

# Renfrewshire Council

## The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning

Prepared for the Accounts Commission

July 2006



**Audit Scotland** is a statutory body set up in April 2000 under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. Together they ensure that the Scottish Executive and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.



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# Commission findings

1. The Commission accepts this report on the performance of Renfrewshire Council's statutory duty to secure best value and to initiate and to facilitate the community planning process. The Commission recognises that the report gives a broad picture of the council's performance based on the work of Audit Scotland and the findings of other scrutiny bodies such as inspectorates and that it does not attempt a comprehensive review of all service delivery. We acknowledge the cooperation and assistance given to the audit process by members and officers of the council.
2. Renfrewshire Council has moved on from a historically volatile political culture to greater stability largely as a result of the commitment of the council leader and chief executive. Clear strategic direction is given by elected members and senior officers and the council has a well integrated strategic planning framework and has established a robust framework of corporate values which govern the way it does business. There is a firm commitment to best value in the council's stated objectives and priorities. There is a strong managerial culture within the council and council services are generally well managed and are customer focused.
3. The council has a high level of self awareness and an understanding of what it needs to do better. The Commission recognises that the starting point for progress by the council was a low performance base and there is still much to do to translate the council's commitment into improved service delivery. We welcome the council's improvement agenda as set out in the report and we wish to highlight a number of areas for particular attention:
  - Effective scrutiny by elected members is an important element of a best value council and considerable improvement is required in this area. The Leadership Board has an opportunity to exercise effective scrutiny by using its call-in powers and acting in a non-partisan fashion. The Scrutiny Board has been effective in bringing about some improvement but the Commission considers it cannot achieve its full potential without commitment and engagement across the range of political parties.
  - While Renfrewshire's best value reviews of services have delivered improvements the council needs to demonstrate a broader approach to examining and appraising the options for services, including, where appropriate, the use of market testing, and considering whether it is best placed to deliver the services it currently provides.
  - The council has approached management re-structuring as opportunities have arisen and it should consider a broader options appraisal approach to determining the most effective management structures. The arrival of a new chief executive may present a good opportunity for such consideration.



- While performance indicators show an upward trend towards average performance some areas show poorer performance, such as home care services for elderly people and criminal justice services.
4. The Commission looks forward to receiving an improvement plan from the council which responds to the audit report and to these findings.



# The Audit of Best Value

This report is made by the Controller of Audit to the Accounts Commission under section 102(1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. After considering it the Commission may do any or all of the following:

- direct the Controller to carry out further investigations
- hold a hearing
- state its findings.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced new statutory duties relating to Best Value and Community Planning. The scope of Best Value and Community Planning is very broad but in general terms a successful council will:

- work with its partners to identify a clear set of priorities that respond to the needs of the community in both the short and the longer term
- be organised to deliver those priorities
- meet and clearly demonstrate that it is meeting the community's needs
- operate in a way that drives continuous improvement in all its activities.

The challenge for local government is to find new ways of working across services and with other bodies to achieve the best results for citizens and service users. The key objectives of this audit were to:

- assess the extent to which Renfrewshire Council is meeting its duties under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, and
- agree planned improvements with the council. These will be reviewed by the council's external auditor over the next three years.

As Best Value and Community Planning encompass all the activities of a council it is not realistic to audit everything in depth, so we plan our detailed work in two ways:

- Where possible, we draw on the findings of other scrutiny processes, such as the work carried out by the council's external auditors and by inspectorates. These are incorporated into our report.



- We select certain aspects of the council's performance for detailed audit investigation. A wide range of sources, including the council's own assessment of its performance, reports issued by external audit and inspections, and national Statutory Performance Indicators, informs this selection.

The report reflects this selective approach, with detailed commentary on some areas and limited or no coverage in others. We have made some comparisons with other councils, but our overall approach has focused on performance trends and improvement within Renfrewshire Council. The report also reflects the picture available at the time our main audit work was conducted between February and March 2006.

We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided to the audit team by Councillor Harkins (Leader of the Council), Tom Scholes (Chief Executive), Ron Morrison (Head of Corporate Policy) and all other members, officers and partners contacted during the audit.





# Overall conclusions

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Renfrewshire Council has adopted a modernising agenda to ensure it is in a good position to meet the changing demands on public services in its area. The council understands what needs to be done to deliver best value and is making good progress in developing systems and processes to support continuous improvement. Now that these underlying systems are becoming established, the council needs to concentrate on improving the quality and efficiency of its services year on year to deliver measurable benefits for local residents. It has developed a positive and customer focused organisational culture which effectively supports the drive for improvement.

The council has strong and effective leadership and needs to build on its more positive recent experiences to sustain this trend for the future as it enters a period of further change with the 2007 electoral reforms and the retirement of the chief executive. It needs to ensure its political and managerial structures continue to support its business needs.

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1. Elected members and senior officers provide strong and effective leadership in Renfrewshire. A commitment to high standards is evident throughout the council and this is jointly sponsored by the leader and chief executive who enjoy a particularly strong and effective working relationship. This relationship has been critical in bringing greater stability to the historically volatile political culture in the council and is the result of considerable personal investment by the leader and chief executive. This improved position, however, remains in fine balance and it is critical that the council now considers how it can best build on these strengths and experiences as it enters a period of further change, which includes the 2007 political reforms and the retirement of the chief executive.
2. There is a strong managerial culture within the council which demonstrates a good understanding of what best value requires. This culture is consistently evident from the Corporate Management Team (CMT) through to unit management levels. The council has established a well integrated strategic planning framework based on the area's broader community planning objectives and the council's arrangements overall represent a firm foundation from which to build improvement. There remain, however, opportunities to refine these arrangements further for the future, for instance by reporting the council's corporate contribution to the community planning objectives to the wider public and by identifying more specific targets to measure its progress in delivering its four additional corporate objectives.
3. The council has replaced its corporate plan with a corporate statement which sets out its corporate values and governs the way the council aims to do its business. These underpinning values aim to assist it in continuing to build a council-wide culture of continuous improvement. The council has set out the way in which it will measure the impact of its corporate values in delivering improvement over time, but needs to set more specific targets for improvement. It is evident that these values, along with





the council's quality award success, are making a contribution to the improvement culture developing within the council.

4. The council has reviewed its political structures for policy and decision making twice, firstly in 2001 with further refinement in 2002. While these arrangements are broadly effective, there remains scope for improvement, particularly around the council's scrutiny arrangements. The political administration's main opposition party does not currently engage with the council's Scrutiny Board. Engagement with the Scrutiny Board across the range of political parties would increase its effectiveness. The council has yet to successfully use the call-in powers of its Leadership Board, resulting in less effective arrangements for the scrutiny of decision making. Similarly there remains scope for the council to further review its managerial structures. The council's approach to management restructuring was planned to take account of the age profile of its corporate management team and the retirement of key individuals. The council needs to ensure that its structures continue to meet its business needs into the future.
5. Overall the council has in place effective consultation arrangements. The council consults extensively and has in place a corporate consultation strategy. The council has however acknowledged that the growth in its consultation activities, particularly as a consequence of the implementation of Charter Mark and other quality mechanisms, would benefit from a more strategic corporate review. The council can build on its good progress to refine its articulation of what it hopes to achieve from its consultation activities, make better use of the information it gathers from consultation and clarify and strengthen its relationship with the voluntary sector for the future. Public performance reporting is also well presented in Renfrewshire, and includes references to targets which have not been met. As in many councils, this area could be further refined. The council continues to develop a more balanced approach. The council also needs to work with partners to develop balanced public performance reports on its progress against community plan objectives.
6. The council demonstrates a clear understanding of the systems and processes required to support best value. It is making good progress in respect of its arrangements for managing and developing its staff, procurement, community planning, equal opportunities, sustainable development and customer care. The council is also implementing a performance management system which aims to enable it to demonstrate continuous improvement and reinforce the positive staff culture which is being built. Plans for developing strategic resource management in respect of finance, the council's workforce and corporate assets will also assist the council in achieving these improvements.
7. The council has not used full market testing to demonstrate the competitiveness of its services but has made use of thorough best value service reviews, benchmarking, consultancy reviews and some externalisation of service delivery. The council needs to build on this approach and be more open to alternative methods of service delivery which are presented through a robust option appraisal process. This has been recognised by the council and its corporate guidance has recently been



updated to reflect this improvement. The council could also consider ways to improve the use of private sector benchmarking information and market testing to develop these arrangements further.

8. The council is focused on the people it serves and has invested in improving its approach to customer care. It works well with partners at a strategic level but could work better with the voluntary sector. The council also has a sound approach to equal opportunities, but could do more to monitor the profile of its service users. The social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability are well embedded and influence the council's actions.
9. Council services are well managed and are customer focused. A culture of continuous improvement exists within services but statutory performance indicators (SPIs) suggest that this has not yet been fully translated into tangible benefits for all service users. SPIs show that the council's ratio of improving against declining SPIs is better than average. There has been a trend of indicators moving into the middle quartiles from the lower quartile. This indicates good progress. Some indicators have, however, moved from the upper to middle quartile, suggesting that the council needs to maintain its focus on improvement in some areas. The council continues to have a number of SPIs in the lower quartile. It is recognised that SPIs alone do not present a comprehensive picture of performance. However, the council's focus on performance management, demonstrated by investment in a new performance management system, will enable it to better target areas for improvement and develop stronger measures to demonstrate improvement over time.
10. The council makes good use of quality awards and other external accreditations to engage, involve and focus its resources, including staff, on achieving continuous improvement. Despite the challenge of pockets of significant deprivation in the area, council services generally achieve good levels of satisfaction and/or performance. For instance, educational attainment is consistently good; the housing service is engaged in a progressive area renewal programme; environmental services perform well and are particularly customer focused; and planning and transport coordinates an integrated approach to the area's regeneration activities which helps to promote the economy and assist people into jobs.
11. Overall, the council demonstrates a strong commitment to delivering continuous improvement and is embedding the appropriate corporate systems to support this. The commitment to continuous improvement is reflected across all of the council's services. The council is also developing its capacity to ensure it can deliver measurable service improvements in the future. It is, however, critical that the council is able to continue to sustain the greater political stability it has achieved in recent times.



# Part 1: Does the council have clear strategic direction?

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The council has a clear set of strategic priorities which reflect its context, and elected members and officers provide strong and effective leadership. The council uses a number of mechanisms to consult with the public and service users and to inform its strategic direction. The council has a well integrated strategic planning framework that provides a good foundation from which to build its future planned improvements.

To support these planned improvements, the council needs to ensure its political and managerial structures are fully effective. It is also important that the more stable political culture seen in recent years can be sustained. The council has in place effective service planning arrangements which continue to improve but, like many councils, Renfrewshire needs to continue to develop more balanced public performance reporting. It works well with partners at a strategic level but could work better with the voluntary sector in delivering services.

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## Context

12. Renfrewshire is the sixth most densely populated local authority area in Scotland covering 268 square miles. The population of 171,000 is concentrated in the towns of Paisley, Johnstone, Renfrew and Erskine. While it is largely urban, the area includes a large rural hinterland in the south and west. Renfrewshire also forms part of the Clyde Valley conurbation. It is close to Glasgow and, as a result, benefits from good transport links, including being home to Glasgow International Airport.
13. The area is benefiting from the regeneration of the Clyde Waterfront, with many major development projects underway including new homes, business and leisure developments, a new public park and riverside walkway. Further significant development around the Braehead shopping and leisure complex (one of the largest out of town shopping developments in the UK) will continue to bring economic benefits to the area. Braehead also presents a challenge to the council in maintaining viable local town centres. The council is seeking ways to address this. It has made a commitment to upgrade the centre of Renfrew and is currently assessing the issues impacting on Paisley as part of its wider regeneration strategy.
14. The economy of Renfrewshire is mixed. Gross average weekly earnings are well above the Scottish average and the claimant unemployment count is below average. Long-term unemployment fell much more rapidly in Renfrewshire last year than in Scotland as a whole. However, between 1997 and 2004 the number of jobs in the area decreased by one per cent, compared to a 12 per cent increase for Scotland as a whole.

