

Best Value Improvement Plan: progress report

- To provide a progress report on implementation of the actions in the Council's 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 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.¹ 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

¹ 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.

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 approach to performance and have worked with Scottish Government and the other enterprise and skills agencies to develop a performance framework for the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board.
 - Strengthened our relationship with Skills Development Scotland through the work to implement our five-step national skills planning and provision model for Scotland, which will align planning and investment between and by SFC and SDS.
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 2019-20. Some examples include:
 - **Vision and Leadership:** the work to develop a new Strategic Framework document, where we set out our vision for the future and the leadership role that we will play to deliver it.
 - **Effective Partnerships:** our work with the other enterprise and skills agencies and our support for the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board, as well as a range of joint funding initiatives with other partners, including funding for the second phase of our programme of Innovation Centres.
 - **Governance and Accountability:** the establishment of a new SFC Access, Learning and Outcomes Committee to provide a coherent view of the system

of learning as a whole from access to learning, progression through learning, and progression into employment or further study.

- **Use of resources:** our work to reduce the burden on colleges and universities in response to the COVID-19 crisis, by streamlining our reporting and accountability requirements.
- **Equality:** our work on equalities - we were one of the first public bodies in Scotland to have a gender balanced Board.
- **Sustainability:** our support for a range of initiatives aimed at promoting carbon reduction in the sectors, including the launch of a £19m Universities for the Future Programme and a £500k Climate Emergency Partnership fund in 2019.

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 Board meeting.

Further information

17. Contact: Richard Hancock, Assistant Director, Strategy (tel: 0131 313 6645; email: rhancock@sfc.ac.uk).