

From: [REDACTED]
Local Government Division
31 May 2018

Minister for Local Government and Housing

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL – BEST VALUE AUDIT 2018

Purpose

1. To brief you and provide lines to take on a Best Value Audit Report on West Dunbartonshire Council, which will be considered by the Accounts Commission at its meeting on Thursday 7 June. The report, a copy of which accompanies this submission, is still embargoed and should become public on Monday 4 June or Tuesday 5 June when it is published on the Commission's website along with the other papers for the meeting.

Priority

2. **Urgent** in terms of agreeing reactive lines, **routine** in terms of noting the content of the report.

Background

3. This report seeks to provide the Accounts Commission with assurance on the council's statutory duty to deliver Best Value, with a particular focus on the Commission's Strategic Audit Priorities covering:
 - the clarity of council priorities and the quality of long-term planning to achieve these
 - how effectively councils evaluate and implement options for significant changes in delivering services
 - how effectively councils ensure that councillors and officers have the right knowledge, skills and time to lead and manage delivery of council priorities
 - how effectively councils involve citizens in decisions about services
 - the quality of councils' public performance reporting (PPR) to help citizens gauge improvement.
4. This report was produced as a product of the Commission's commitment to a continuous program of Best Value Audit of Local Government and was not generated as a consequence of any concern regarding West Dunbartonshire Council.

Audit Assessment

5. The overall tone of the report is positive reflecting what Audit Scotland has identified as significant improvement since the previous BV Report in 2007. It does note some concerns, notably a projected funding gap of £13.8 million for the three years to 31 March 2021, which will be a challenge to make up, and some slippage in its capital program which has resulted in the late delivery of some projects. The Report's key messages and Recommendations are set out in the Annex to this submission.

Next Steps

6. The Accounts Commission will consider the report on 7 June. We do not normally comment on reports before the Commission has considered them. We therefore suggest the following standard line for the media:

[REDACTED]

7. We expect that the report with the Accounts Commission's findings will be published towards the end of this month. We will receive an embargoed copy of the report and findings before its publication, and at that point we will propose tailored media lines and provide a draft letter for you to send to the Council Leader.

Recommendation

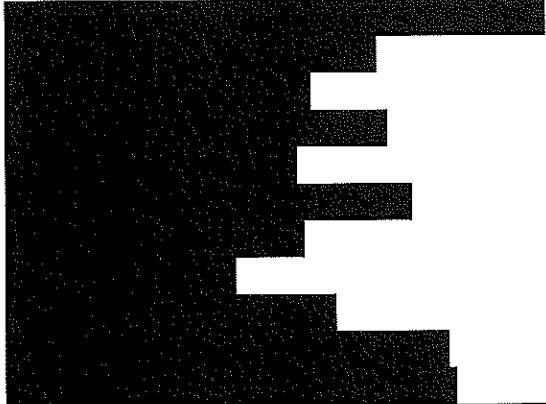
8. You are invited to note the content of the report and agree the media line at paragraph 6 above.

[REDACTED]
Local Government and Analytical Services Division
[REDACTED]

31 May 2017

Copy List:	For Action	For Comments	For Information		
			Portfolio Interest	Constit Interest	General Awareness
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution			X		
Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities			X		

DG Education, Communities and Justice
Stephen Gallagher, Director Local Government and Communities
Donna Mackinnon, DD Local Government and Analytical Services



WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL – BEST VALUE AUDIT 2018**The key messages of the audit assessment set out in the Report are:**

1. Since our last Best Value Report in 2007, West Dunbartonshire Council has made significant improvements in how it works. The council now demonstrates a focus on delivering Best Value and we found evidence of continuous improvement in its services.
2. In 2007, the Accounts Commission highlighted extensive and fundamental weaknesses in leadership and direction and poor relationships among elected members and between members and officers. Since then, changes to the senior officer team, including the appointment of the current Chief Executive in 2011, have played a key role in the improvements the council has made. Officers and councillors from all parties work well together for the benefit of the residents of West Dunbartonshire.
3. Overall, service performance is improving and most residents who have provided feedback to the council are satisfied. The council maintains a steady pace of change that has led to improved outcomes in its priority areas including housing services and educational attainment amongst schoolchildren.
4. The Council's latest Strategic Plan 2017-2022 lays out a focused and ambitious vision for the period, which reflects the needs of its community. There is evidence to demonstrate that the views of the community influenced council budget-setting and decision-making. The Strategic Plan is clearly aligned to the Community Planning Partnership's strategic priorities.
5. The Strategic Improvement Framework provides a structured and practical approach to help council services to continue to improve. The council has demonstrated a commitment to delivering services differently in West Dunbartonshire and is working well with partners to achieve this. Partnership initiatives include:
 - a shared IT data centre with East Dunbartonshire Council
 - membership of the Civil Contingencies Service with Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde councils
 - a communications partnership with Stirling Council.
6. The council has a good record of delivering services within budget. It has developed both medium and long-term financial plans. However, it has a projected funding gap of £13.8 million for the three years to 31 March 2021, which will be a challenge to make up. Service reform needs to continue.
7. In recent years, the council has significantly expanded its capital budget, which pays for projects such as buildings and roads. But there is a trend of significant slippage in the capital programme, which means that a number of projects are being finished late. The council now needs to strengthen project planning and management.
8. The council has a detailed organisation-wide, five-year workforce plan and individual service-specific workforce plans.

