Best Value Introduction

Audit Scotland describes Best Value as "ensuring that there is good governance and effective management of resources, with a focus on improvement, to deliver the best possible outcomes for the public." The duty of Best Value applies to all public bodies in Scotland. It is a statutory duty for local authorities, such as councils.

In 2016 a revised framework for the auditing of Best Value was approved by the Accounts Commission. A key element of the framework is the publication of a Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) for the council at least once during a five-year period. It is informed by the Annual Audit Report, other statutory reports and Audit Scotland reports including the Local Government Overview series (performance, finance) published annually.

The BVAR will be considered by the Commission, in public, and action may be required of the council. The fieldwork for the BVAR for Aberdeenshire Council will take place between February and April 2019.

The fieldwork for the development of the BVAR includes:

- Interviews with councillors, senior officers and partner organisations;
- Observation of council, committee and board meetings;
- Review of documents and performance data and;
- Focus groups with councillors, officers and community groups.

Each council's BVAR incorporates an analysis of the Best Value characteristics aligned to the themes of:

- Vision and strategic direction;
- Performance;
- Use of resources;
- Partnership working;
- Improvement and transformation

Case Study Criteria

As part of our preparation for our Best Value Assurance Report we will be compiling a narrative to show the council's transformation since the last Best Value Audit. In order to do this, the Best Value Key Officer group will be sourcing case studies from all services. To ensure that the case study stays relevant to Best Value's key themes, the below criteria has been set out:

- Please ensure that a relevant link with BV criteria is demonstrated throughout
- Where relevant, please complete each section of the template as fully as possible
- Each section must contain narrative along with relevant links of evidence
- Each case study should show a consistent and clear link to at least one of the council's 11 priorities (point 6).

Case Study Template

Implementation of UNIFORM Business System in Infrastructure Services

How does this link with the criteria of Best Value?
"ensuring that there is good governance and effective management of resources, with a focus on improvement, to deliver the best possible outcomes for the public." The implementation and roll out of UNIFORM across the Planning, Building Standards, Environmental Health functions of Infrastructure Services (and also Property Management and the Licensing function in Legal Services) adheres to the criteria of Best Value in that it has generated efficiencies in terms of both finance and time. It has fulfilled the vision/strategic direction to move to paperless and streamlined planning processing and it has enabled a significant improvement in performance, moving our Planning function from the bottom to the top quartile performance quartile for Scottish Planning authorities.

How does this link to our priorities?
'Support a strong, sustainable, diverse and successful economy' and 'Have the right people, in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time' - through increasing the efficiency of a range of Council functions (eg planning, building standards, environmental health, licensing) allowing improved and faster delivery of services that underpin the Aberdeenshire economy. 'Protect our special environment, including tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions' through the introduction of virtually paperless processes and reducing travel through more efficient use of resources, across a range of council services

What research was undertaken to ensure best practice?
The project was focused on what had to be delivered and an output based specification with 19 high level "products" produced.   The tender document described what had to be achieved rather than specifying, in detail, the way it had to be achieved. The decision to go for a fully-integrated system, with end-to-end workflow and no paper case files was ambitious but also helped define the processes and required actions. For example, extensive staff involvement was required in order to workflow the end-to-end processes and this included many mini-workshops across all roles.

What was the background to the case story?

This work originated from a desire to provide a modernised and improved Planning service; the project was focused on using technology to achieve better services, turning around poor performance, cost reduction and increased resource efficiency. Once the project was implemented in Planning and Building Standards it was evident that a similar approach to other Council services could also reap efficiency benefits and so the project was extended to cover other areas including Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Estates, Licensing and Housing Assistance.

What activity was undertaken?

This Aberdeenshire Council project has incorporated a vast range of specialised back office modules into one fully integrated, end to end workflow system, delivering end to end virtually paperless processes across a range of service delivery areas. It has been spotlighted by the Scottish Government as having transformed service delivery across a substantial land mass, bringing savings in both time and costs. The trail blazing project focussed on using technology to achieve better services, turning around poor performance, achieving cost reduction and increasing resource efficiency.
Phase 1, which lasted 17 months, implemented the foundations of the project and worked through to delivery of a virtually paperless Planning & Building Standards service. Phase 2, lasting 18 months and currently underway, is completing the project to achieve similar outcomes in the additional areas of Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Estates Management, Licensing and Housing Assistance and to extend the scope of the project to include the use of field-based mobile devices.

How did this contribute to improved outcomes?

The project has been spotlighted by the Scottish Government as having transformed service delivery across a substantial land mass, bringing savings in both time and costs. The trail blazing project focussed on using technology to achieve better services, turning around poor performance, achieving cost reduction and increasing resource efficiency.

How did this assist in delivering value for money?

As above

What did we learn?

The intelligent modernisation of processes has the potential to bring significant benefits to service delivery in terms of financial savings and increased productivity. Additionally, we learned that principles and practices generating improvement in specific areas can be applied more widely across other areas to similar effect.

Please attach any supporting documents/evidence relevant to the case study

Attached – Cosla Awards Internal Application 2017