

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 12 JUNE 2006

REPORT ON: BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - REVIEW THE COUNCIL STRUCTURE

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 338-2006

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To review the Council Structure to ensure a better fit with Corporate Objectives, the needs of service users and organisational efficiencies.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

To agree the conclusion outlined in Section 10.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications.

4. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

The proposals in this report will enable the Council to continue to take forward Local Agenda 21 issues.

5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

The proposals in this report will enable the Council to continue to take forward Equal Opportunities issues.

6. BACKGROUND

An area identified for improvement arising from the Best Value Audit was the Council Structure in order to ensure a better fit with corporate objectives, the needs of services users and organisational efficiencies.

7. UPDATE SINCE THE BEST VALUE AUDIT

Members will recall that a report to the Policy and Resources Committee on 17 October 2005 on the Council Management Team agreed a new structure and remit of meetings. Arising from that report a revised Management Team structure is now in place with a revised Management Team meeting on a regular monthly basis to deal with operational issues and corporate information matters.

In addition the Management Team has met monthly to examine in depth strategic areas concentrating around performance monitoring. The Strategic priorities are grouped under three headings: Achieving the Council Plan Vision; Modernisation; and People and Resources. Within these headings presentations have been made to the team on topics such as the Council's Customer First Strategy, Technology Infrastructure (including Business Continuity issues), the Annual Consumer Survey and Voice Recognition Systems.

Further presentations are planned around Planning Issues/Population, Housing Markets and opportunities to use other sectors to improve/increase the delivery of services. The Chief Executive's Departmental Team which consists of the Depute Chief Executive (Finance), Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Assistant Chief Executive (Management) and Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) meets weekly to discuss operational matters.

7.1 MODERNISING DECISION MAKING STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

The Best Value Auditors wished the Council to examine its structures to enable the Council to move forward with its modernising agenda and its efficiency programme. Local Authorities all adopt different Council structures to ensure that decision making and scrutiny are effective and that there is good corporate governance.

At present:

- all members are on virtually all Committees, which provides a direct opportunity to debate and challenge policy decisions and allows Committees to have full delegated powers, speeding up decisions since these don't have to be ratified by the full Council
- Committee meetings are restricted to three evenings per month, and guidance has been issued on the style and length of reports which makes decision-making clear
- operational matters are delegated to officers, reducing the number of routine reports
- complex issues have been explored in detail by member/officer working groups.

The current Committee/Council structure is effective in dealing with the day to day decision making of the Council and is fairly readily understood by members of the public in that, for example, the Education Committee deals with all matters relating to our schools. If a member of the public wishes to make a representation on an education matter they will do so either through the Director of Education, the Education Convener, or to the Education Committee. However, if we are to move forward with our modernising agenda and ensure effective and efficient governance it was accepted at the time of the Best Value Audit that we would need to make some changes to the existing Council structure.

The changes that have been made so far are to add to the Best Value Committee duties around performance management and around the efficient government agenda. This will ensure that elected members are able to scrutinise the Council's performance that has been outlined in the Council Plan, Departmental Plans, and other action plans. Elected members will also be involved in the process around modernising Council services and efficiency programmes. This will be achieved by expanding the number of Member/Officer working groups involved in dealing with specific issues, such as Occupational Therapy services or Education attainment. These Member/Officer Groups should include a greater involvement from service users, the voluntary service and health colleagues.

As mentioned earlier, local authorities operate different structures. Some have introduced cabinet models of working; while others have development Committees dealing with integrated services, such as Children's Services. Whatever structure Dundee City Council operates under, it has to be one that ensures all elected members

feel involved in decision making and that there is effective scrutiny of Council decisions. Any major change to our current Council structure would have to be incremental as otherwise there would be an effect on how we met our commitments in respect of the Best Value Audit external inspection of our services, and include issues such as Equal Pay and Single Status. The Council may therefore wish to continue to examine its Council structures but not make any radical changes until 2007/2008 when a new Administration will have been appointed.

7.2 MODERNISING CUSTOMER SERVICE

In the meantime the Council will continue to move forward with its modernising customer services agenda. The Council Plan 2003-2007 committed the Council to be more customer focused and less concerned about departmental boundaries. Achievements include:

- Customer Contact Centres established to provide a high standard of modern telephone and face to face service in:
 - Revenues and Benefits
 - Housing Repairs
 - Corporate Customer Services Team
- Further customer contact centres being established in new regional housing offices (east and west) for letting, rent collection and capital contracts
- A 'First Contact' team in the Social Work Department to deliver a single shared assessment using a new organisation system model that dramatically cuts the process time
- A growing rate of self-service facilities for ordering and paying for services on the council's website are available and approximately £5m per annum (growing at 45% per annum) is being taken this way
- 44,000 Dundee Discovery smartcards for accessing a range of council and non-council services for which a card is required have been issued
- A citizen account and corporate address gazetteer has been established that provides the Council with the capability to join up data and services to eliminate the need for customers to complete numerous forms with the same information
- A new customer first strategy and a commitment to achieve a one stop shop in the new city centre offices

The Council Plan also commits the Council to review areas of policy and service delivery where it believes there are clear opportunities to change and do things better. A programme of reviews has been established, all of which will examine the need to modernise services.

In conclusion the Council has made significant progress in moving forward with modernising customer service but there is a considerable involvement of staff in achieving this type of change.

8 FUTURE PROGRAMME

In order that elected members can be fully involved in our modernising projects and our efficiency agenda, action plans will be submitted to the Best Value Committee. These action plans will be developed with "smart targets" and the larger projects will be developed using PRINCE2 principles.

As we move forward with some major projects, such as E-procurement, more Member/Officer working groups will need to be established and the outcome of these reviews should be scrutinised by the Best Value Committee.

9. MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Management Team will continue to undertake its own monitoring of performance, and will be actively involved with elected members in taking forward our agenda to modernise and improve our services throughout the Council. This commitment will be supported through the development of projects, such as our human resource strategy, which was also part of our commitment under the Best Value Audit.

If, in the future, elected members decide to change the organisational structure of the Council then, at that time, it would be appropriate to also review the structure of the Management Team. However, the Chief Executive will continue to establish where changes can be made within the management structure of the Council to develop services on a corporate basis, rather than on a departmental basis. It will also be necessary to develop more integrated working within the Council between Housing and Social Work, and between Social Work, Education and Leisure & Communities.

10. CONCLUSION

The Council structure be reviewed by the new Administration after the Local Government Elections in May 2007, based on a continual review of Council structures being operated by local authorities throughout Scotland.

11. CONSULTATION

The Depute Chief Executive (Finance), the Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and the Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) have been consulted regarding the contents of this report.

Alex Stephen
Chief Executive

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