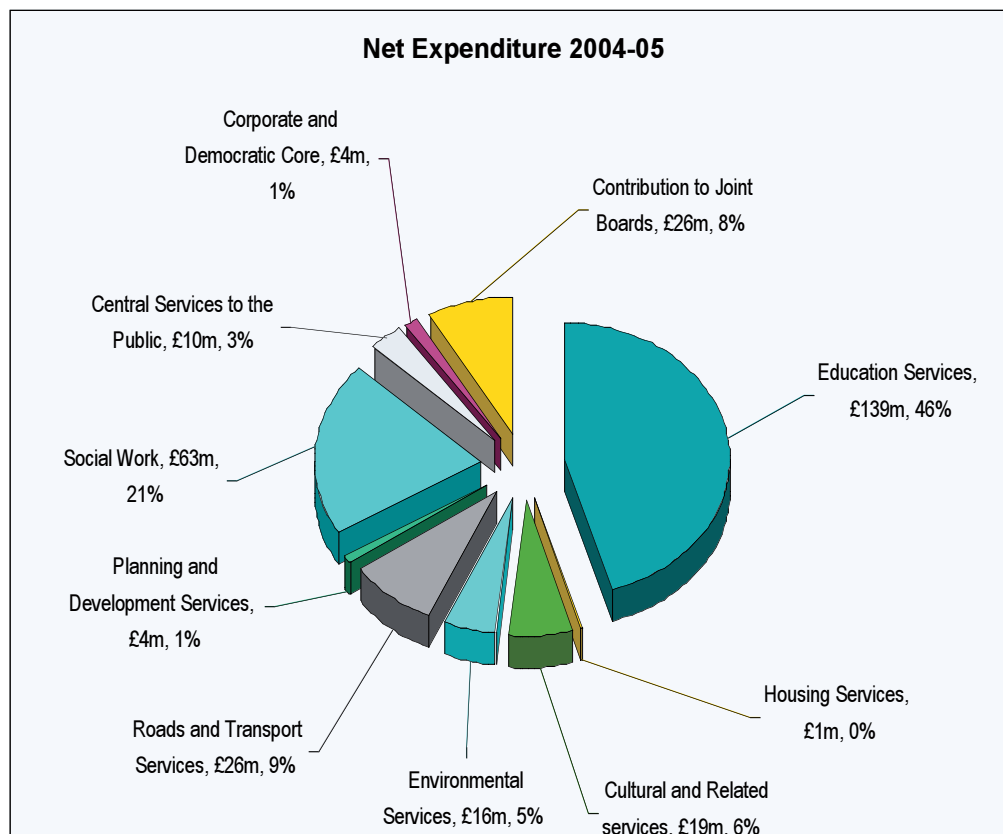


15. As home to Glasgow International Airport, Renfrewshire is a gateway to many major international markets. As a consequence, compared with Scotland as a whole, the area has a higher percentage of jobs in transport and communications sectors. Jobs are also more likely to be in large enterprises, and several major international companies are located in the area including Ciba-Geigy, Chivas Brothers, Hewlett Packard and Rolls Royce.
16. In contrast, there are pockets of severe deprivation in the area. Renfrewshire is jointly the fifth most deprived local authority area in Scotland. Unemployment is as high as 15 per cent in some council wards and a higher than average percentage of people of working age claim sickness, disability or lone parent benefits. The area also suffers from higher than average levels of coronary heart disease and drug and alcohol misuse. The council's strategic plans set out actions to tackle these issues.
17. The population of the area is declining. There is a projected 9 per cent drop in the population by 2024 compared with a broadly static population for Scotland as a whole over this period. In line with the Scottish picture, older people will form a greater percentage of the population in the future. However, the working age population of Renfrewshire is expected to decrease by a far greater percentage than for Scotland as a whole (17 per cent compared with 7 per cent for Scotland). These demographic changes will have implications for the council in providing services. These implications are recognised in the council's service planning processes.
18. The council has 40 elected members. Twenty-one members form the current Labour administration. The opposition is led by the Scottish Nationalists with 15 elected members. There are three Liberal Democrats and one Conservative.
19. Net expenditure on services in 2004/05 was £308 million ([Exhibit 1](#)) which equates to £1,806 per head (Scottish average £1,927) and ranks it the tenth lowest spending council per head of population. Band D council tax for 2006/07 is £1,143 (the tenth highest in Scotland) compared with the Scottish average of £1,129.



## Exhibit 1

### Renfrewshire Council's net expenditure by service 2004/05



Source: Renfrewshire Council Consolidated Revenue Account 2004/05

## Leadership and culture

**Elected members and senior officers provide strong and effective leadership. Strategic priorities and corporate values are well set out and demonstrate political and managerial commitment to high standards. There is also a strong managerial culture which demonstrates a good understanding of what best value requires, and an improving focus on managing performance. Arrangements for the scrutiny of decisions need to be reconsidered.**

20. Elected members and senior officers provide clear strategic direction for the council and have provided effective leadership and facilitation of the community planning process. The council shares six long-term strategic aims and objectives with its community planning partners and has identified an additional four corporate objectives. These are set out in the Renfrewshire community plan (2000 to 2010) and the council's corporate statement and are shown in [Exhibit 2](#). The council's planning framework is discussed further in paragraphs 33 to 44.



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## Exhibit 2

### The council has ten strategic aims and objectives set out in the community plan and the corporate statement

#### **Community plan core aims**

- To provide and promote learning opportunities which meet the needs and aspirations of individuals, business and communities.
- To support and sustain economic growth which generates work and wealth.
- To make significant progress towards Renfrewshire being one of the healthiest areas in Scotland.
- To provide the best possible support and care to vulnerable individuals.
- To improve and maintain our neighbourhoods and homes.
- To create safe places to live, work and play.

#### **Corporate statement objectives**

- To raise achievement, set standards and continually improve.
- To ensure that our services are designed to meet the needs of all our residents.
- To modernise the way we work.
- To develop services in ways that can be sustained.

*Source: Delivering the Key Corporate Initiatives, Renfrewshire Council, 2005*

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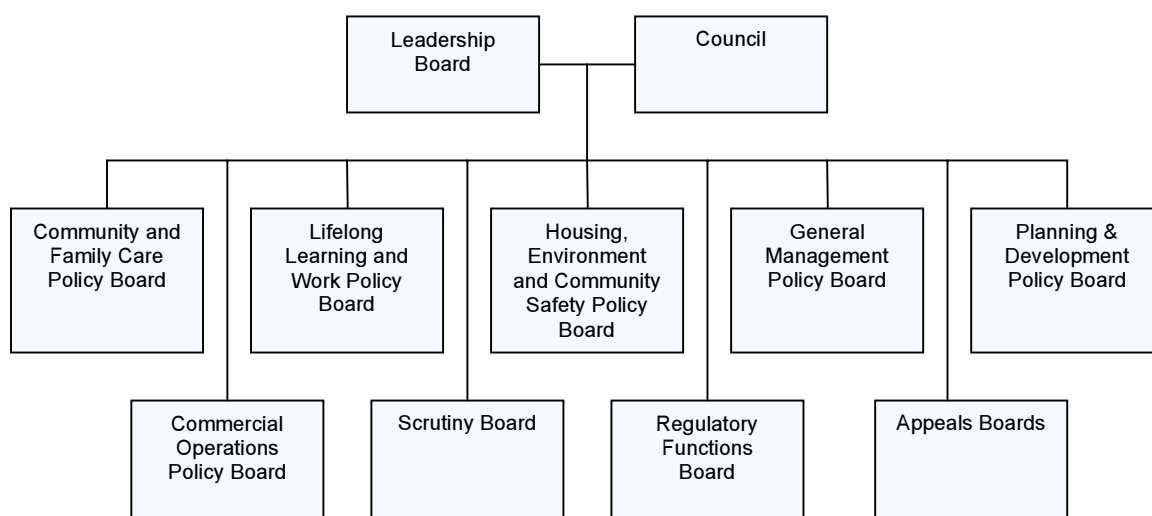
21. The council has a well integrated strategic planning framework and has also established a strong framework of corporate values which govern the way it does business. These values are set out in the council's corporate statement and include: 'involving and empowering', 'treating our customers well', and 'valuing our employees'. The council has established methods for measuring how these values are contributing to improvement but could improve its approach by setting specific targets for improvement. It is clear that the values are key drivers for the council's culture of continuous improvement.
22. The council has also identified its 20 corporate and medium-term priorities and sets them out in the paper *Delivering the Key Corporate Initiatives*. The corporate initiatives document clearly specifies the role of elected members in each of the council's planned initiatives. Elected member roles range from approving policy and strategy decisions to receiving regular monitoring reports on progress. Elected members are also actively involved in promoting best value, approving the best value review programme and considering the results of reviews. Commitment to best value is also clearly demonstrated in the council's stated objectives and priorities. For instance 'To raise achievement, set standards and continually improve' is identified as a strategic priority; 'Achieve Best Value' is one of the council's corporate initiatives; and 'Aiming to be the Best' is identified as a corporate value.
23. The council reviewed its policy and decision making processes in 2001 and further refined them in 2002. The aim is for the structure to streamline decision making, support community planning and ensure proper coverage of council functions which do not fall naturally within community plan themes,



such as trading activities. The current structure is shown in [Exhibit 3](#). While there are some issues around the role of the leadership board and the political composition of the scrutiny board, which are discussed below, the structure has enabled the council to make good progress in delivering policy objectives in an historically politically turbulent environment.

### Exhibit 3

#### Renfrewshire Council's political structure



Source: Renfrewshire Council

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24. The council has a number of policy boards with widely delegated authority for specified policy areas. This means that the boards are the main decision making forums within the council. The policy boards are also responsible for scrutinising the performance of services.
25. The Leadership Board's remit is to provide strategic leadership for the council and ensure consistency across the council's policy objectives. It also directs and oversees community planning. The board comprises elected members from almost all political parties (seven Labour, three SNP and one Liberal Democrat). This is not, however, proportionate to the whole council's composition, as a greater proportion of places are held by the administration. While the board receives reports on progress with the overarching themes of the community plan, these reports are not sufficiently detailed to enable the board to identify and track progress on the council's contribution to the achievement of these themes. The board does not currently receive reports on progress against the corporate statement.
26. The Leadership Board also has call-in powers over decisions made by other boards. This role is intended to act as a check on the widely delegated decision-making powers of the council's policy boards. The arrangement requires the majority of members of the leadership board to sign a call-in motion. Given the political balance of the board, these arrangements are not effective as a check or scrutiny mechanism and the board has not used its powers to date.





27. The Leadership Advisory Panel published its report in 2001 and concluded that the council's political arrangements were innovative but noted the need for the (then new) Leadership Board to act in a non-partisan spirit to exercise effective scrutiny under its call-in powers. Given the fact that the council is yet to use its call-in powers effectively, it needs to reconsider this issue to ensure there is proper scope for transparency, accountability and challenge in its decision making processes.
28. The council's Scrutiny Board operates as an audit committee, as well as undertaking a programme of scrutiny reviews. The areas for review are determined by members in consultation with officers. A wide range of subjects has been considered, ranging from asset management to the local effects of climate change. Scrutiny reviews have been effective in bringing about improvement. The council has seen a steady and consistent fall in the number of pupils excluded from schools following a review of this area by the scrutiny board. Other recent reviews have focused on areas of concern in service performance (services for the homeless) and issues of importance to service users (disabled transport). Elected members are well engaged in scrutiny reviews, although the current membership of five appears small for the wide remit of the board. The SNP have withdrawn from the scrutiny board and the absence of the main opposition group from this important scrutiny forum dilutes its effectiveness. The council needs to ensure that it maximises engagement with the board across the range of political parties.
29. The council has seven directors and 24 heads of service. It is in the process of reducing the number of heads of service to 17, with the intention to reduce this further if tenants vote for the transfer of its housing stock to community ownership. This would also result in the director of housing and property post being removed. The council is moving to this structure over two years using voluntary redundancy or early retirement at director level. Vacancies created at director level will be filled by suitable candidates at head of service level to enable head of service posts to be deleted. The resulting restructuring is projected to save around £520,000 a year. The chief executive has also indicated his intention to retire during 2006.
30. The planned restructuring has been implemented as opportunities have arisen through the retirement of senior officers. The council should ensure that its new structure is effective in meeting its present and future business needs. It should consider whether there are further opportunities for rationalising its structure to provide greater strategic focus for directors and matching its political and management structures more closely. The appointment of a new chief executive will provide an opportunity to revisit the structure.
31. The corporate management team is strong and is led effectively by the chief executive, who creates a culture where high standards are expected. The team, comprising seven directors and the chief executive, meets weekly. The team members work well together and provide good corporate leadership. Strategic projects (including the council's 20 corporate initiatives) and cross-cutting issues (such as the staff development scheme and sickness absence) are monitored by the team. It is



continuing to develop its approach to performance management and a set of key corporate indicators has been expanded and improved to give a better focus on the main issues for services. The indicators have been selected on the basis of their specific relevance to the council, either because they are strategically important or have been identified as an area for service improvement.

32. To date, the main challenge to directors on service performance issues has come from the chief executive on a one-to-one basis. This is done through six monthly meetings on service plans and performance indicators. There is scope for the corporate management team to provide more collective challenge on service performance and the new corporate performance reports should facilitate this.

## Setting a clear direction

**The council has a clear strategic framework based on community planning objectives and service planning is improving. Further refinement to these arrangements continues and the council should consider how it can report more explicitly on its corporate contribution to community planning objectives, establish more specific targets for its four additional corporate objectives and improve the resource information included in its service plans.**

## Community planning

33. Councils are responsible for ensuring that key organisations which influence public service delivery work together in their area to focus resources on the achievement of common long-term strategic objectives. The council has taken a significant role in developing community planning and keeping structures and objectives under review to ensure they continue to be relevant and effective. The council worked closely with its partners to draw up its community plan. In agreeing its community plan, the council and partnership consulted widely, for instance with its Citizen's Panel, made up of 1,500 local residents and with individuals and community groups, to inform the final plan published in 2000. In the council's survey of citizen panel members almost two-thirds responded that the plan reflects their views on the most important issues facing the area.
34. The community plan represents a coherent statement of the partners' strategic objectives. The partnership's overall vision is for a *'Thriving, safe, and forward looking community which provides opportunities for all and which cares for its people and its environment.'* The plan is well structured and has a good level of detail, enabling the partnership to be held to account for delivering its planned improvements. Targets are expressed in terms of better outcomes, or establishing the building blocks that will lead to better outcomes, such as reducing the percentage of working age adults with no qualifications to the Scottish average. (In 1998 around 20 per cent of working age adults in Renfrewshire had no qualifications compared to the Scottish average of 17 per cent).
35. The community plan also establishes a clear planning framework, based on three guiding principles (*social inclusion, modernising government and sustainable development*) and three key themes (*learning and work, health and social care, and housing neighbourhoods and community safety*). The



guiding principles are intended to inform the way the partners will deliver the identified strategic objectives. Each of the three themes has a set of core aims and objectives and these are supported by a set of measurable targets. The partnership has recently undertaken a mid-term review of the plan, reporting progress and updating and revising targets.