9. Our 2007 report highlighted that scrutiny in the council needed to improve. There is evidence of significant improvement in this area, with members working together and demonstrating stronger scrutiny.

Recommendations

To reduce the level of slippage on the capital plan, the council should review its project management processes. The council could use the Major capital investment in councils: good practice guide as the basis of a self- assessment.

Workforce plans are in place and should be further developed to include forecasts of workforce numbers, the expected shape of the workforce and costs, over the planning period. Progress should be monitored.

Some staff are finding the pace of change challenging and staff absence remains an issue. The council is taking positive steps to try and address this and should continue to explore opportunities for improvement.

The Community Alliance (CA) brings together representatives from neighbourhood, interest and user groups. The council sees it as an important engagement link with the community but there are a number of challenges that it needs to address. The council should continue to offer help to further develop the role of the CA and help it reach its full potential.

Councillors should consider working in cross-party groups to address the financial challenges which exist and the important decisions required in the future.

From: [REDACTED]
Local Government and Analytical Services Div
25 June 2018

Minister for Local Government and Housing

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL: BEST VALUE ASSURANCE FOLLOW-UP REPORT: PUBLICATION AND ACCOUNTS COMMISSION FINDINGS

Purpose

1. To brief you on the publication of the Best Value Assurance Report on West Dunbartonshire Council, with the Accounts Commission's findings on the report, that is to take place on 28 June; and to provide lines to take and a draft of a letter to send to the Leader of the Council. The report and findings are embargoed until **28 June**.

Priority

2. **Urgent** in terms of agreeing media lines, **routine** in relation to writing to the Council Leader.

Discussion

3. The report, which accompanies this submission, follows Audit Scotland's recent Best Value audit of West Dunbartonshire Council. The last BV audit of the Council was carried out in 2010. This report was produced as a product of the Commission's commitment to a continuous programme of Best Value Audit of local government and was not generated as a consequence of any concern regarding West Dunbartonshire Council.

4. My submission of 31 May provided initial advice on the report. The Accounts Commission considered the report at its meeting on 7 June, when it agreed to make findings and publish the report.

5. The overall tone of the report is positive following the 2010 report. The Commission highlights that West Dunbartonshire Council continues to improve and notes the strong and improved leadership of councillors and officers. However they noted persistent issues of slippage in the capital plan and underlined the need for reviewing capital planning and project management. The Commission's findings are reproduced in full in **Annex A**.

6. The Commission look forward to seeing positive progress being maintained. In line with the new approach to auditing Best Value, it is expected that the Controller of Audit will monitor this through the annual audit process and update the Commission accordingly. No specific follow-up has been requested by the Commission.

Next Steps



7. Proposed media lines are at **Annex B**.

8. It is usual practice for Ministers to write to council leaders following publication of Best Value reports to convey particular messages. A draft letter for your consideration accompanies this submission.

Recommendations

9. You are invited to:

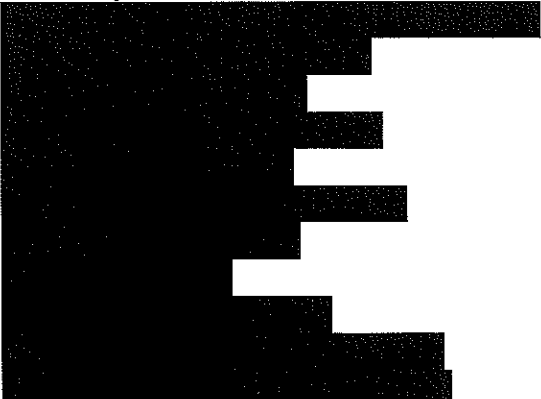
- note the Accounts Commission’s findings on the Best Value Assurance Report on West Dunbartonshire Council;
- clear the proposed media lines in Annex B; and
- write to the Leader of the Council in terms of the draft letter that accompanies this submission.


