

# Leadership of the development of new local strategic priorities

Best Value thematic work in East Dunbartonshire Council 2022-23

November 2023

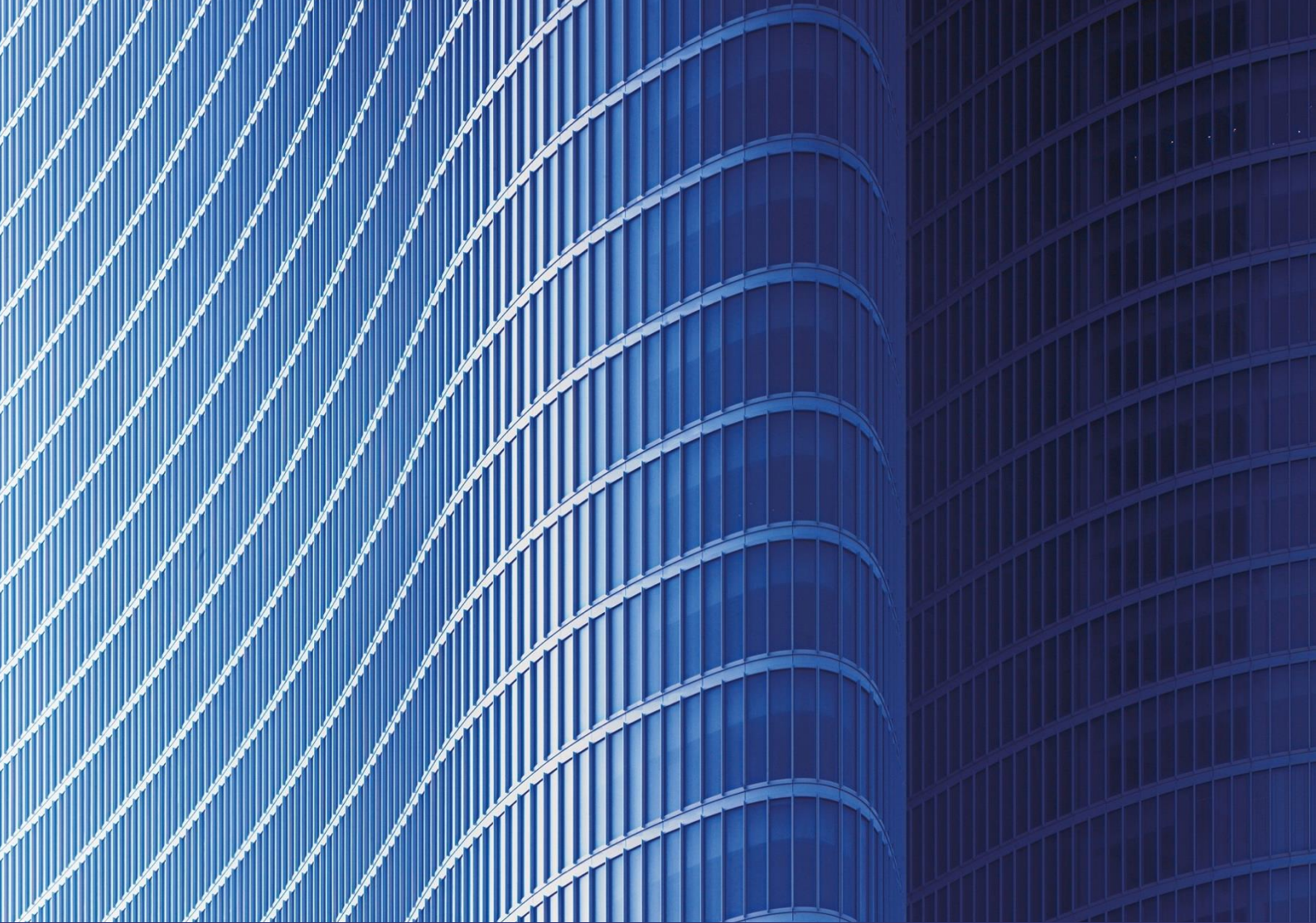
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Our reports are prepared in accordance with Terms of Appointment Letter from Audit Scotland dated 18 May 2022 through which the Accounts Commission has appointed us as external auditor of East Dunbartonshire Council (the council) for financial years 2022/23 to 2026/27. We undertake our audit in accordance with Part VII of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended; and our responsibilities as set out within Audit Scotland's Code of Audit Practice 2021.