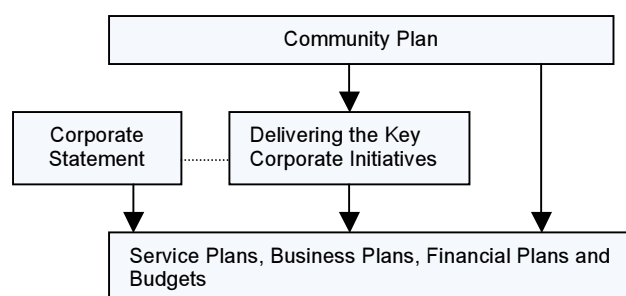
## Corporate and service planning

36. Having discussed the main features of the community planning framework, this section of our report focuses on the council's planning structure. This framework is set out in [Exhibit 4](#), highlighting the good levels of integration which exist.

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### Exhibit 4

#### Renfrewshire Council's planning framework



Source: Audit Scotland

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37. The council has ten strategic objectives which provide the overall strategic direction for the council, as set out in [Exhibit 2](#). The council does not have a traditional corporate plan but draws its ten strategic objectives directly from the community plan and also from its corporate statement.
38. The corporate statement sets out the values which govern how the council delivers services to meet customer needs and includes: involving employees, communities and customers; being open and accountable; measuring success; and developing employees.
39. The *Delivering the Key Corporate Initiatives* document focuses on 20 major projects which significantly contribute to the achievement of the council's ten strategic objectives, and includes the schools estate strategy, the strategic waste fund, and efficient government. These projects are cross-referenced to the strategic objectives outlined in the community plan and corporate statement. The document also outlines expected outcomes and measures of success to allow effective monitoring by members at the appropriate policy boards.



40. The council has a comprehensive and effective approach to service planning, reflected in detailed guidance which is updated annually. The guidance establishes a clear planning and budgeting timetable based on annually updated three-year rolling plans. The clear corporate timetable enables better integration with other related processes within services, such as staff development reviews.
41. Service plans are clear and easy to read. They take account of the council's changing context and show how service objectives contribute to corporate objectives. Links are clearly set out from the community plan to: *Delivering the Key Corporate Initiatives*; service plans; and to team and individual objectives. There is scope for better information on how resources will be used to achieve service objectives. This has been recognised by the council and service plans for 2006/07 have better resource information. Service plans are subject to rigorous review by the chief executive's department and, as a consequence, are improving.
42. The council has further developed its approach to financial planning in recent years and is improving its integration with the wider planning processes. In his report for 2004/05, the local external auditor has examined this in detail and has recognised the progress made. In contrast, the council still has more work to do in integrating its cross-departmental plans, such as the local transport strategy, within the overall planning process. Based on the improvements to the planning process already achieved the council is well placed to make these enhancements.
43. Risk management has developed significantly, from a narrow insurance risk focus into a systematic consideration of business risk across all parts of the organisation. However, service plans do not fully and consistently reflect key risks and the council has identified a need to address this. It intends to designate risk champions, who will be responsible for deployment of the risk approach within their services.
44. The planning framework allows cross-referencing between both the service plan actions and the key corporate initiatives with the strategic objectives as set out in the community plan and corporate plan. It does not, however, clearly set out what the overall programme is for these strategic objectives, including the council's role. This makes it difficult to gain an overview of the council's progress in achieving its corporate objectives. It would benefit from reporting more explicitly on its contribution to community plan objectives and identifying measurable targets for its major corporate objectives to improve public accountability.



## Responding to the needs of Renfrewshire

**The council has in place effective consultation arrangements. It consults extensively and has in place a corporate consultation strategy. The council has however acknowledged that the growth in its consultation activities, particularly as a consequence of the implementation of Charter Mark and other quality mechanisms, would benefit from a more strategic corporate review. There also remains further scope to strengthen and build its relationship with the voluntary sector.**

45. The council has a consultation strategy in place and uses a number of methods to consult and involve citizens and communities. The council's strategy mainly comprises guidance on using different types of consultation and there is potential for the strategy to set out more explicitly how these various consultation exercises, with different communities, are intended to contribute to the council's policy and decision-making processes.
46. The Public Services Panel, established in 1998, gauges views from over 2,000 local residents on a range of high level policy issues. The panel is balanced and refreshed on a regular basis to ensure it is representative of the local community. The panel has a high profile, both within the council and in its dialogue with its citizens through, for example, the municipal magazine *Renfrewshire*.
47. Services consult users both in setting priorities and in designing services. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) has commented favourably on the wide range of approaches to seeking and responding to the views of different interest groups on the education service. Other examples of effective consultation include involving service users in redesigning mental health and learning disability services in social work and well developed approaches to tenant participation in developing housing services, such as regular tenant forum meetings.
48. The council recognises that the volume of its consultation activity has continued to grow and that a key factor in this has been the use of the charter mark mechanism to support the development of the council's continuous improvement culture. A more corporate and strategic mechanism to help the council assess the value that it gains from such a wide range of activities would help to better focus its future consultation initiatives. The council has recently established a corporate consultation database with the aim of maximising the effectiveness of its consultation activity in the future.
49. The council, with the community planning partnership, is developing local community planning forums to help take forward a structured approach to involving local communities in decision-making. There are six forums based on local areas. The council intends that these will play an increasing role in its efforts to engage with communities. Results from a survey of people participating in community planning, conducted as part of the audit, suggest that the council could do more to engage with communities. In light of this the council should consider how it can better publicise and develop the role of the area forums. Work is underway to develop the skills and capacity within the community and



voluntary sectors. Complementary capacity-building work is being done by the Paisley Partnership Regeneration Company and by the council's community learning and development service.

50. The council has experienced some difficulties in establishing effective relationships with its voluntary sector partners in the past. However, its relationships with the voluntary sector are now improving and both the council and the voluntary sector need to develop a better understanding of their respective roles in service provision and in community representation and engagement for the future. The council has been slow in establishing a compact between the council and the local council for voluntary services, but agreement on this was imminent at the time of the audit. This is one means by which the council aims to strengthen and improve the relationship for the future.

## Working with partners

**The council has in place a number of effective strategic and service based joint working arrangements. The council recognises the importance of the need to invest in its joint working to deliver improvement across the area and the communities it serves.**

51. The council is strongly committed to community planning recognising that it must work closely with other agencies if it is to deliver services that meet the complex needs of local communities. The community planning partnership was refreshed in 2004 by introducing a new structure, recognising the need to better engage with local community representatives. Six local community planning forums were set up and 16 learning neighbourhoods are being rolled out to bring the process closer to local people. The learning neighbourhood approach is explained in [Exhibit 5](#). The former Social Inclusion Partnership has been successfully integrated within the community planning structure and the partnership's Regeneration Outcome Agreement was well received by Communities Scotland.
52. A mid-term review of the community planning partnership has recently been completed, reporting on progress against the targets set out in the plan. The majority of the targets have been met. Where they have not been met this is usually because they require a longer timescale or delivery is not entirely within the control of the partnership, as is the case with reducing teenage drinking for example. A revised set of targets has been drawn up for the period 2006-2009. These continue to be challenging.



## Exhibit 5

### **Renfrewshire Council is developing its 'learning neighbourhoods' structure as part of its approach to community planning.**

The concept of a learning neighbourhood encourages integrated working between services for children and families promoted by integrated community schools. The features of a learning neighbourhood include:

- a focus on the learning needs of all who live within the neighbourhood
- engagement with individual learners
- support for pupils and their families
- engagement with the wider neighbourhood
- integrated provision of learning (formal and informal), social work and health education
- increased access to leisure and cultural opportunities
- access to information, advice and guidance on learning and employment opportunities
- a commitment to closing the opportunities gap
- support for community groups and organisations.

The key outcomes of this concept are to contribute towards:

- improved attendance and attainment for young people
- reductions in exclusion rates from school
- reduced youth and adult unemployment
- improved levels of literacy and numeracy
- improved levels of health and fitness
- reductions in crime and vandalism
- increased participation in leisure, cultural and community activities
- increased participation in the community planning process.

*Source: Renfrewshire Council*

53. The council has a number of strategic partnership arrangements designed to ensure a joined up approach to developing the local area and tackling complex problems. The council is a member of the Clyde Valley Community Planning Partnership which is developing and delivering the vision for the metropolitan region around Glasgow, including securing funding from the Cities Growth Fund for key projects.
54. Glasgow airport has a major impact on the local area and the Glasgow Airport Zone Partnership aims to provide a development framework to maximise economic activity in the area around the airport. The airport directly employs 5,000 staff and a further 11,000 people are employed indirectly across Scotland. The potential for developing a Centre of Excellence for aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul activities has been identified. The council is working with Scottish Enterprise Renfrew, BAA Glasgow and Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce to explore this opportunity.
55. The council is also a member of the Clyde Waterfront Strategic Board. One of the main projects under way within this partnership is the development of Renfrew Riverside to provide 2,100 new homes,





business space, leisure space, a new public park and riverside walkway. This is progressing well. Further details are given in [Exhibit 6](#).

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## Exhibit 6

### Renfrew Riverside

Renfrew Riverside is a major waterfront renewal initiative as part of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Structure Plan. The council approved a masterplan for the Renfrew Riverside area in June 2003. This is a development framework encompassing land use allocations, urban design, road and public transport networks and public space.

The council is working closely with three major landowners to realise the renewal of the area. It leads the Renfrew Riverside Development Team to develop and coordinate the project. Planning consent has been granted for most of the Riverside area and works commenced in August 2004. The first phase, which entails the Xscape leisure facility, public park and main road construction, is progressing well.

The council has considered the sustainability of the project by securing private investment to build additional capacity in two primary schools, and also to provide essential road and drainage infrastructure. The project also provides new employment opportunities and supports the economy of the area. Also as part of the Riverside initiative, the council and Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire have developed proposals to revitalise Renfrew town centre to ensure that it benefits from the Riverside development. These proposals include improved access and pedestrian links, townscape enhancements and the development of new employment and business opportunities.

*Source: Renfrewshire Council, Audit Scotland*

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56. Services can also identify a number of examples of partnership working delivering more joined up services. There is good joint working between social work and health partners, and this is covered more fully in Part 4 of this report. [Exhibit 7](#) is a good example of joint working with the voluntary sector, and the council supports the sector through funding.
57. Discussions are also currently underway between the eight councils in the Clyde Valley on joint work for common functions such as rates collection and social work and education training. These proposals are being taken forward as part of the Efficient Government agenda.



## Exhibit 7

### Renfrewshire Women and Children First

The project was established to address a number of issues identified by the Scottish Executive about services for victims of abuse including:

- Ad hoc and disjointed services.
- Services which were confusing and inaccessible to most women.
- Organisations lacking responsiveness to victims of abuse when they seek help.

The project offers an accessible 'one stop shop' service for women and children affected by violence. It also has a role to raise awareness and to encourage a strategic, multi agency response to tackling violence against women and children.

The project is supervised by the Social Work department. Glasgow Rape Crisis and Children 1<sup>st</sup>, health, education, police and the voluntary sector, are also involved. Clients are encouraged to provide feedback on the service they have received. The evaluation process runs throughout the period of support and ends with an evaluation form. Feedback from clients informs policy and procedures.

Output and outcome targets are set annually. Partners are involved in discussions about the outputs and outcomes for the project. These discussions inform the next operational plan. There are no sources of baseline information for this type of project, however referral data is scrutinised and year-on-year uptake and long-term engagement are steadily increasing. Outputs recorded relate to the volume of activity across the main services provided by the project together with information on the experience of the service user. The project has successfully developed systems where output and outcome targets can be monitored and audited without breaking confidentiality, and which can identify that resources are being targeted to priority areas.

The project is currently working towards achieving a charter mark.

*Source: Renfrewshire Council, Audit Scotland.*

## Reporting to the public

**The council has well-presented and readable performance reports. Like many councils, it could be more balanced in what it reports to the public. Mechanisms for publicly reporting on community plan progress also need to be established.**

58. The council reports its performance to the public through a range of readable and informative publications. It holds a platinum award from the Plain English campaign. This is the highest level of award and signifies that at least 100 documents bear the Crystal Mark for clarity. All reports and documents examined during the audit, including the council's board reports, were well written and easy to understand.
59. The most prominent council publication is the *Renfrewshire* magazine which is issued quarterly to all households. It provides useful news on council services and initiatives, such as recycling and the development of the customer service centre. Each edition also includes the 'How are we Doing?' feature which presents performance reports from two departments and covers all council services



annually. The council's annual *Summary of Accounts* leaflet is also a well presented and useful guide to the year's income and spending.