 Local Government and Analytical Services Division


25 June 2018

Copy List:	For Action	For Comments	For Information		
			Portfolio Interest	Constit Interest	General Awareness
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution			X		
Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities			X		

DG Education, Communities and Justice
 Stephen Gallagher, Director Local Government and Communities
 Donna Mackinnon, DD Local Government and Analytical Services



WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL BEST VALUE AUDIT: ACCOUNTS COMMISSION FINDINGS

1. The Commission accepts the Controller of Audit's report on Best Value in West Dunbartonshire Council. We endorse the recommendations set out by the Controller of Audit in his report and expect the council to act upon them.
2. We are pleased with the significant progress made by the council since previous audit reports, most recently in 2010.
3. A core feature of this progress has been the strong and improved leadership of councillors and officers. Councillors demonstrate a shared commitment to improving the council and they and officers work well together. We urge continuing this positive momentum by adding weight to the recommendation in the Controller of Audit's report to consider more cross-party working to address the council's financial challenges. It is the Commission's view that a shared commitment to improvement helps inform constructive political discussion and debate. We also note the positive impact of a good take-up of member training and development opportunities.
4. We acknowledge steady improvement in service performance, particularly in priority areas in housing and educational attainment. The budget gap projected by the council will necessitate continuing changes in how it delivers its services.
5. The council has a good record of delivering services within budget but we note persistent issues of slippage in the capital plan. We underline the need for reviewing capital planning and project management. It is important that the council assures itself that it has the capacity and capability to deliver its ambitious capital projects. The significance of its economic development strategy in driving change in West Dunbartonshire helps underline the importance of progress in this regard.
6. This report confirms that the council and its partners are well placed to face the substantial challenges in West Dunbartonshire around reducing population, economic deprivation and poor health outcomes. We note the potential of the Community Alliance in further developing how the council and its partners involve communities in facing these challenges.
7. We look forward to seeing positive progress being maintained. The Controller of Audit will monitor progress through the annual audit and update the Commission accordingly.

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL BEST VALUE AUDIT: DRAFT MEDIA LINES

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[Redacted]

From: [Redacted]
Sent: 31 May 2018 13:52
To: Minister for Local Government and Housing; Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work; Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities
Cc: DG Education, Communities & Justice; Gallagher S (Stephen); MacKinnon D (Donna); [Redacted]
[Redacted]
Subject: Accounts Commission - West Dunbartonshire Council - Best Value Audit 2018
Attachments: AC.2018.6.5b_WestDunsBVAR_Report.pdf; West Dunbartonshire Council - Best Value Audit 2018 - initial submission.docx

Marissa

I attach a submission on the West Dunbartonshire Council Best Value Audit 2018 which will be considered by the Accounts Commission (AC) on Thursday 7 June. The report is expected to be in the public domain on the AC website as part of the meeting papers early next week.

The submission is urgent in terms of agreeing the media line, otherwise routine.

Full report to the Accounts Commission:

Please let me know if you would like any further information.

Regards

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Local Government Policy and Relationships Scottish Government, Local Government and Analytical Services Division Area 3-G (North) Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ
Tel: [Redacted]
abcd

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] on behalf of Minister for Local Government and Housing
Sent: 28 June 2018 16:08
To: [REDACTED], Minister for Local Government and Housing; Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work; Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities
Cc: DG Education, Communities & Justice; Gallagher S (Stephen); MacKinnon D (Donna); [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Accounts Commission Findings Publication - West Dunbartonshire Council - Best Value Audit 2018
Attachments: u441209_28-06-2018_16-02-05.pdf

[REDACTED]

Many thanks for sending this over, I can confirm the Minister is content and the letter has now been sent out.

Please find attached a signed copy of the letter for your records.

<<u441209_28-06-2018_16-02-05.pdf>>

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Assistant Private Secretary
Office of Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning
The Scottish Government
St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG

[REDACTED]

Please see the [Ministerial preferences](#) which may be of assistance to you.

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 25 June 2018 14:53
To: Minister for Local Government and Housing; Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution; Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities
Cc: DG Education, Communities & Justice; Gallagher S (Stephen); MacKinnon D (Donna); [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Subject: Accounts Commission Findings Publication - West Dunbartonshire Council - Best Value Audit 2018

[REDACTED]
Subject: Accounts Commission Findings Publication - West Dunbartonshire Council - Best Value Audit 2018

[REDACTED]

Audit Scotland's Best Value Assurance Report on West Dunbartonshire Council, with the Accounts Commission's findings on the report, will be published on 28 June. I attach submission for Mr Stewart on the report, with draft reactive media lines and draft of a letter for the Minister to send to the council Leader – also a copy of the report.

Please note that the letter should not be sent until the report has been published on 28 June.

<< File: West Dunbartonshire Council - Best Value report 2018 - publication submission.docx >> << File: Best Value Audit of West Dunbartonshire Council report 2018 - Draft Letter to Council Leader.docx >> << File: BVAR_West_Dunbartonshire_Council_EMBARGO.pdf >>

[REDACTED]

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