Reports and letters prepared by appointed auditors and addressed to the council are prepared for the sole use of the council and made available to Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission, the Controller of Audit. We take no responsibility to any member or officer in their individual capacity or to any other third party.

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# 1. Key messages

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## Overview of engagement

A summary of the judgements we have made for each section is detailed below:

### **How clear is the new council vision and its priorities?**

The council has a clear vision for the five-year period covered by its Strategic Planning and Performance Framework. This focuses on working with residents, communities, and businesses to deliver the best possible services and target resources to those most in need.

### **How effectively have the views of citizens and communities been reflected in the priorities and decisions taken by the council?**

The council's priorities include actions requiring it to work effectively with citizens and communities. The council consulted effectively with communities on the locality plans and through the annual budget consultation. The locality plans set a clear leadership role for residents and the Community Planning Partnership in addressing community needs and bringing positive change.

### **How effectively do the council priorities reflect the need to reduce inequalities and climate change?**

The council's priorities and the locality plans focus on reducing inequalities and ensuring the council distributes its resources fairly and equitably. The council has made tackling climate change a priority. It is developing a climate action plan setting out how it will support the Scottish Government's climate change targets.

### **How good are the delivery plans and is there alignment of financial, workforce, asset and digital plans with the council's priorities?**

Each service has a Business Improvement Plan. These set out the strategic priorities for the service and how they align with the council's priorities and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan. The council is refreshing its financial, workforce, asset and digital strategies and plans. This is a significant programme of work and successfully implementing the new plans will be challenging.

### **Overall, how effective has the leadership been (political and officer) in setting clear priorities and a sustainable approach to delivering them?**

Officers and elected members worked effectively to agree the council's refreshed priorities shortly after the May 2022 Council elections.

## Other reporting

Where relevant to this thematic work, we have followed up Best Value Assurance Report and previous Annual Audit Report findings in the following pages.



## 2. Scope of the audit

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When discussing the Local government in Scotland Overview 2022, William Moyes, Chair of the Accounts Commission said: “Councils are operating in a complex and increasingly volatile, unprecedented and unpredictable environment. Strong leadership from councils is needed now more than ever, with new and returning councillors being able and willing to make difficult decisions about where and how to spend highly pressurised resources.”

This report concludes on the effectiveness of the council’s leadership of the development of the council’s strategic priorities, following the recent local government elections.

The [Accounts Commission’s Strategy \(2021-26\)](#) sets out its priorities to focus on inequalities, funding, communities and recovery. The Code of Audit practice sets out the Best Value work required to report on these priorities.

### Code of Audit Practice 2020 Best Value reporting requirements

#### Best Value reporting – extract from the Code

87. The Accounts Commission’s approach to Best Value involves reporting on individual local government bodies and thematically across the local government sector through performance reports:

- As part of their integrated wider-scope annual audit work appointed auditors use a risk-based approach to assess and report whether the audited body has made proper arrangements for securing Best Value and is complying with its community planning duties, including reporting progress against previous Best Value findings and recommendations.
- The Accounts Commission also requires the Controller of Audit to report to the Accounts Commission on each council or Integration Joint Board (IJB) at least once over the five-year audit appointment on the body’s performance on its Best Value duty. This enables the Accounts Commission to make findings for improvement where appropriate. <sup>1</sup>

The Accounts Commission reports nationally on thematic aspects of local government bodies’ approaches to, and performance in, meeting their Best Value and community planning duties. Local government appointed auditors report locally on any such Best Value thematic work prescribed by the Accounts Commission.

This report covers the thematic aspect of the Best Value audit requirements. The Commission has directed auditors to report on the effectiveness of the leadership of the development of the council’s strategic priorities.



In carrying out the work auditors have considered the following questions:

- How clear is the new council vision and its priorities?
- How effectively have the views of citizens and communities been reflected in the priorities and decisions taken by the council?
- How effectively do the council priorities reflect the need to reduce inequalities and climate change?
- How good are the delivery plans and is there alignment of financial, workforce, asset and digital plans with the council's priorities?
- Overall, how effective has the leadership been (political and officer) in setting clear priorities and a sustainable approach to delivering them?

An improvement action plan is included at Appendix 1 of this report. This sets out audit recommendations in key areas, and the council's planned response including responsible officers and dates for implementation.

