

Executive Summary

- The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 established Best Value and community planning as statutory duties for councils. As a result, the Accounts Commission has introduced new cyclical arrangements for the audit of Best Value. Normally, the audit of Best Value will only be carried out once in a three-year period at each council. As it will be up to three years before some councils are exposed to a full audit of Best Value, there is a need for some high-level transitional work to be carried out at councils not included in the 2003/04 programme of Best Value audits.
- There are four main objectives in carrying out the transitional work at the councils not being covered in year one of the audit of Best Value:
 - ◆ to help councils develop their response to the new legislation and to prepare for the full audit;
 - ◆ to provide the Best Value audit team with background information on key areas, helping to inform the full audit in subsequent years;
 - ◆ to contribute to the selection of councils for the 2005 programme of Best Value audits; and
 - ◆ to identify possible examples of good practice.
- To complete the transitional work, auditors have drawn on their existing knowledge of the Council and on information readily available, and then produced a position statement on five selected areas:
 - ◆ the performance management system;
 - ◆ elected members and their scrutiny role;
 - ◆ service performance;
 - ◆ public performance reporting; and
 - ◆ community planning.
- This report summarises Argyll & Bute Council's current arrangements in each of these areas. No action plan is to be agreed. Instead the Council is to progress its Best Value and community planning arrangements through its own continuous improvement strategies.
- The Council has demonstrated commitment to development of its Best Value and community planning frameworks to meet the requirements of the 2003 Act. It has made progress on a number of fronts and is reviewing current practice in a number of areas. Areas of good practice include:

Performance Management System

- ◆ The Council has an approved Performance Management System in place;

- ◆ A formally documented Service planning system has been approved and is in place;
- ◆ A regular quarterly review process is undertaken which monitors implementation progress in respect of service action plans;
- ◆ A Citizens Panel has been set up and Benchmarking mechanisms put in place for feedback;
- ◆ An Audit Committee, which promotes internal controls, meets regularly and reviews progress on internal and external audit reports. A programme of formal scrutiny and service reviews has recently been re-established;

Service Performance

- ◆ The creation of a Best Value network, which aims to raise awareness and develop a better understanding of best value within services.

Public Performance Reporting

- ◆ A wide range of informative information is held on the Council's website, including minutes of all committee meetings and performance indicator information
- ◆ A Public Performance Report is produced and available to all households in the area each year.

Community Planning

- ◆ A Community Planning Partnership was launched in 2001, comprising representatives from 23 organisations;
 - ◆ A Community Plan Action Plan has been agreed in conjunction with formalised monitoring arrangements;
 - ◆ The ongoing development of a new Community Planning Partnership framework to facilitate the integration of the Social Inclusion Partnerships and deliver the principles behind the Scottish Executive's regeneration statement and the Local Government Scotland Act;
- However, there are a number of areas where action should be taken to ensure that the frameworks in place are effective in demonstrating a positive impact on service delivery. The main areas where action is planned or where action should be considered by the Council are.

Performance Management System

- ◆ Closer alignment of service plans to budgets;
- ◆ Development and inclusion of a balanced set of local indicators which are both SMART and Outcome based;
- ◆ Review mechanism for updating service plans;

- ◆ Implement balanced scorecard approach across services;
- ◆ Implement mechanism to monitor overall performance against corporate objectives;
- ◆ Provide clearer link between corporate and service objectives.

Elected Members and their Scrutiny Role

- ◆ Facilitate scrutiny by elected members of performance reports;
- ◆ Improve monitoring arrangements in respect of the recommendations arising from reviews and allow for member scrutiny of this process;
- ◆ Agree a best value strategy and ensure effective leadership by elected members;
- ◆ Review performance reporting system to provide a single report containing both financial and performance information.

Service Performance

- ◆ Review and standardise the format and content of the service plan performance reports to ensure they provide an effective assessment of service performance for users.
- ◆ Public Performance Reporting
- ◆ Publish Public Performance Reports timeously;
- ◆ Corporate Public Performance Reports to incorporate service objectives and local indicators;
- ◆ Services to develop their own local public performance reporting frameworks.

Community Planning

- ◆ Implementation of the revised community planning structure.

The co-operation and assistance afforded to audit staff during the course of the audit is gratefully acknowledged.