Managing performance

The council has made progress in revising its performance management framework. This now demonstrates some strengths at a corporate level, although there is a need to improve the consistency of departmental and service planning.

**34.** The January 2008 progress report highlighted that the council had made little progress in improving its approach to performance management. It has now developed a revised performance management framework, which came into operation from 1 April 2009. It is too early to assess its impact on performance.

**35.** The scope of the revised framework now goes beyond quarterly performance reporting on departmental plans, to include reporting on the corporate plan, the strategic risk register, the single outcome agreement and the community plan. The framework includes reporting to elected members, the CMT and departmental

management teams, based on reports from the new Covalent performance management system.

**36.** The council commissioned an external consultant to review its corporate, departmental and service planning, and performance reporting. The consultant's findings were presented to the Audit and Performance Review Committee (A&PRC) in March 2009. Some strengths in reporting of performance, particularly at a corporate level, were highlighted. These included a clear, concise corporate plan with strong reporting at council level, community plan and single outcome agreement. Reporting at department level was also considered comprehensive and balanced.

**37.** The report also recommended:

- early involvement of members in the planning and performance reporting process
- the inclusion of milestones and resource implications for major projects, plus performance reporting on their progress
- a simplified, consistent form of departmental or service plan, with an appropriate choice of indicators to provide a rounded view of performance.

**38.** The Covalent performance and risk management system has been implemented since the January 2008 progress report. The council has trained 146 staff in the use of the system and continues to run training sessions twice-monthly, with eight places available per session.

**39.** The 'traffic light' system of performance reporting, which was not successful, has been changed so that performance indicators are now graded according to deviations from targets, instead of national ranking. This change should encourage appropriate target setting, and review and challenge by senior management and elected members.

**40.** Poorly performing SPIs now have actions logged in the Covalent system. These are reported through the service plan scorecards, where the indicators and related improvement actions are linked to departmental or corporate objectives. As part of the revised remit of the A&PRC, reports on poorly performing performance indicators should be presented to this committee to allow members to scrutinise the corrective action being taken by the service committees. This approach is not yet in place.

**41.** The council is implementing the PSIF. Five service areas were selected as pilot areas for the PSIF. They undertook a self-assessment based on the framework but have yet to complete implementation plans. This has led to a delay in rolling out the framework across the council.

**42.** The council is pursuing a number of other improvement initiatives including Kaizen Blitz. There has been a delay in developing an action plan for the Kaizen Blitz activity. A diagnostic pathway programme, reviewing and identifying opportunities for shared services and efficiencies will also require significant effort to implement successfully.

### Scrutiny

Scrutiny by elected members continues to improve slowly, but there is scope to further develop the arrangements to support better scrutiny of performance and decision-making.

**43.** The January 2008 progress report highlighted that improved scrutiny arrangements were agreed in August 2007 following a review of the council's committee structures and remits. The revised arrangements are now established and supporting improved scrutiny. Performance information is considered at the relevant service committees and

A&PRC takes an overview role. There is further scope to improve scrutiny as the performance management framework and performance information system is developed further.

**44.** The progress report also stated that scrutiny was improving through more robust challenge from elected members. Elected members and senior officers of the council regard the level of questioning by elected members at council and committee as robust and challenging. Options appraisal is becoming a routine part of strategic decision-making, and members challenge officers where they are not included in relevant reports to committee.

**45.** In January 2008, a revised remit for the A&PRC was agreed. The remit gives the committee oversight of activity including: performance information; audit and risk management; development and implementation of Best Value and continuous improvement; Community Planning; and Efficient Government matters. However, the committee still predominantly considers internal and external audit reports and reviews of performance information, such as SPIs and absence management statistics. Since the meeting in January 2008, there have been no reports to the committee relating to the corporate complaints system and little relating to continuous improvement, Efficient Government or service areas identified as poorly performing. The council needs to consider how the full range of issues within the committee's remit can be addressed more thoroughly.

**46.** The council recognises that further development is required in the arrangements for decision-making and scrutiny of decision-making. Recommendations agreed in February 2009 by council include: elected member involvement at an early stage in the processes leading up to strategic decisions; establishing an annual programme of key strategic issues; establishing mechanisms to manage implementation of strategic

decisions; undertaking a complete review of the scrutiny function; and providing further development sessions for elected members on scrutiny.

**47.** In April 2008, four lay members were included in the A&PRC. They were appointed by their respective organisations and represent the business community, voluntary sector, community councils, and tenants and residents groups. The inclusion of lay members can be a positive development, but there is little evidence to date of the impact that this arrangement has had on the scrutiny work of the committee. No specific needs assessment was performed in order to identify necessary skills and experience required of lay members. The planned review of the scrutiny function should include an assessment of how effective these arrangements have been and whether they can be improved.