The coverage of the work is in line with the expectations for council's arrangements for the seven Best Value themes in the [Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Best Value Statutory Guidance 2020](#).



### 3. Council vision and priorities



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**The council has a clear vision for the five-year period covered by its Strategic Planning and Performance Framework. This focuses on working with residents, communities, and businesses to deliver the best possible services and target resources to those most in need.**

#### **Background**

A council focused on achieving Best Value in how it operates will be able to demonstrate that elected members and officers have a clear vision and priorities for their area.

The Local government in Scotland Overview 2022 says that Scotland's councils have had a pivotal role in supporting and working with communities as they respond to the impacts of Covid-19. Following the council elections in May 2021, councils will have reviewed their priorities.

#### **Detailed reporting on Council vision and priorities**

**Has the council published a clear vision, with clear priorities for the council? Is it communicated to its citizens, staff and other partners?**

The council agreed a new approach to strategic planning and performance in June 2022. This included strategic priorities to support the council, its citizens and businesses recover and renew after the Covid-19 pandemic. The council agreed a continued commitment to the vision for East Dunbartonshire of "Working together to achieve the best with the people of East Dunbartonshire".

The council's Strategic Planning and Performance Framework (SPPF), "East Dunbartonshire Forward in Partnership", supports delivery of the council's priorities and outcomes, decision-making and prioritisation of services and resources.

The council's priorities for 2022 to 2027 are categorised under the themes of:

- Health and wellbeing
- Access to services
- Finance and employment
- Community and environment.

The council agreed more detailed priorities under each of these themes. These set out the actions it will take and the outcomes it is seeking to achieve.

The SPPF sets a clear vision for the council for the five-year period. This focuses on working with residents, communities, and businesses to deliver the best possible services and targeting resources to those most in need.

The council promoted its priorities through its website and engagement with staff and trade unions and the Community Planning Partnership (CPP). The council is working to ensure all decisions it makes are aligned with its priorities.

**Were the council's priorities developed with partners and aligned with their priorities?**

The council used the themes from consultation on the East Dunbartonshire locality plans and from a budget consultation with the whole community to inform its priorities. Officers also held engagement sessions with the administration and the Leader and Deputy Leader following the Council elections.

The Community Planning Partnership Board (CPPB) agreed the process for reviewing the four East Dunbartonshire locality plans in September 2021. A series of local community participation events and activities were held in the areas covered by the locality plans. Consultation ran from December 2021 until April 2022 using:

- surveys
- telephone
- activity-based events
- street survey and pop-up stations.

This work was led by the council's Place and Community Service and supported by several council services, the Health and Social Care Partnership, CPP partners, community and third sector organisations. 643 people participated in the consultation.

All four communities covered by the locality plans (Auchinairn, Hillhead and Harestanes, Lennoxton, and Twechar) identified similar high-level themes:

- Health and wellbeing
- Access to services
- Finance and employment
- Community and environment
- Children and young peoples' health and well-being (in Auchinairn, Hillhead and Harestanes, and Lennoxton).

The 2022/23 budget and priorities consultation asked residents for their views on the council's established priorities and what its future priorities should be. This included asking if priorities should change as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The CPP is in the process of refreshing the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP). The council's priorities share many of the themes of the current LOIP.