60. The council has received positive feedback from the Public Services Panel on its performance reporting and there are many other examples at service level which follow the corporate standard. Individual services use a common reporting format in their performance information leaflets, which are available at public service points. These are well presented and also bear the Crystal Mark. Performance reports are available on the website. Reports in suitable formats can also be provided for people with disabilities and for ethnic minorities on request.
61. Public performance reports are well presented. Many offer a good overview of service activities and performance, commenting on areas for improvement as well as good performance. Some reports lack targets and comparative information. For instance, information on the length of roads swept is given without any context to indicate if this represents good or bad performance. The council's reports would benefit from the inclusion of more information about costs and comparisons with other councils or service providers. Public performance reporting is an area where the council continues to improve.
62. The council's approach to reporting to the wider public on its community planning activities could be improved. Some information is available in policy board minutes, agendas and community planning conference reports but these have limited circulation and are not readily accessed by the public. The council should consider how it can report publicly on its specific contribution to the achievement of community planning targets. The council is currently reviewing its public performance reporting framework and will produce an annual programme of what will be reported and where. It aims to address many of the points we have raised in our report.



## Part 2: Are there systems to support continuous improvement?

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The council demonstrates a clear understanding of the systems and processes required to support best value, and has a positive staff culture which supports continuous improvement. This is further reinforced by the council's developing performance management system, another mechanism by which it aims to demonstrate its commitment to continuous improvement.

The council has sought to develop a mixed economy of service provision, although its approach to competitiveness could be strengthened by extending its benchmarking comparisons and reconsidering its approach to market testing.

The council has a sound approach to equal opportunities and considers social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability in determining its actions. It needs to continue to develop its strategic approach to managing its resources.

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### Continuous improvement and competitiveness

**The council is embedding the structures and processes to support continuous improvement including the use of thorough best value reviews and charter mark and other quality awards to involve staff and focus on improvement. In addition, it has sought to deliver a mixed economy of service provision. These arrangements could however be strengthened by better use of comparisons with other service providers, including the private sector, and reconsidering its approach to market testing.**

63. The council does, to some extent, deliver a mixed economy of service provision and has outsourced some of its work on economic grounds. As an example, around 50 per cent of work on patching and road repairs and street lighting is undertaken by private sector contractors. The council estimates that around 80 per cent of the work on its £8 million capital programme for improving roads will be awarded to private contractors.
64. Further examples include the removal of asbestos, where there is no in-house trade provision, the externalisation of skip hire services, and the use of external contractors to supplement in-house staff provision. This example has the added benefit of providing external comparative cost indicators to highlight the financial competitiveness of the current service. The competitiveness of the property service has also been subject to favourable independent review by consultants as part of the preparations for housing stock transfer.
65. There has also been some reconfiguration of services provided by trading activities in recent years, focused on improved customer service and efficiencies. Client and contractor splits have been removed to reduce overheads and provide a more streamlined service to clients. In environmental services, street cleansing activities have been integrated with grounds maintenance and refuse



collection services to provide a more flexible and responsive service to users. Dedicated litter squads have been introduced, and area based amenity squads formed to support neighbourhood wardens. A facilities management approach is also being adopted for catering and building cleaning services within all sites.

66. The council has recently completed a comprehensive five-year best value review programme covering its main activities to ensure that they are providing value for money. Service reviews have been thorough in looking at ways that existing services can be improved and have resulted in comprehensive improvement plans that are regularly monitored by the relevant policy boards. Good corporate guidance has also been issued to support service reviews. This has recently been updated and improved, particularly in giving an increased focus to full options appraisal.
67. While these reviews are thorough and have led to change, until recently, they have tended to focus on how the council can do the same things better, rather than leading to any major reconfiguration of services. The methodology for the reviews has been based on the assumption that unless services are failing, alternative methods of provision such as outsourcing or partnership working are not considered and again, until recently, this was reflected in the council's guidance for conducting its reviews. The council now needs to demonstrate a broader approach to examining and appraising the options for services, including considering whether it is best placed to deliver the services it currently provides.
68. Steps are taken in conducting reviews to ensure that good benchmarking information is obtained to demonstrate satisfactory performance and identify scope for improved future performance. The council has sought to demonstrate competitiveness using this external benchmarking and service performance information. This benchmarking, however, often focuses on other providers within the local authority sector, for instance, the Association for Public Sector Excellence (APSE) family groupings for street cleaning and grounds maintenance reviews. Private sector comparison is limited to some extent by the availability of relevant information. Street cleaning, grounds maintenance, domestic refuse collection, and vehicle maintenance trading activities have had no significant market testing since the moratorium on Compulsory Competitive Tendering. The council should consider how it can better demonstrate the competitiveness of its service delivery, including revisiting its approach to benchmarking and market testing.
69. The council has also sought to engage community planning partners in cross-agency best value reviews but has had little success in getting others to engage with this process. It is, therefore, currently looking at developing a programme of internal cross-cutting reviews focusing on more effective inter-departmental working to deliver the council's strategic objectives. While this is a positive development, the council needs to consider how it can continue to ensure an appropriate level of review and challenge to promote continuous improvement across its services as well as in its cross-cutting arrangements.



70. The council is committed to demonstrating service quality by accreditation to quality assurance schemes. It has selected charter mark as the principal quality assurance scheme because of the scheme's focus on the experience of people using services. The scheme also ensures that frontline staff have a say in how best to improve services based on their practical experience. Services such as the district court, administrative services, residential child care, day care for older people and East Nursery School were the first of their kind to be awarded charter mark status in Scotland. Other quality assurance schemes used by services include EFQM, Investors in People and ISO 9001:2000.

## Managing and monitoring performance

**The council has established a framework for systematic review of performance at corporate and service level. Some work is still required to streamline performance management across the council and to develop better information, but the council has established a firm base from which to improve in the future.**

71. The council recognised that the quality and use of performance information varied across services and has used existing good practice to inform corporate guidance on performance information in service planning. The guidance specifies minimum levels of information, and promotes the use of a 'balanced scorecard' approach. This ensures that performance is considered from a number of perspectives, including service users. Services have developed a range of performance indicators. Targets are set to be challenging taking the previous year's performance into account. Better information on costs would enhance these arrangements further.
72. The council has established its monitoring and review framework at both officer and member levels. This framework focuses on monitoring progress against service plans and a set of local performance indicators. Detailed service performance is routinely monitored by departmental management teams and quarterly performance reports for the corporate management team were introduced in 2005/06. These reports highlight performance against targets, and trend information for each indicator. They cover a range of measures, including service specific indicators and common corporate indicators such as absence statistics, call handling, and complaints.
73. Service performance information is presented on a six-weekly cycle to policy boards. For most services this is mainly financial information. Other performance information is reported on a six monthly basis. This includes a review of progress against service plans, and reports on performance against targets. Challenge from members is limited to more significant performance issues such as poor comparative performance in rent arrears collection in 2004. This more detailed member challenge identified the introduction of new software and staffing shortages in the housing benefits service as major contributing factors to the increase in the level of arrears. Actions were agreed to address this problem. The effects of these improvements have yet to be fully reflected in collection levels.



74. The council has also recently introduced a computerised corporate performance management package to assist with effective performance monitoring. The database has been populated with core corporate performance measures so far, and is being used to generate quarterly performance reports for the corporate management team. The council recognises that to maximise the benefit of this tool, it needs to be rolled out and populated with all identified service indicators. In the longer term, this will allow the council to use the system to monitor service progress and other corporate strategies and plans.

## Using resources effectively

### Managing finance

**The council has a good record of financial management. It has recognised the need to further improve its longer-term financial planning to match its resources with its strategic objectives and the need to further develop its long term financial strategy.**

75. Local external audit reports on the financial stewardship and governance of the council have been favourable. There have been no significant service overspends during the life of the council. The most recent annual report noted that the council had a balance of around £16 million on its general fund at the end of March 2005. Of this, around £9 million was earmarked for specific purposes, leaving unallocated reserves of just under £7 million against a target of around £4 million.
76. The council has a well-developed financial management framework, including comprehensive budget setting and monitoring processes, but acknowledges the need for better strategic resource management and options appraisal to support spending decisions. Individual service plans provide a link between service priorities and the council's strategic objectives but links with the budget process need to be improved. While budgets within services are focused on priority areas, the council could do more to move resources between services to reflect corporate priorities. The council has recently revised service planning guidance to ensure that medium-term financial information is included in service plans on a consistent basis.
77. The council works on a three-year budget cycle, setting a detailed revenue budget for the forthcoming financial year, and preparing high level budgets for the subsequent two years. A potential funding gap of around £12 million in 2007/08 has been identified, based on income and expenditure levels adjusted for future grant and known cost pressures. Now that greater certainty exists around financial pressures associated with the implementation of a single status pay agreement and the results of efficiency reviews, the council is developing a sustainable long-term financial strategy to ensure that it can meet the cost of such commitments. Better information from improved strategic management of assets and human resources will also support the council in producing a sustainable long term financial strategy.





78. The council approves its detailed capital budget at the same time as the revenue budget. The three-year rolling capital programmes are reviewed annually. They are supported by an annual review of prudential borrowing indicators, to demonstrate the longer-term affordability of the capital programme. Capital programmes are based on estimated expenditure required to support corporate and service priorities. Detailed estimates are prepared for key strategic spending decisions, such as the schools estate strategy, and delivering care standards in residential homes. The council acknowledges the need for better asset management and options appraisal processes to support capital spending decisions and is starting to address this issue.

## Managing people

**The council does well in managing and developing its staff. The results of its latest staff survey show significant improvement in some areas of satisfaction and the council supports management development well. While there is evidence of workforce planning in response to specific pressures, in common with other councils, Renfrewshire needs to develop an overall strategic approach.**

79. The council employs the equivalent of around 8,000 full time staff at a cost of £176 million. 'Valuing our employees' is one of the council's core values. To support this it has developed a comprehensive range of personnel policies covering issues such as health and safety at work, absence management, harassment, discrimination and victimisation at work.
80. Although there is evidence of strategic workforce planning within individual services, this mainly occurs due to specific pressures such as shortages in qualified social workers. The council recognises the need to improve its overall strategic approach to workforce planning to ensure that it can meet the needs of service users into the future. It has recently advertised for a specialist to fill this role. This is an area that councils throughout Scotland need to address.
81. The council has recently introduced a staff development scheme: Managing Team and Individual Performance and Development (MTIPD). The scheme is designed to ensure close alignment of individual goals with service and corporate priorities, quality standards and continuous improvement. Training needs are identified as part of the process. Staff contacted during the audit were generally supportive of the MTIPD system.
82. Although staff now receive formal appraisals through the MTIPD arrangements, directors do not receive a formal appraisal. Directors receive twice yearly one-to-one meetings with the chief executive and this could form the basis of future more formal appraisal arrangements. The council has indicated that it plans to introduce such formalised arrangements.
83. The chief executive's appraisal was recently undertaken on the basis of his prospective retirement after a period of ten years' service in the role. The appraisal was externally facilitated and provides a very favourable retrospective view of his performance. It also looks forward to his role in facilitating the



transition to the new chief executive and issues for the development of the council. This process aims to provide continuity for the council when the new chief executive is appointed. Issues identified include: reflecting on council decision making structures and processes, inter-party member working in relation to scrutiny and 'performance beyond the indicators'. These themes are well aligned with issues highlighted in this report.

84. The council has also introduced a refreshed management development programme designed to focus on the practical skills required to be an effective manager. A self-assessment handbook helps managers to identify and match their existing skills against required management competencies. The handbook contains details of training courses available to support development of competencies. A series of management master classes with guest speakers has also been introduced to develop management skills.
85. Managing sickness absence has been a key issue for the council. A range of policies and procedures have been introduced to tackle this, including return to work interviews and the offer of counselling. While rates across all categories of staff have reduced since 2001/02, SPIs show that there is further room for improvement. In 2004/05 SPIs show that the council has absence levels of 5.9 per cent for chief officers and local government employees, and also for craft workers. The rate for teachers is 3.9 per cent. This compares with Scottish averages of 5.5 per cent, 5.9 per cent and 3.7 per cent respectively. The council continues to focus on this area and has set targets to reduce the levels year-on-year.
86. Results from a recent staff survey indicate that the council's work in developing a positive staff culture through its values framework and by improving staff training has brought great benefits in terms of increased staff morale. The council's staff survey results show a marked improvement in key areas such as job satisfaction, the level of training provided and consultation compared to a similar survey conducted in 2001. The key results of the staff survey are shown in [Exhibit 8](#). Staff focus groups held as part of the audit confirmed that the council has a highly committed and customer focused workforce. Relationships with the trade unions are also good and the council has a staff awards scheme to recognise and encourage good practice in service delivery.