## Managing resources

### Financial planning

The council has made some progress in improving its approach to financial planning. It has introduced three-year revenue and capital budgeting but has not yet approved a financial strategy. Strong leadership is required from elected members, with the support of senior officers, to take the strategic decisions required to address the current financial pressures.

**48.** The council has put in place financial plans that cover the next three years. It continues to face significant financial pressures in both revenue and capital budgets; the indicative budget information currently identifies a budget gap of around £7.3 million for 2010/11. The unallocated general reserves at 31 March 2008 stood at £2.3 million, below the prudential reserves level approved by council of two per cent of net expenditure, equivalent to £4.8 million. The capital programme has

been revised due to an expected reduction in capital receipts because of the current economic conditions.

**49.** The council had intended to complete its financial strategy by August 2008, but it has not yet been finalised. Following the 2009/10 budget-setting process, the development of a robust financial framework was proposed. The expectation is that this framework will provide the foundation for long-term financial planning, including strategic policy decisions. Strong leadership and direction from elected members, with the support of senior officers, is required to enable the council to focus on long-term efficiencies and service provision and to shape the financial strategy around these decisions.

**50.** The council enhanced its joint planning and budget guidance for 2009-13. This framework for preparing directorate plans and budgets now provides clearer links to the corporate plan outcomes and the strategic risks which may impact on delivery of these objectives. It is intended that departmental risks will be included within the guidance to ensure these are considered as part of the budget-setting process.

### Risk management

The council has made further progress in embedding risk management into its decision-making processes.

**51.** The council is making progress towards embedding risk management within its decision-making processes. Strategic, departmental and operational risk registers are now included within the Covalent performance management system. This provides section heads and managers with access to performance indicators, action plans and related risks in one system.

**52.** All committee reports include a risk analysis section, but this is not linked to the identified risks within the risk registers. The council needs to

embed this to obtain full benefit from its risk management framework.

### People management

The council has made limited progress in developing a workforce planning strategy. However, it has increased its capacity by recruiting additional HR and organisational development professionals.

**53.** The council has made limited progress in developing a workforce planning strategy, with the corporate HR team still working on the framework to take this forward. Capacity has, however, been increased within the HR team, with a new organisational development manager and additional professional HR support now in post.

**54.** The council is in the process of procuring a new HR system although this will not be fully operational until April 2010. This is an important tool for the long-term improvement of HR management in the council. The council implemented the single status agreement during 2008/09 based on a 37-hour working week, including rationalisation of pay and grading, terms and conditions and allowances. This had been a major barrier to progress in developing workforce planning, requiring significant HR time input and completion of a detailed data cleansing exercise.

**55.** The level of sickness absence remains a significant priority for action. The 2007/08 statutory performance indicators show sickness absence rates for chief officers and local government employees around the Scottish average (5.8) at 5.9 per cent (ranked 21), craft employees are higher than the Scottish average (6.6) at 7.2 per cent (ranked 23) and teachers are around the Scottish average (3.9) at 4.0 per cent (ranked 19). The figures for chief officers and local government employees have not improved significantly since 2005/06. Corporate HR and organisational development have now identified a number of initiatives aimed at



tackling the underlying causes of absence. These include an attendance management pilot, procurement of a new occupational health provider, a stress management steering group, a dignity at work policy, and a newly established alcohol and substance misuse policy.

**Competitiveness**

The council has made limited progress in establishing arrangements to demonstrate the competitiveness of its services.

**56.** The January 2008 progress report detailed the findings of an external consultant’s report, commissioned by the council in 2007, on the council’s approach to competitiveness. The report, presented to the council’s corporate and efficient governance committee in September 2007, made 52 recommendations. The council has done little to address these recommendations directly since then.

**57.** The council’s progress report on its BVIP recognises that corporate approaches to competitiveness and options appraisal are still at an early stage. A working group is developing a framework and action plan for taking forward work on improving the arrangements. The council needs to make significant progress in this area before it will be able to demonstrate the competitiveness of its services.

**Service performance**

Service performance is improving. The SPIs show good performance improvement overall since 2005/06 but some areas of continuing weaker performance remain. Housing services are still an area of concern although the council is making progress on its improvement plan. Education and social work services continue to perform well. The council needs to ensure that its improvement programme helps to improve service delivery.

**Statutory performance indicators**

**58.** SPIs do not give a comprehensive picture of performance across all services, but they allow some comparisons to be made between councils and over time. There has been good improvement across the SPIs between 2005/06 and 2007/08. During this period, the council’s performance improved by five per cent or more on 36 SPI measures and worsened by five per cent or more on 15. This gives the council an improvement to decline ratio of 2.4, significantly higher than the national average of 1.7 (*Exhibit 2*).