### **Has the council clearly set out what performance it wants to achieve in its priority areas?**

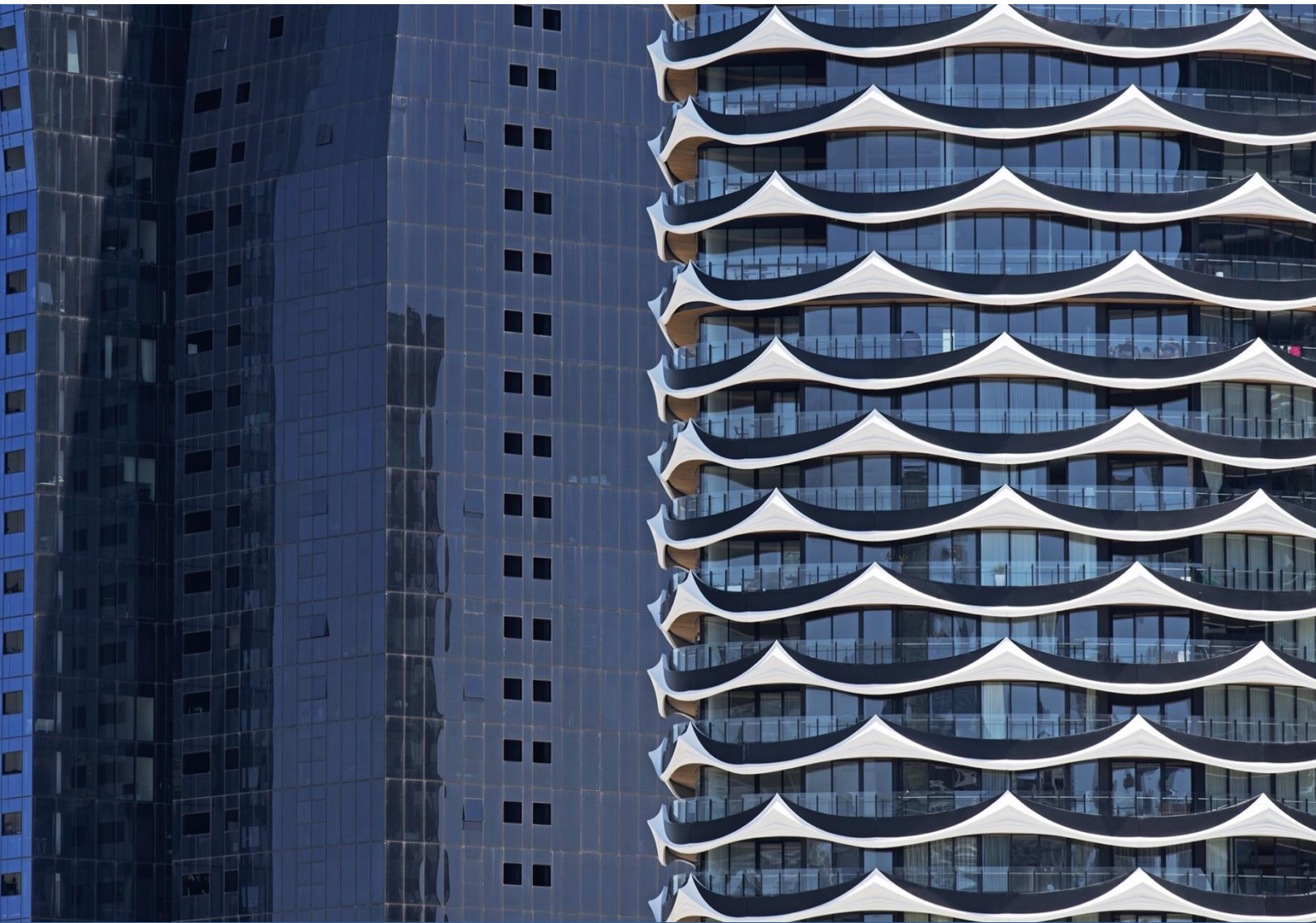
The council's priorities are specific actions. Performance reporting and targets are linked to the priorities.

The council measures performance through its annual performance report which provides a high-level overview of performance across all council services. There is more regular reporting to elected members in the form of elected member technical notes, which are available on the council's website.

Case studies are published on the council's website highlighting the impact of the council's performance on service areas.

### **Improvement recommendations**

We have not identified any risks or weaknesses as part of this thematic review section.



## 4. Citizen and community engagement

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**The council's priorities include actions requiring it to work effectively with citizens and communities. The council consulted effectively with communities on the locality plans and through the annual budget consultation. The locality plans set a clear leadership role for residents and the CPP in addressing community needs and bringing positive change.**

### **Background**

Recovery from the pandemic will require councils to work alongside their local communities. There must be a focus on getting the services people need in place as pressures and stresses escalate and impact the day to day lives of individuals and communities.

Councils, with their community planning partners, have a responsibility to ensure that people and communities are able to be fully involved in the decisions that affect their everyday lives.

Early and meaningful engagement and effective collaboration with communities to identify and understand local needs, and in decisions that affect the planning and delivery of services should be a core part of determining a council's vision and priorities.

### **Detailed reporting on citizen and community engagement**

#### **Is community empowerment reflected in the high-level goals of the council and embedded in strategic plans?**

The council's community and environment priorities include actions which require it to work effectively with citizens and communities. An example is "Ensure the aspirations of place communities are central to locality plans, and reflected in council decisions around the provision of services and facilities that meet local need."