## Exhibit 8

### The recent staff survey reflects a positive culture and shows clear improvement since 2001

#### The key results of the recent survey are:

- 89.6% of respondents stated they liked their job. An increase from 74%.
- 76.4% of respondents feel their work is valued. An increase from 38%.
- 91.5% of respondents know what standards are expected of them. An increase from 91%.
- 71.9% of respondents felt they got the training and guidance they required. An increase from 56%.
- 71.3% of respondents felt they are listened to and their views are taken seriously. An increase from 55%.
- 72.4% of respondents feel able to come forward with suggestions and ideas. An increase from 39%.
- 83.6% of respondents feel the council is looking for ways to improve what it does. An increase from 67%.

Source: Renfrewshire Council, Audit Scotland

## Managing assets

### The council has reviewed some major asset holdings at service level and has recognised the need to take a more strategic approach to asset management across all of its activities.

87. The council holds assets worth approximately £732 million, mainly represented by land and property. A number of key property holdings have been reviewed. For example:

- A schools estate strategy has been produced, which includes a public private partnership agreement for ten new schools, two nurseries and a learning centre by 2007, and the refurbishment of up to 37 schools through more traditional funding routes.
- A major refurbishment and rationalisation project is underway for the council headquarters.
- Social work services are currently managing a number of initiatives involving the co-location of staff and services with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, and three new care homes for older people.
- A public buildings estate strategy is being drawn up for other buildings such as libraries and museums.

88. The council recognises the need for a more strategic approach to asset management to assist with capital expenditure planning and ensure best use is being made of assets. This area was reviewed by the council's scrutiny board and an asset management working group has been established to develop the council's corporate asset management arrangements.

89. The council is making progress in developing a corporate, strategic approach to asset management and approved its corporate asset management policy in March 2006. The new approach aims to



improve the quality of asset information which currently varies across services. Vehicle and equipment databases are well established and include key indicators and trend information. Infrastructure assets have been reviewed more recently, with a comprehensive roads and pathway survey resulting in an £8 million three year investment programme.

## Managing information and communications technology (ICT)

**The council is implementing its customer services strategy and developing its modernising government agenda through a stronger business change and efficient government focus. ICT has made a significant contribution to modernising the council's services and delivering the customer services strategy.**

90. Information and communications technology (ICT) plays a major role in delivering the council's strategic objectives and corporate initiatives. In particular ICT supports the council's modernising services, efficient government and customer services objectives.
91. The council recognised the need for a more comprehensive IT strategy and has drawn up a revised corporate IT strategy. This provides a stronger focus on efficiency, project management and infrastructure improvement. The new strategy links with the modernising government strategy and service plans. A Modernising and Improvement Group (MIG) has been established to coordinate the modernising government agenda and focus on organisational development to support the efficient government and shared services agendas.
92. In delivering the objectives of its 'Reaching Renfrewshire' and Customer Services Strategy the council has developed a successful contact centre, which handles around 1,000 telephone calls a day dealing with a range of enquiries and service requests. The customer service centre, which provides face to face contact, incorporates a queue management system to minimise waiting times. The council performs comparatively well against meeting the national targets for electronic service delivery. Renfrewshire Council plays an active role in supporting the Scottish Executive's Customer First project. It acts as a pilot or lead authority in areas such as the citizen's account, customer contact training and e-procurement.
93. The IT service uses information from the Society of IT Managers (SOCITM) to benchmark its performance and is further developing its own performance indicators. The information available shows that the council compares favourably with others in terms of having high levels of customer satisfaction. The service has been retained in-house based on good benchmarking results and a favourable independent review of the IT strategy.



## Buying goods and services

**The council is developing a more systematic approach to procurement, and has made a good start in generating cost savings and establishing mechanisms to deliver its planned efficiencies.**

94. The council introduced a revised approach to procurement in 2004 through the approval of the eASY BUY corporate procurement strategy. The council has also rolled-out the implementation of PECOS, an electronic procurement system, to most services. Monthly spend through the system is in excess of £1 million and is increasing as more services come online. This has been supported by other initiatives such as corporate purchasing cards and statement billing. At present, the PECOS system is predominantly used to replicate the previous paper based system. Although this has generated some efficiencies, the council acknowledges that a significant amount of development work is required to increase the effectiveness of the system by encouraging more suppliers to adopt the system and to improve catalogues.
95. The council has successfully introduced e-tendering on a range of contracts including contracts for stair lifts and fruit for schools. E-tendering is used by the Corporate Procurement Unit and is being rolled out to all other tendering departments. This replaces traditional paper based tendering procedures with more efficient electronic systems, and permits electronic auctions to be conducted. Potential contractors can view the leading bid price and can submit an improved bid. The council has saved at least £180,000 on new stair lifts using this process. E-tendering is also currently being rolled-out across the council.
96. The council is the lead authority for the Authorities Buying Consortium (ABC), a collaborative purchasing agency. ABC is developing a number of strategies to maximise savings through standardising specifications and contractual terms and conditions. The council has recognised that significant scope exists for procurement savings through better collaborative buying and is playing an important part in taking this forward more generally through its lead role with ABC.
97. Establishing baseline information to identify procurement savings is a challenge for the council. Until PECOS has been further developed and becomes the key tool for procurement, full baseline information will not be available. However, the council has developed a tracking system to identify procurement savings generated through collaborative buying exercises. To date, it estimates that £1.4 million savings have been achieved.
98. In a further initiative the council took the lead in developing a proposal for a centre for procurement excellence for local government in Scotland, in partnership with 17 other councils, ABC and Strathclyde Police and Fire and Rescue Services. It has secured Efficient Government Funding to develop a business case for this.



## Equal opportunities

**The council has the building blocks in place for a comprehensive approach to addressing equalities issues. Its strategy is supported by policies, consultation, clearly delegated responsibility, and mainstreaming. Equalities are given high priority, reflected in the community plan and corporate statement. The engagement of the leader of the council affords this issue a high corporate profile.**

99. Equal opportunities issues come under the remit of the leadership board and several of the elected members who sit on the board also have responsibility for specific equalities groups. The council takes a wide definition of equalities and includes older people and young people among the groups which have designated elected member champions. The leader also assumes responsibility for equalities which is encompassed within his remit of social inclusion affording the issue a good profile within the council.
100. The council carries out consultation with minority groups to inform its policies and processes. This has been particularly effective with the user group at the Disability Resource Centre. There are many examples of how input from this group has directly affected the access to or delivery of a service including:
- lowering service counters and reception bells to assist wheelchair users
  - introducing loop systems and text phones to help staff serve people with hearing impairments
  - training in sign language for a number of staff.
101. The council has also worked jointly with Renfrewshire Council for Voluntary Services to establish specific networks to assist consultation with particular groups. The Disability Network was launched in October 2002. The council has found it more difficult to establish a Race Equality Network or to establish consultation structures with the minority ethnic population. This may, in part, be due to the relatively small ethnic minority which represents 1.2 per cent of the population, just over half the Scottish average. Nonetheless, environmental services identified and met the need for food hygiene courses in Chinese and Punjabi. The council has also identified the need to improve links between the black and minority ethnic communities and the community planning partnership within its plans for continuous improvement.
102. The council mainstreams equal opportunities in a number of ways. Equal opportunities are included in departmental service plans and within the 'Customers Matter' strategy and toolkit. Services carry out an annual equalities audit using an equalities checklist. Reports from this are submitted to the corporate management team. Equal opportunities are also considered within the service review process. While the council does not carry out equal opportunity monitoring of service users at a corporate level, this is done by some services, such as education and social work. Without



comprehensive data on service users, it is difficult for the council to demonstrate it is monitoring its policies for any adverse impact on the promotion of race equality.

103. Equalities issues are mainstreamed in the council's programme of training courses including induction, recruitment and selection, customer care and management. The new statutory performance indicator for the percentage of public service buildings that are suitable and accessible to people with disabilities shows a compliance rate of 65 per cent of buildings compared to the Scottish average of 37.4 per cent. The council's new web portal is working towards the WWW Consortium AA conformance level for accessibility. The council provides key documents in other languages and formats on request but could do more to highlight the availability of this support and information.
104. The council recognises the need for adequate information on the composition of its workforce to support equal opportunities. It has undertaken an employee verification exercise in the course of developing a new integrated payroll and human resources system. This provides the council with information to monitor and analyse the diversity of its workforce. The Diversity in Relation to Employment Matters strategy commits the council to introducing measures to improve recruitment and retention of, in particular, under-represented groups. Examples include flexible working arrangements and the targeting of bursaries for newly qualified staff.
105. In the 2004/05 statutory performance indicators measuring the percentage of the council's highest paid 2 per cent and 5 percent of employees that are women, the council ranked 22nd and 21st out of all Scottish councils. A working group chaired by the Chief Executive developed an Employment Diversity Strategy in 2005 to address workforce diversity issues, including female representation at senior management level. A variety of initiatives are being taken forward including a senior management mentoring scheme, a pilot programme of flexible working practices and bursaries to encourage applications from under represented groups.

## Sustainable development

**Renfrewshire Council has made good progress in raising the profile of sustainability. Many of its key corporate projects have a major bearing on sustainable development. The council recognises that it must better coordinate and monitor its sustainable development activity.**

106. Sustainable development is an important strategic priority for the council. It is one of the three 'guiding principles' in the community plan. The corporate statement also emphasises the need for sustainable development. Work by the local external auditor acknowledges the council's commitment to sustainable development and the progress made in mainstreaming sustainability, particularly through the service planning process. The auditor noted a range of environmental and economic activity contributing to sustainable development, and that environmental considerations are included in the council's procurement policy.



107. Particular challenges for Renfrewshire include the need to regenerate deprived urban areas and to sustain the local economy. The council's housing renewal and regeneration work to improve neighbourhoods has a major role in this. Local initiatives, often involving the independent sector, help to build the capacity in communities to improve neighbourhoods and promote employment. An example is the Sustainable Communities Project which enables community action groups to promote healthy living, conservation, and environmental improvements in deprived areas. The Recycle Renfrewshire project ([Exhibit 9](#)) demonstrates an innovative programme to promote recycling, employment and social inclusion.

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## Exhibit 9

### Recycle Renfrewshire

This innovative project is sponsored by the council and delivered by the Wise Group - a charitable organisation which is dedicated to helping unemployed people back into work. The project aims to tackle poverty and digital exclusion in Renfrewshire, whilst providing a route back to work for local unemployed people through training and work experience. The project involves the refurbishment and repair of household and computer goods before distributing them free of charge to local communities.

The project brings many benefits: it promotes sustainable waste management; it provides work opportunities for the long term unemployed; it provides the workforce with interpersonal and employability skills, for example in computing or furniture repair; and the community gains from the educational and social benefits of internet ready PCs.

*Source: Renfrewshire Council*

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108. The council is involved in many environmental initiatives. These include: the Local Biodiversity Action Plan; the Strategic Waste Fund and Integrated Waste Management plan to increase recycling and reduce landfill flood prevention and drainage assessment guidance to ensure sustainable building and infrastructure developments.

109. The council also has a Sustainable Development Action Plan covering the period 2002 to 2005. This has an over-riding focus on environmental aspects of sustainability, but also includes social and economic aspects such as area renewal and integrated transport. A senior councillor has a brief to champion sustainable development and progress reports on the action plan are considered at the leadership board.

110. The council recognises that it must better coordinate and monitor its sustainable development related activity if it is to meet the evolving Scottish Executive guidance. For example performance indicators need to be developed to support the monitoring of the council's sustainable development action plan. In order to address this, the council has reinstated its Sustainable Development Working Group. The group's aim is to set clear objectives for sustainability and monitor progress against these through existing policy frameworks. This will help the council to better coordinate, monitor and resource its sustainable development activities.





111. The community planning partnership has developed local performance indicators that are presented to the annual community planning conference. However, these relate exclusively to environmental aspects such as pollution, wildlife and habitats, not to wider social or economic aspects of sustainable development.



# Part 3: Is the council delivering better public services?

Council services are generally well managed and are customer focused. A culture of continuous improvement exists within services but statutory performance indicators (SPIs) show that this has not yet been fully translated into tangible benefits for all service users.

SPIs show that the council's ratio of improving against declining indicators is better than average and that a number of indicators have moved from the lower to middle quartiles. However, at the same time as this improvement has occurred, some indicators have also moved to the middle quartiles from the best performing quartile.

The council is below average ranking in a number of corporate SPIs. Work is ongoing to address equalities issues for female senior staff. Collection rates for council rents are poor and the council has plans to tackle this. The council has devoted considerable effort to addressing sickness absence.

The council's investment in improving its approach to customer care is resulting in significant improvements.

112. Audit Scotland publishes a set of 79 SPIs for each Scottish local authority. While these do not give a comprehensive picture across all services or activities, they give an indication of comparative performance across a range of services.

- In 2004/05 Renfrewshire was ranked in the upper quartile (eighth or above out of 32 councils) on 16 measures and was in the lower quartile (25 or below) on 11.
- The council's performance improved by at least five per cent on 16 measures between 2002/03 and 2004/05, while ten measures worsened by at least five per cent.

This represents a ratio of improvement to decline of 1.6, the seventh highest of all 32 councils and well above the Scottish figure of 1.2 ([Exhibit 10](#)).

## Exhibit 10

### Statutory Performance Indicators: Performance change between 2002/03 and 2004/05

	Measures that worsened by...			Measures that improved by...		
	>15%	10-14%	5-9%	5-9%	10-14%	>15%
<b>Scotland average</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Renfrewshire</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>

Source: Audit Scotland, Council Profiles 2004/05



113. Three service areas have indicators which show they are amongst the poorest performing eight councils in the country and that performance has deteriorated by at least five per cent since 2002/03.