**59.** In 2007/08, the proportion of SPIs in the upper quartile of all Scottish authorities was 24.7 per cent (compared to 20.8 per cent in 2005/06) with 17.3 per cent of indicators in the bottom quartile (compared to 20.8 per cent in 2005/06) (*Exhibit 3*).

**60.** Four SPIs that were in the bottom quartile in 2005/06 had not improved by at least five per cent by 2007/08. These include:

- the percentage of council tax income for the year that was collected in the year, although this has improved year on year
- the percentage of working days lost through sickness absence for chief officers and local government employees
- the percentage of primary schools in which the ratio of pupils to available places is between 61 and 100 per cent
- the number of library borrowers as a percentage of the resident population.

**Housing services**

**61.** An inspection by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) in 2003/04 graded the council’s housing services a B (good) grade for its homelessness services, a C (fair) grade for property maintenance and a D (poor) grade for housing management. SHR carried out an interim inspection in 2008 and published the findings in November 2008.

**Exhibit 2**

SPI profiles: 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
WDC	8	1	6	7	8	21

Source: Audit Scotland

**Exhibit 3**

SPI profiles: Proportion of indicators in quartiles 1 and 4

	Quartile 1		Quartile 4	
	No. of indicators	%	No. of indicators	%
2005/06	16 of 77	20.8	16 of 77	20.8
2007/08	20 of 81	24.7	14 of 81	17.3

Source: Audit Scotland

The interim inspection report noted that the council had not met some timescales within its remedial plan, and faced a challenge in implementing the remaining actions and a need to develop capacity if the council was to improve performance.

**62.** The council recognises that it needs to improve its housing service and is focusing on achieving this. It had appointed a new housing service senior management team before the interim inspection and it is now implementing an improvement plan. It is currently meeting its timescales to implement this plan and is using external assistance to develop its expertise in particular areas.

**63.** The council remains in the bottom two quartiles for SPI performance in eight out of 11 housing performance indicators. However, performance has increased by more than ten per cent since 2005/06 in four of these indicators.

#### Education services

**64.** The council was the subject of an INEA inspection by HMIE in 2008/09. The results of this inspection will be available late June 2009. Early indications suggest that education services continue to build on the good work established following previous inspections.

**65.** During the previous 18 months, ten schools (one secondary, nine primaries) have been subject to an HMIE inspection. There were no major issues and some good practice identified; only one primary school requires a follow-through investigation.

**66.** HMIE published a report in May 2009 on a joint follow-through inspection of services to protect children and young people in the West Dunbartonshire area. The report notes that the council and its partner agencies had made significant progress against the main points for action in the original inspection report (2007). It considers services to be well placed to work together to continue to improve the quality of services to protect children.

#### Social work services

**67.** The Social Work Inspection Agency has recently inspected the council's social work services. In its April 2009 report, SWIA rated the council's social work service as 'good' in all aspects of the service except delivery of key processes, which it rated as 'adequate' (Exhibit 4). Delivery of key processes relates to management of services from initial contact with service users through to assessment, care planning and service delivery, as well as day-to-day planning and resource allocation.

#### Benefits administration

**68.** Audit Scotland's report on *Housing and Council Tax Benefit Services in West Dunbartonshire Council* (January 2009) highlighted good practice in a number of performance areas. The council has subsequently prepared an action plan to address the risks to continuous improvement identified in

the assessment and these actions are due for completion by December 2009.

**69.** The report concluded that the council clearly demonstrates an awareness of what constitutes an effective, efficient and secure benefits service and has much in place to support local and national objectives. The council has improved its claims processing performance since 2006/07, as well as its recovery rate of overpayments. However, the council benefits investigation team has a low profile in general. The council website has basic details on benefit fraud but no facility to complete an online fraud referral, and there is a need for more detailed target setting and reporting of counter-fraud performance to senior management and elected members.

### Exhibit 4

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

Area for evaluation	Evaluation
Outcomes for people who use services	Good
Impact on people who use services and 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	Good
Management and support of staff	Good
Resources and capacity building	Good
Leadership and direction	Good
Capacity for improvement	Good

**Excellent** – excellent or outstanding.

**Very good** – major strengths.

**Good** – important strengths with some areas for improvement.

**Adequate** – strengths just outweigh weaknesses.

**Weak** – important weaknesses.

**Unsatisfactory** – major weaknesses.

Source: SWIA May 2009

# West Dunbartonshire Council

## Progress report

If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us to discuss your needs.

You can also download this document at:

[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)



Audit Scotland, 110 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4LH  
T: 0845 146 1010 F: 0845 146 1009  
[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)

ISBN 978 1 906752 54 5

Printed on Revive 100 Uncoated, a recycled grade, containing 100% post consumer waste and manufactured at a mill accredited with ISO 14001 environmental management standard. The pulp used in this product is bleached using an Elemental Chlorine Free process (ECF).