



Scottish Funding Council

Promoting further and higher education

SFC/18/16  
Agenda item 7  
7 June 2018

### **Best Value Improvement Plan: progress report**

- To provide a progress report on implementation of the actions in the Council's 2017 Best Value Improvement Plan.

### **Recommendations**

- Note the contents of this paper.

### **Financial implications**

- There are no financial implications arising from this paper.

## **Best Value Improvement Plan: progress report**

### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides a progress report on the implementation of the actions in the Council's 2017 Best Value Improvement Plan.

### **Background**

2. Best Value is intended to provide a common framework for continuous improvement in public services in Scotland. The Council has a duty to comply with the principles of Best Value.
3. Under the terms of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000, Accountable Officers have a specific responsibility to ensure that arrangements have been made to secure Best Value. The Boards of public service organisations also have a corporate responsibility for promoting the efficient and effective use of staff and other resources in accordance with the principles of Best Value. Compliance is subject to audit by Audit Scotland.

### **Best Value self-assessment**

4. In March 2011, the Scottish Government published guidance for Accountable Officers on the duty of Best Value in Public Services.<sup>1</sup> The guidance identified seven 'themes', which define the expectations placed on Accountable Officers by the duty of Best Value:
  - Vision and Leadership
  - Effective Partnerships
  - Governance and Accountability
  - Use of Resources
  - Performance Management
  - Equality (cross-cutting theme)
  - Sustainability (cross-cutting theme).
5. Against each of these themes, the Scottish Government has identified 'characteristics' which a Best Value organisation should be able to demonstrate, or has plans to demonstrate.
6. We assess our compliance with the principles of Best Value by undertaking periodic self-assessment exercises. The last exercise was undertaken in 2017 and the results were provided to the Audit and Compliance Committee at its

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<sup>1</sup> Best Value in Public Services: Guidance for Accountable Officers. Scottish Government. March 2011. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/22154607/0>)

meeting in March 2017 (ACC/17/03). The exercise was undertaken by means of questionnaires, which asked relevant senior staff across the organisation for a qualitative assessment of our performance against the 'characteristics' of the seven Best Value themes (in total, there are 75 characteristics; 73 of which are relevant to the Council).

7. Against each 'characteristic', we provided:
  - An assessment of how well we demonstrate the characteristic - using the descriptions: '**Well-developed**', '**Under development**' or '**To be developed**')
  - Provided evidence to support our assessment including, where appropriate, proposals for improvement.
8. As a result of the self-assessment exercise, the executive identified nine actions for improvement, which formed a Best Value Improvement Plan. These actions were incorporated into our Operational Plan for 2017-18.

### **Progress**

9. The Annex attached to this paper provides a report on progress with the Improvement Plan actions. The attached report shows that, over the last year, the Council has made progress against all of the actions. In particular, we have:
  - Continued to develop our SFC Strategic Plan Performance Report by including new measures, and aligning the measures with the national aspirations for our Outcome Agreements with colleges and universities.
  - Strengthened our relationship with Skills Development Scotland through the establishment of a new Director of Skills Alignment.
10. As well as making progress with the small number of actions in our Best Value Improvement Plan, we have continued to demonstrate our compliance with the principles of Best Value through a range of other activities and initiatives in FY 2017-18. Some examples include:
  - **Vision and Leadership:** our 'intensification' of Outcome Agreements, which is intended to deliver improved outcomes from our significant investment in colleges and universities.
  - **Effective Partnerships:** our work with the other enterprise and skills agencies and our support for the establishment of a new Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board.
  - **Governance and Accountability:** strengthening our governance with the establishment of a Capital Decision-Point Committee to consider major capital projects at critical stages in their procurement and delivery, and provide assurance to the Council.

- **Use of resources:** the successful completion of our office accommodation project which is allowing the organisation to work more efficiently and achieving a better use of our financial resources.
- **Equality:** our successful Gender National Conference in December 2017 and work associated with our Gender Action Plan in the sectors.
- **Sustainability:** the introduction of a £16 million Financial Transactions Fund to support carbon reduction projects in the university sector.

11. Overall, the executive is satisfied that SFC can demonstrate that it is contributing actively to the overarching Best Value goal of continuous improvement in the public sector.

#### **Risk assessment**

12. There are no risks associated with this paper.

#### **Equality and diversity assessment**

13. An equality and diversity assessment has not been carried out in relation to this paper.

#### **Recommendations**

14. The Committee is asked to note the contents of this paper.

#### **Financial implications**

15. There are no financial implications arising from this paper.

#### **Publication**

16. This paper will be published on the Council website following the Committee meeting.

#### **Further information**

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