These relate to:

- The proportion of social enquiry reports submitted by the social work department to the courts by the due date (rank 28).
- The percentage of householder planning applications dealt with within two months (rank 26).
- Current rent arrears as a percentage of the net amount of rent due in the year (rank 27).
- The percentage of current tenants owing more than 13 weeks rent at the year end, excluding those owing less than £250 (rank 28).

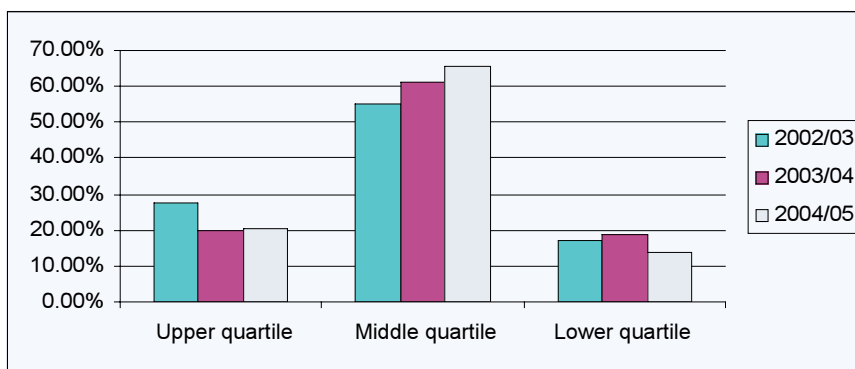
114. The council ranked first, or joint first, in Scotland for four indicators in 2004/05.

- The percentage of the national target met for replenishing lending stock for adults.
- The average time taken to respond to a request for a building completion certificate.
- The percentage of business advice requests dealt with within 14 days of receipt.
- The percentage of trading premises in medium risk inspection level (1-2 years) that were inspected on time.

115. The SPI trend in Renfrewshire is towards average performance ([Exhibit 11](#)) when compared with other councils in Scotland. The council is below average ranking in a number of corporate SPIs. Work is ongoing to address equalities issues for female senior staff. Collection rates for rent arrears are poor and the council is working to improve the position. The council has devoted considerable effort to addressing sickness absence, introducing a range of initiatives including stress counselling and return to work interviews.

## Exhibit 11

### Renfrewshire Council: Statutory Performance Indicators 2002/03 to 2004/05



Source: Audit Scotland, Council Profiles 2004/05



## Council services

116. The audit took a risk-based approach selecting services for focused audit work. The selection criteria included: high spending services, services with vulnerable client groups, and services with a direct role in delivering the council's priorities.
117. The services selected were: education and leisure services, social work, housing and property services, environmental services and planning and transport (which includes economic development). We also looked at the council's approach to customer care.

## Education and leisure services

**Renfrewshire Council has consistently performed well in educational attainment. Its education and leisure services are able to demonstrate a performance focused culture and how education contributes to the council's strategic priorities. A more strategic approach is now also being developed for leisure and cultural services.**

118. Education and leisure services accounts for over half of council expenditure and employs around 4,000 staff. Education services are provided through schools, community learning and development and associated support services. The council has 17 pre-five establishments, 19 nursery classes, 52 primary schools' 12 secondary schools, and three special schools for children with additional support needs. Partnership nurseries provide additional pre-five places. As well as schools and community education, the service includes leisure, arts, libraries and museums, which represent nine per cent of the education and leisure services department's spending.
119. A new director was appointed in October 2005 and the management team has since been restructured, with the number of heads of service reduced from four to three. While it is early days for this new structure, the service plan identifies a clear direction for the future development of the service and there is good evidence of a performance focused culture within the service.

## Education

120. The education functions of Renfrewshire Council were inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) in 2004. The report of that inspection, published in April 2004, was very positive, with eight out of eleven quality indicators deemed to be 'very good' and three 'good'. A further inspection was scheduled for April 2006. HMIE inspections of individual schools confirm this overall assessment, with all assessments for the two years up to June 2005 rated good or very good.
121. Attainment figures for the authority are very good, and Renfrewshire has consistently outperformed similar authorities. For example, 2004/05 figures show that performance is above the national average and continually improving in 5-14 year olds' attainment. Performance is also above the national



average in SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5 (Standard Grade) and 6 (Higher Grade), albeit with some slight slippage. The council is aware, however, that some areas need to further improve, such as the attainment of S5 and S6 pupils.

122. The council is making good progress with the Scottish Executive's *Ambitious Excellent Schools* initiative. For instance, it considers that it is on course to meet the target of 90 per cent of the school education budget being devolved to schools. It is also making progress in delivering a more flexible curriculum and the service plays a key role in taking forward the Integrated Children's Services Plan.
123. The Community Learning and Development (CLAD) service has been assessed by HMIE, in its inspection in the Paisley and Johnstone area in March and April 2003, as being good overall with some very good aspects. This includes finding that the Paisley and Johnstone team was highly motivated and committed to the delivery of high quality services to local young people and adults. A follow-up report in February 2005 found sufficient progress in action points previously identified. Following on from this positive assessment, the council, in conjunction with its community planning partners, has published a CLAD strategy entitled '*Working and Learning Together for a Better Renfrewshire*'. The basis of the strategy will be a roll-out of a 'learning neighbourhoods' structure, with CLAD action plans being produced for each of the sixteen learning neighbourhood areas. The concept of the learning neighbourhood is explained in [Exhibit 5](#). The council accepts that this is an ambitious commitment and that progress in this area will be crucial.
124. The service is able to demonstrate its substantial contribution to the council's social inclusion agenda. It is, for example, the only council in Scotland that has shown a steady and consistent fall in exclusion numbers over the past five years. Following a comprehensive review by the Scrutiny Board, the past three years have seen a fall in total exclusions from 501 to 375, with a target of 278 by 2007/08. [Exhibit 12](#) is an example of a successful initiative used by the council to address this. The council can also point to a number of initiatives commended by HMIE such as West Johnstone Digital Inclusion Project and the Buddies for Learning adult literacy project.



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## Exhibit 12

### New Directions

*New Directions* is a joint initiative with Reid Kerr College. The initiative was launched as a three-year pilot project in August 2001 and supports disengaged young people in meaningful education.

The initiative provides an alternative curriculum for S4 pupils identified as being vulnerable and disengaged. It is provided in Reid Kerr College, and allows pupils to study core skills and vocational subjects of their choosing and provides 30 places per term.

The three-year pilot was completed in July 2004 and an independent evaluation report was published by Strathclyde University. The report concluded that the model adopted by *New Directions* was very successful in engaging with the target client group. It also prompted the council to mainstream the resource.

By the summer of 2005 *New Directions* had worked with over 200 students. Performance indicators such as attendance patterns, SQA National Awards and the final destination of students continue to improve year on year. The student success rate in terms of young people completing the programme is around 85-90 per cent. Other indicators show the majority of young people on the programmes are growing in confidence and are using the resource as a means of developing a range of life, social and vocational skills. In August 2005, the council agreed to fund an extended *New Directions* provision, which will attempt to replicate the original model outwith the college setting, by using a community-based approach.

Source: Renfrewshire Council

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## Leisure, arts and culture

125. The council's leisure, arts and culture agendas are linked to its schools and learning agendas and it acknowledges the need for a more coordinated approach. To address this, a physical activity, sport and health strategy is due to be published by June 2006. The council works in partnership with Renfrewshire Leisure, an arms-length body set up to run its leisure facilities. The council monitors and evaluates the services provided by Renfrewshire Leisure.
126. The library service has been subject to an extensive review resulting in some major changes, particularly relating to the use of information and computer technology. Statutory performance indicators are encouraging. Use of learning centre and learning access points have seen a 52 per cent rise in the three years to 2005. Stock turnover has also been consistently good. In 2004/05 the council ranked first and ninth respectively for adult and children's lending stock amongst Scottish councils. Borrower numbers have increased by 35 per cent in three years. However the time to satisfy requests for books has been static for the last three years at 21 days.
127. A review of halls and community facilities was completed in 1999, but current targets applied to usage and income generation do not suggest any substantial improvement in this regard, and the department accepts that this is an area which is worthy of further attention. Indeed, given its substantial amount of physical assets beyond schools, such as community centres and libraries, the department is aware of the potential opportunities and challenges that this might present, and



accordingly is committed to the development of a public buildings and estate strategy by June 2006. This provides the council with a further opportunity to consider how services such as libraries and community halls are used and developed in future years.

128. The service is customer focused and can point to good customer satisfaction figures for libraries, arts and museums and for the services provided through Renfrewshire Leisure. For the past two years the Public Services Panel have rated libraries (90 per cent), museum and art gallery (85 per cent) and community halls and art centres (71 per cent) amongst its top four services for customer satisfaction. All of these have shown improvement on the previous year's figures. Attendance figures for both pools and other facilities are comparatively low, albeit improving. The council currently ranks 24<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> respectively on these statutory performance indicators.

## Social work

**The service has a clear vision for how services need to improve and how it will respond to projected shifts in the demand for its services. It is making good progress in developing a performance focused culture. However, some aspects of service delivery still need to improve including homecare services for elderly people, controlling out of area children's placements and aspects of its criminal justice performance.**

129. Social work represents some 21 per cent of council expenditure, of which around 40 per cent is spent on older people, 35 per cent on other community care services (learning difficulties, physical disability and mental health), 23 per cent on children's services and 2 per cent on criminal justice.

130. The main challenges for social work services in Renfrewshire are:

- higher than average levels of deprivation
- an increase in the proportion of older people
- an increase in the number of children requiring care and attention
- the effects on families and communities of increasing drug and alcohol misuse.

131. The service's strategic objectives, as set out in its service plan, provide a good indication of its approach in addressing these issues by: developing more integrated services with partners; shifting the balance of care towards care at home or with substitute families; developing a skilled and confident workforce; improving the protection of children and young adults; and improving joint assessment and care management.

132. Overall, the service has made good progress in developing a performance focused culture. It has invested heavily in quality assurance mechanisms (including charter mark) and reports very positive feedback from those taking part. It can demonstrate a good record of service user involvement in service redesign and monitoring. It can also show, particularly through its service plan, that it is



responding well to the local challenges and delivering a programme of service redesign, change and improvement. Its management processes are developing well to support this, with examples of strategic projects such as the roll-out of electronic care records with care partners and the development and roll-out of the social work information system.

## **Community care**

133. The service is in the process of major modernisation of services for various community care client groups. In particular, the council with its strategic NHS partner, (formerly) NHS Argyll & Clyde, published its first Joint Future Annual Plan in June 2005, and its performance in delivering joint future targets was judged by the national joint improvement team in 2004/05 to be in the top quartile of Scottish councils.
134. This good progress is despite considerable difficulties associated with the dissolution of NHS Argyll and Clyde on 31 March 2006. (NHS services in Renfrewshire are now being delivered by a new body, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde). In the period leading up to dissolution, factors such as uncertainty over resources and delays in establishing a Community Health Partnership (CHP) slowed progress on joint service developments. However, the CHP has existed in shadow form since 1 April 2006, and is intended to be fully operational by the end of 2006. As a result, joint work and projects such as the development of a new multi-agency service unit in Renfrew are anticipated to progress.
135. Despite these difficulties the council can demonstrate good progress on developing new joint planning structures and major joint commissioning strategies were progressed during 2005 for a number of community care client groups including older people, mental health services, and learning disability services. The council was reported in the Joint Performance Improvement Assessment Framework (JPIAF) annual statement for 2004/05 as making 'good progress' in developing a holistic approach to the balance of care. In addition, the single shared assessment tool was launched in October 2004 and piloted for all community care client groups. The JPIAF annual statement for 2004/05 reported 'steady progress' in this regard. The council can demonstrate that it is successfully tackling delayed discharges. It reports that the number of delayed discharges has fallen by 69 per cent (i.e. 119 to 37) in the three years to April 2006.
136. SPIs suggest that there is scope for improvement in homecare services for older people. In 2004/05, the council was ranked 28 out of 32 Scottish councils for the proportion of homecare clients aged 65+ receiving evening and/or overnight care. The service aims for its ongoing review of the service, building upon a successful recruitment drive in 2004-05, to have a positive impact on this performance in the future. The joint commissioning strategy for older people developed by the council and its NHS partner brings together a number of changes to shift the balance in care for older people in favour of more independent living.





137. SPIs confirm the council's positive move towards ensuring that it will be well placed to meet National Care Standards by 2007. Accommodation quality indicators for adults and older people all show year-on-year improvement. The development of three new purpose built residential care homes for older people which, along with developments in the voluntary and private sector, will provide more single and en-suite rooms to improve this performance further.
138. Given the increasing significance of the effects of drug and alcohol abuse, and the consequential increase in demand for addiction services, the council also recognises the need to review the way it plans and delivers the range of joint services currently in place. For instance, the Renfrewshire Drug Service is a joint initiative between social work and the NHS and is staffed by a multidisciplinary team. An evaluation of drugs services in Renfrewshire is underway.

## **Children's services**

139. The Joint Children's Services Plan, covering the period 2006-2008, was approved by the Community and Family Care Policy Board on 2 August 2005. The major challenge is to reshape children's services to deliver this plan. Integrated children's services will be the subject of an inspection led by HMIE during the next three years.
140. An area of difficulty for the council has been the balance of care provided in residential rather than community settings, such as with foster carers. Demand for services has been such that there has been an increasing use of foster carers located outwith the council area. Plans have been developed for a phased investment to increase the number of Renfrewshire foster carers; improve the support available to carers; and increase the council's capacity to achieve permanent care arrangements for children.

## **Criminal justice**

141. The Social Work Services Inspectorate short review of 2003 identified a persistent problem of poor performance in producing social enquiry reports (92.5 per cent of reports submitted to courts by the due date, a deterioration of 4.9 per cent in three years and ranked 28 of Scottish councils). This has been considered as part of the recent Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) report on criminal justice services and a range of actions to address the issue have been agreed.
142. The SWIA inspected the criminal justice partnership of East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire during October 2004 and February 2005. The report set out a number of 'encouraging findings', such as the use of group work in supervision; strong partnerships between the three authorities and other service providers (particularly for addictions services); work with sex offenders; the use of pooled resources to deploy peripatetic staff; and, stakeholders spoke highly of the service.



143. The report set out 'practice that could be improved' in relation to the standard of reports to court and the parole board; staff understanding of risk assessment practice; contact with offenders; increased sharing of resources; and the need to rethink through care services. Issues relating to community service will be dealt with through an ongoing joint best value review of this service (due to report in August 2006), and the partnership has produced an action plan to address the other issues.

## Housing and property services

**The housing service is making good progress with its housing renewal programme and the preparatory stages of the community ownership programme. Housing performance is generally improving, but the service still faces a number of challenges, for instance in meeting its challenging targets for accommodating homeless people and reducing tenant rent arrears. Building services performs well and has a culture focused on improvement.**

144. The council is Renfrewshire's largest social landlord with a stock of 15,367 dwellings and a budget of around £56 million. The housing and property services department includes housing landlord functions, area renewal, homelessness and the building maintenance service. The council's community plan includes housing, neighbourhoods and community safety as a key theme. Housing stock transfer and housing area renewal are identified as key corporate initiatives.

145. The problems of severe deprivation and social exclusion are often exacerbated by poor housing conditions. The council estimates that over £300 million is required to bring its housing stock up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standards target for 2015. In May 2004 the council decided that housing stock transfer under the Scottish Executive's community ownership scheme offers the best way to fund improvements required to the housing stock while keeping rents at an affordable level. A shadow housing association has been established comprising councillors, independent and tenant representatives. A tenants' ballot on a potential stock transfer to a community housing association is scheduled for autumn 2006. A shadow housing association has been set up.

146. The housing service has developed a balanced scorecard of performance indicators. These include SPIs, tenant satisfaction indicators derived from the annual Public Services Panel, and new indicators for anti-social behaviour. This is a positive development for the service; however, it is not yet possible to analyse performance trends as there is only one year of complete data.

147. The housing service performs reasonably well in terms of the statutory performance indicators: 98 per cent of emergency housing repairs were carried out within 24 hours compared to the Scottish average of 93.5 per cent; rent lost due to empty or un-let properties is in line with the Scottish average at 2.5 per cent; and 90 per cent of the 489 council houses sold during 2004/05 were completed within 26 weeks, ranking the council third amongst Scottish councils.

148. The council has improved the time it takes to re-let council houses, with an average time of 59 days compared to a Scottish average of 79 days. Examples of improvements include simple but effective



measures to maintain the gardens of empty properties to improve their marketability, which was suggested by tenant consultation; and the shortening of building services' timescales to ensure that empty properties are refurbished before they are viewed.

149. Current tenant rent arrears are 14.9 per cent compared to a Scottish average of 7.4 per cent. Improvements have been made through a specialist arrears recovery team, improved money advice and better working with the benefits team and the Sheriff Courts. However, Renfrewshire remains one of the poorer performing councils, ranking 27 among the 32 Scottish councils. The council has also increased evictions of non-payers by 60 per cent in 2004/05 from 81 to 128. The council has set an ambitious target to reduce the level of arrears to below the current national average by 2007/08 and has in place comprehensive plans to deliver the planned improvement. As part of this the Scrutiny Board is examining ways to increase take up of housing and council tax benefits. At the time of the audit, the council was on target to meet the overall reduction in the level of arrears but was behind target in respect of tenants owing in excess of 13 weeks rent. The challenge for the council is to meet this target without over-reliance on eviction.
150. The council uses area development frameworks to plan physical and social renewal in more deprived housing estates. This is described in [Exhibit 13](#). It is on target with its area renewal and demolition programme to improve these neighbourhoods by 2009. The council is also implementing an innovative scheme to involve tenant representatives in estate inspections. The results of inspections will be fed into an early warning indicators system to identify any deterioration in estate condition.



## Exhibit 13

### Ferguslie Park

In 1988/89 Ferguslie Park was designated as one of four pilot urban regeneration initiatives under the 'New Life for Urban Scotland' strategy. This aimed to address high levels of multiple deprivation with regard to employment, poverty, housing, environment and image. A major aspect of this comprehensive review was physical renewal of the area to diversify the housing tenure, integrate between tenures and to make the environment more attractive.

The area has now been dramatically turned around from an area of 100 per cent local authority housing with a high proportion of void properties to an area of mixed tenure of local authority, housing association and private properties. The main vehicle for planning and co-ordinating the physical renewal of the estate was the area development framework prepared by the department of planning and transport and approved by all the main stakeholders in the estate including the council, Communities Scotland, Ferguslie Park Housing Association, Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire, and the local community. The implementation of the framework is overseen by a locally based implementation group made up of representatives of these groups and local councillors.

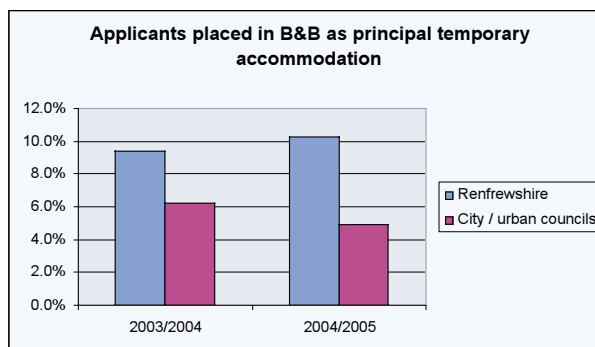
Area development frameworks have been implemented in seven neighbourhoods, and as part of its Local Housing Strategy, the council plans to roll out this approach to all estate areas by March 2009. The use of estate management agreements helps to ensure that improvements are sustained and that residents are aware of the service levels they can expect and also their responsibilities as residents.

Source: Renfrewshire Council and Audit Scotland

151. The council performs slightly better than the Scottish average for the time taken to resolve homeless cases from initial presentation to finding suitable accommodation. It has set an ambitious target of 9.5 weeks for 2005/06, well below the Scottish average of 13.4 weeks. This is linked to the increased supply of permanent accommodation identified in the housing strategy. However, the council needs to reduce its reliance on the use of bed and breakfast as temporary accommodation (see Exhibit 14). The council also performs significantly better than the Scottish average for the proportion of households re-presenting as homeless within a year with only six per cent re-presenting.

## Exhibit 14

### The council needs to reduce its reliance on bed and breakfast temporary accommodation



Source: Scottish Housing Best Value Network – benchmark information for Renfrewshire Council, and Audit Scotland



152. Customer service pledges allow customers to understand the level of service they can expect. Performance against these targets has been met or exceeded in 2004/5 for the homelessness service. These pledges are monitored through customer satisfaction surveys as part of the service's charter mark approach.

## Building services

153. The building services division provides repairs and maintenance services to both the council housing stock and council buildings. Around 80 per cent of the workforce would transfer to the housing association should tenants vote in favour of a stock transfer.

154. Building services operations have not been competitively tendered since 1997. The in-house contract has been renewed each year on the basis of best value service reviews, which use benchmarking information and external consultancy reports to demonstrate competitiveness. The service has shown year-on-year improvements, such as the use of hand-held devices for reporting repairs and a greater emphasis on planned capital works rather than reactive maintenance. However, the service could better demonstrate its competitiveness by taking a more systematic approach to its market comparisons and considering whether this service should be market tested in the future.

155. One example of an external review of service competitiveness is the report commissioned by the shadow housing association to test the council's building service's capability as a potential service provider. This review concluded that the trades profile and turnover requirement complemented the housing association's anticipated work programme. The report also included a dummy tender evaluation exercise. This concluded that building services' tender price was well within the programme budget, and offered comparatively high quality. A comparison with successful tenders for similarly sized contracts indicated that actual works costs of the in-house tender were competitive, although on-costs were higher. This has prompted the service to develop a multi-trades approach to service delivery.

156. The service has developed its approach to customer care through: customer feedback with follow-up visits to all non-satisfied customers; training and quality assurance; extension of the service into the early evening; customer access through the customer contact centre and the web portal; a tenant handbook on repairs reporting; and better coordinating different trades when undertaking a job. Customer satisfaction feedback indicates that over 90 per cent of customers are satisfied with the service.



## Environmental services

**Environmental services has a strong performance and customer focus. Performance is amongst the best Scottish authorities for the cost of refuse collection and several other indicators are above the Scottish average. Recycling performance has improved significantly under the council's Waste Management Plan. Improvements could be made by considering alternative forms and means of service delivery rather than solely focusing on improving the existing in-house service which has not been market tested since 1997.**

157. The environmental services department has a budget of around £42 million and employs 1,292 staff. It has a very wide portfolio of services including the commercial operations of waste management, refuse collection, grounds maintenance, street cleansing, catering, and building cleaning. It also undertakes statutory enforcement functions concerning trading standards and public health inspections. SPIs for 2004/05 show:

- Refuse collection costs per household are amongst the lowest in Scotland at £36.92 compared with the average of £49.20. Costs have been kept low through improved route planning and rationalising commercial waste services.
- Refuse disposal costs at £52.36 are also cheaper than the Scottish average of £55.08, but higher than the average cost of £49.22 for similar urban councils.
- Refuse complaints at 15.2 per 1,000 households are significantly lower than the Scottish average of 35.9. The council's special uplift facility also appears to perform well, with 93 per cent of special uplifts being completed in five days. The Scottish average is 83 per cent. Renfrewshire made over 24,000 special uplifts during 2004/05.
- The council's street cleanliness rating of 67 is below the Scottish average of 70 and in the bottom quartile. The council is addressing this poorer performance level through identifying litter control areas to target improved town centre and roadway sweeping.

158. Environmental services uses an integrated service model for its trading operations with joint management and working arrangements between services such as street cleaning and grounds maintenance, and also cleaning and catering. This has helped to reduce overheads and improve service delivery.

159. The service has a particularly strong performance driven culture. This is evidenced by the level of detail in its integrated business plan for commercial operations which includes financial forecasts, budget savings, workforce profiling and forecasts, performance review, marketplace assessments, customer consultation and risk assessment. There is a strong emphasis on quality assurance through charter mark, ISO 9001 quality management registration, and ISO 9004 benchmarking, for which environmental services is the only UK organisation to have received a Gold Award. The assessors noted business planning and consultation as particular strengths.



160. In addition to its internal performance measures the service uses the independently validated APSE benchmarking service to assess its performance. This indicates that the service has low overheads, good customer consultation and quality assurance, and staff absence is comparatively low.
161. Environmental services consults well with its users to improve its service. The customer consultation strategy incorporates site visits, surveys, quality inspections, and forum meetings. The integrated service plan cites many examples of customer feedback influencing service delivery including enhanced town centre cleaning, the household recycling approach, more litter bins, a fridge disposal service, and improving the maintenance of parks.
162. Grounds maintenance contracts were renegotiated in 1998 in the process allowed by the (then) Scottish Office. Facilities management services to the new Public Private Partnership (PPP) schools and some minor services such as skip hire have also been awarded externally. Best value service reviews are the usual means of determining whether services should be retained in-house and independent assessments by external consultancy firms have also been used as part of this assessment process.
163. The integrated service model brings certain service benefits but makes it difficult to test the competitiveness of services, especially where a market does not exist for such configurations of services. Environmental services contracts have not been subject to competitive tender since 1997 and have tended to focus on in-house service improvements rather than more radical options such as outsourcing or partnership working.
164. Environmental services also runs the school meals catering service. The service has an agreed capped subsidy for meals which ensures that it must maximise overall meal uptake by pupils to meet its financial targets. [Exhibit 15](#) illustrates progress with the Scottish Executive's healthy eating programme. The council has ceased to provide staff catering given the central location of council offices.



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## Exhibit 15

### Hungry for Success (H4S)

In 2000 the council adopted a strategy to use the surpluses it had generated to modernise its dining facilities in partnership with suppliers. Initially facilities and food products were branded to attract pupils back into school cafeterias. This led to an improvement in the uptake of meals. In 2003/04 as part of the government's Hungry for Success (H4S) programme the council de-branded the food and introduced healthy vending and pricing to encourage healthy choices. Unfortunately this caused a dramatic 40 per cent drop in uptake.

The catering service has since introduced sessions with pupils, parents, and teachers to promote and educate them about healthy eating. Revised hungry for success compliant menus have been introduced in primary schools; and theme days with tasting and menu awareness sessions have been held to promote the school meal service and the selection of healthy choices. Cashless catering has also been introduced in all secondary schools to help improve uptake by removing the stigma of free school meals. The schools operating under the forthcoming PPP contract will also be H4S compliant.

*Source: Renfrewshire Council*

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165. The Scottish Executive has set a target for councils to recycle or compost 30 per cent of their waste by 2008. Renfrewshire's latest published performance indicator for 2004/05 showed that Renfrewshire was only recycling 15 per cent of its waste, and ranked 20th amongst Scottish local authorities. The Scottish average was 17.6 per cent. However the council's programme under the Strategic Waste Fund, for which it was awarded £28 million, has improved performance significantly and the council reports that it is now meeting the interim 2006 target of 25 per cent, and that it is on track for the 2008 target of 30 per cent.

## Planning and transport

**The department of planning and transport provides effective regeneration activities through an integrated approach to planning, economic development and transport. Challenges remain in delivering sustainable employment opportunities against a declining working age population. In common with many councils, Renfrewshire faces a major challenge in bringing its road condition up to the targets set by the Scottish Executive.**

166. The department of planning and transport includes planning, economic development and roads services. It also provides an integrated approach to regeneration activities. The economic development service's operating plan provides evidence of a strong vision to support economic development linking areas of need with areas for opportunity.

167. Renfrewshire has suffered from a loss of high technology jobs over recent years. Between 1997 and 2004 the number of jobs in Renfrewshire decreased by one per cent compared with a 12 per cent increase in Scotland as a whole. The potential loss of jobs associated with the closure of the Rolls





Royce plant at Hillington was a major challenge for the area. The council worked well with partners to mitigate the effects of this (Exhibit 16).

## Exhibit 16

### Rolls Royce

Trade union officials from Rolls Royce plc contacted Renfrewshire Council in December 2001 to inform them that 300 staff had been issued with notice of redundancy and that the future of the Hillington manufacturing plant which employed 1,000 people was under threat. The council responded, in partnership with Job Centre Plus and Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire, by offering training and employment support to those being made redundant, many of whom subsequently found employment. The council also requested talks with Rolls Royce senior management regarding the future of the plant.

In January 2002 the council met with a Rolls Royce managing director regarding the company's intention to establish a new state of the art facility which would employ 900 skilled engineers. The company was considering Eastern Europe as the preferred location. The council requested the opportunity to convince Rolls Royce that their manufacturing requirements could be satisfied in Renfrewshire. To achieve this, a dedicated team was established from across the planning and transport department's disciplines. The department also liaised with Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Executive to ensure that a competitive assistance package could be offered to the company. The council also worked closely with trade unions to ensure that the remaining workforce could demonstrate that they could play a key role in taking the company forward.

In April 2002 a proposal involving a site at Inchinnan Business Park, together with a support package of £15 million from the Scottish Executive was presented to the company, towards the £85 million investment required. In response Rolls Royce agreed to make Inchinnan Business Park its preferred option provided that planning permission could be delivered by July 2002.

The department's dedicated team worked on a full-time basis with Rolls Royce's project team and successfully achieved planning permission by this date. The whole process from initial talks with Rolls Royce to securing full planning permission for a major new manufacturing facility was completed within six months. In October 2004 the First Minister opened Rolls Royce's new state of the art world class manufacturing facility at Inchinnan which now employs 900 people.

*Source: Renfrewshire Council and Audit Scotland*

168. Economic development activity in the Renfrewshire area is important to attract investment and stimulate growth. Particular challenges include helping long-term unemployed people into sustainable jobs and sustaining an appropriately skilled workforce to meet demand. At the same time, the working age population of Renfrewshire is projected to fall by 17 per cent, significantly more than the Scottish average figure of 7 per cent.

169. A 'master planning' approach has been adopted for major developments such as Renfrew Riverside (Exhibit 6). This has been successful in coordinating the various development proposals and ensuring that the infrastructure is in place to sustain communities. The masterplan sets out a land use and design framework which takes account of the local plan and the aspirations of landowners, potential developers and the council. This helps to integrate new developments, and identify opportunities for new investment in Renfrewshire. The council helps residents to compete for jobs by providing



employability training. It also attempts to remove other barriers to work by assisting with transport and childcare issues.

170. Economic development is difficult to assess due to a lack of good benchmarking information and the difficulty of isolating the impact of one organisation such as the council. To address this, the service has developed a range of performance indicators with targets and previous year comparisons. It is also developing a more in-depth framework for monitoring its activities.
171. In terms of current performance, the numbers of trainees benefiting from training support has exceeded target, although these were from a smaller base of companies than planned. Performance in training and employment programmes has improved greatly and 428 people were placed in training or further education in 2004/05 compared to a target of 300. In addition 747 people were assisted into jobs through various employment initiatives compared to a target of 450. The Environmental Task Force Programme, to involve young people in environmental improvement, performed particularly well with 66 per cent of participants securing full-time employment against a government target of 55 per cent. However, the service has fallen short of its targets for business loans in terms of companies assisted and loans advanced.
172. An improved monitoring framework is being developed and the council proposes to report regularly on key economic indicators in Renfrewshire including unemployment rates, economic activity, average earnings, and gross domestic product.

## Roads

173. The roads service provides transportation, design and roads maintenance activities. It has a budget of £34 million and employs around 280 staff. Renfrewshire's first local transport strategy was published in 2000. The council is in the process of preparing a revised Local Transport Strategy for the five year period from 2006-2010.
174. The highlights and progress made with the 2000 strategy were reported to the public in the summer 2005 issue of *Renfrewshire* magazine. This also invited views from the public on the main issues to tackle in the revised transport strategy. The council has introduced an annual status report to update members on progress with the transport strategy. However, the document lacks targets against which to measure achievement and the links with the service and community plans are unclear. The updated strategy will address this.
175. Transport planning is helped by close working between the planning, economic development, and transport functions in the service. This has led to improved transport links to the airport and business parks, working with Job Centre Plus to issue journey planners to assist with the transition into employment, and promoting joint travel planning between transport providers.



176. As part of the department of planning and transport, the service has developed a range of performance indicators. These include the SPIs for roads and local indicators such as the percentage of road network subject to maintenance work, and the expenditure per kilometre on winter maintenance.
177. The roads service has a high percentage of roads that should be considered for maintenance treatment compared with other councils (51.8 per cent of roads compared to a Scottish average of 41.9 per cent). The reported figure is a slight improvement on the previous year and meets the council's target for 2004/05. The council has a major challenge in meeting the Scottish Executive's ten year target which is 13.5 per cent for Scotland as a whole.
178. The introduction of a roads asset management system is an important part of the council's strategy to meet the Scottish Executive target. This will enable roads maintenance to be prioritised to ensure the worst roads are treated first. The council has an additional £8 million programme to improve road condition and is in the process of tendering this work.
179. There is a relatively small in-house roads maintenance team of around 60 operatives undertaking repairs work to the value of around £4 million and capital work of around £300,000. Where work is considered to be beyond the capacity of the in-house team, it is contracted externally. There is significant use of contractors, with £3.8 million out of £8.4 million of the annual revenue spending contracted out; and around £2.5 million out of £3 million of next year's capital spend will be contracted out. The council has also recognised the need to improve benchmarking information on the cost of its services and has developed a system to assess its in-house prices against the rates for winning contracts in other councils. The council acknowledges that this approach is not as robust as market testing or contracting, but it provides a useful basis for comparison and goes some way to demonstrating the competitiveness of the services provided.

## Customer care

**The council places a high priority on customer care in its plans. Its high-quality 'Customers Matter' toolkit has been used to train around 1,700 employees and the council has made good progress against its customer strategy targets.**

180. Delivering good customer care is an explicit priority for the council. 'Improving access to information and services' features as part of the Modernising Government priority in the community plan and 'treating our customers well' is an aim explicitly set out in the corporate statement.
181. The council's vision for customer service is set out in its 'Customers Matter' service strategy. The vision is 'to enable all citizens, businesses and organisations to reach information and services quicker and more easily, where and when they want, and by whatever means they prefer'.



182. The council has a very strong focus on developing frontline staff to provide high quality customer service. This is supported by a high-quality training toolkit called 'Customers Matter'. The toolkit is supported by a number of training workshops and an on-line training course is available through the council's intranet. To date over 100 training workshops have been delivered to around 1,300 employees. In addition nearly 400 employees have passed the on-line training course.

183. The council has embraced technology to help it deliver its vision and has invested resources to enable it to do so. While it is developing information and communication technology solutions, it has established from consultation that telephone and face-to-face are the preferred means of communication for most residents. It is successfully investing in its customer contact and customer service centres to improve the customer experience. The council reports significant improvement in call handling as a result. The overall approach is based on research and visits to other organisations that are developing innovative approaches.

184. The council's complaints procedure is clearly set out in leaflets and posters in all offices, on the website and in *Renfrewshire* magazine. Complaints are recorded, analysed and monitored. All staff are given written guidance on dealing with complaints and training is provided as part of the customer care training programme.

185. The 'Customers Matter' strategy includes targets for 2005/06 for call handling and for complaints. These are monitored on a three-monthly basis by the corporate management team and reported annually to the council. They are also reviewed annually by officers.

186. The council has the following indicators in place:

- The percentage of formal complaints resolved within agreed timescale. The target of 100 per cent was achieved for 2004/05.
- Visitor satisfaction levels at reception points. The target of 94 per cent was achieved in 2004/05.
- Contact centre response times. The target of 70 per cent of calls answered within three rings was missed by only one per cent for 2004/05.



## Part 4: What needs to improve?

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The council has undertaken a wide range of review and improvement activity. It has demonstrated that it is seeking to build the capacity to meet the challenge of best value and is embedding systems and processes to support continuous improvement. It now needs to ensure that it can show real improvements for service users as a result of its modernising agenda. A key factor in achieving this will be maintaining the greater political stability it has achieved in recent years through the coming period of change.

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### Developing an improvement culture

187. Continuous improvement in public services and local governance lie at the heart of best value and community planning. Local authorities must develop an improvement culture across all service areas. Elected members and officers must focus on key policy objectives and the needs of service users and communities, and be driven by a desire to achieve the highest possible standards in service delivery. This requires a culture where areas in need of improvement are identified and openly discussed and in which service performance is constructively challenged.
188. Renfrewshire Council's self assessment demonstrates a high level of self-awareness and an understanding of what needs to improve. Many of the improvement actions identified by the council in its assessment are in line with those we have raised during our review. The council has demonstrated a commitment to best value and has recently invested in improving its customer focus and customer service. It is undertaking a programme of modernisation across its services but now needs to push forward and ensure that it can demonstrate the benefits this will bring for service users in improved service delivery.
189. Elected members and senior officers have delivered strong and effective leadership against a history of political difficulties, focusing on modernisation and improvement. The council should ensure its political and management arrangements and structures fully support it in delivering its strategic objectives and best value. It has made some progress in management restructuring but its mechanism for scrutinising decisions could be improved. The greater stability experienced in recent years will help the council to achieve its objectives and best value.
190. The council can demonstrate that it has a track record in taking some difficult decisions, such as the decision to pursue the option of transferring its housing stock and entering into a public private partnership for developing its school estate. It has a good rate of improving performance set against its relatively challenging context of pockets of severe deprivation. The council needs to continue to foster a culture of greater challenge by a greater commitment to considering alternative means and modes of service delivery, making appropriate use of external performance information, and testing its



services against external providers in open competition where appropriate. It also needs to consider how challenge will be sustained within services in the absence of a continuing programme of service reviews. Although there are examples of projects it has undertaken with the voluntary sector, the council needs to forge closer links with the sector and explore more ways of working with partners to provide better, more accessible services. It can build on its good joint working arrangements, particularly with its strategic partners, to achieve this.

191. Renfrewshire's improvement agenda, set out below, will assist the council in building on the work that is already underway to ensure the council can meet the challenge of continuous improvement. This agenda should complement the improvement plans already in place throughout the council.



## Renfrewshire Council's improvement agenda

### High priority

- Set out more clearly how the council will contribute to achieving community planning objectives and establish clear targets for its four additional corporate objectives.
- Improve the effectiveness of the council's arrangements for scrutinising decisions.
- Increase the level of challenge on options for how services are delivered, including, private sector benchmarking where appropriate.
- Further develop the council's relationship with the voluntary sector.

### Medium priority

- Ensure that political and management structures are effective in delivering a modernising agenda and fully support the delivery of strategic objectives.
- Reconsider how the council will ensure that continuous improvement and challenge is sustained within individual services, in the absence of planned best value review activity.
- Improve how equalities issues are monitored and reported to elected members.
- Develop the range of services available through the web portal and the customer contact and service centres and increase the profile of community planning on the web portal.
- Report progress on how the council's core values are being embedded and develop impact measures for this.
- Continue to develop performance management and ensure that measures of cost as well as quality are developed.
- Develop improved strategic approaches to resource management and procurement.
- Work with partners to develop public performance reporting for the community plan and report to the public in a more balanced way.

# Renfrewshire Council

## The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning



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