The council has a Consultation and Engagement Strategy covering 2021 to 2024. This sets a framework to ensure consultation and engagement activity is effective, efficient, and fair. The strategy applies to internal employee engagement as well as external organisations and groups. The council's communications and engagement team provides guidance and support to services on consultation and engagement activity.

The council is working with partners, including the community, to agree performance indicators for the locality plans that demonstrate progress and impact.

## To what extent is the organisation involving local people in decision making processes?

The locality plans set a clear leadership role for communities and the CPP. The council developed these with residents, organisations, and partners. The locality plans include action plans designed to address community needs and bring positive change.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 introduced locality planning as a way for community planning partners to address inequality in communities facing disadvantage. The purpose of a locality plan is to address poverty and inequalities within a community.

The four East Dunbartonshire locality plans were approved by Council in 2023. The action plans are grouped under themes broadly aligned with the council's strategic priority themes:

- Health and wellbeing
- Financial wellbeing
- Access to services and facilities
- Community safety
- Community development
- Environment.

The action plans include details of who is responsible for each action (the council and partner organisations), resources allocated, how impact will be assessed, and timescale. The council plans to launch an engagement strategy to inform residents and community organisations about the revised plans.

Participatory budgeting is a method to encourage community participation and direct resources to communities where it is most needed. Scottish councils have a target to allocate 1% of annual budgets using participatory budgeting.

The council makes an annual submission to COSLA on participatory budgeting, this sets out where it has involved communities in decisions on existing resources. The council has consistently exceeded the 1% target for participatory budgeting through capital and revenue spend.

The council has a Community Grants Scheme to encourage and support community-led activities that result in a community benefit for East Dunbartonshire residents. Applications are assessed against the LOIP. The council has a defined budget for the scheme, with three cycles a year for approving grants.

The Grants Advisory Committee, made up of community organisations, considers applications and makes funding recommendations. 90 organisations secured total funding of £140,000 in 2022/23. The committee is supported by the council's community development team. The team assists interested groups and those successful in being awarded grants. The committee is led by a council officer, but the Chair is independent of the council.

**Are councils learning from the innovative ways communities were involved in developing and delivering support during the pandemic and putting more flexible governance and decision-making structures in place now to provide more opportunities for more local participation in decision making?**

The council is establishing locality forums within each of the locality areas. These will be open to representatives from organised community organisations, third sector organisations, businesses, and community planning partners. The forums provide an opportunity for communities to engage and help shape the locality plans.

**Improvement recommendations**

We have not identified any risks or weaknesses as part of this thematic review section.



## 5. Reducing inequalities and tackling climate change

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**The council's priorities and the locality plans focus on reducing inequalities and ensuring the council distributes its resources fairly and equitably. The council has made tackling climate change a priority. It is developing a climate action plan setting out how it will support the Scottish Government's climate change targets.**

### Background

Council priorities are expected to reflect the Best Value expectations that all activity should contribute to tackling poverty, reducing inequality and promoting fairness, respect and dignity for all citizens, alongside a focus on sustainable development, including climate change.

The Local government in Scotland Overview 2022 report says that the impact of the pandemic and service disruption have been felt most strongly by those already experiencing inequality. Councils have worked hard and adapted to maintain service delivery but those most in need of support are still being affected. Councils must evaluate these impacts so that recovery and renewal supports those most affected and addresses inequalities.

Around two-thirds of councils have formally declared a climate emergency, and COSLA's Blueprint for Local Government states that climate change is a 'greater threat than COVID'. The Scottish Government has recently published guidance on public sector leadership on the global climate emergency to help public bodies in leading climate action. Addressing the climate emergency and setting actions to achieve net zero will need to be a key element of councils' recovery and renewal from the pandemic.

### Detailed reporting on reducing inequalities and tackling climate change

#### **How clearly does the council and its community planning partners reflect its plans to reduce inequalities in its vision and strategic priorities?**

The council's priorities and the locality plans focus on reducing inequalities and ensuring the council distributes its resources fairly and equitably. The council's priorities include:

- reducing poverty-related inequalities
- reducing health inequalities
- raising attainment and wider achievement for all children and young people
- supporting local residents struggling with the cost-of-living crisis
- ensuring a fair and equitable distribution of resources and investment across communities.

The council has identified the CPP and other partners it will work with to deliver these actions.

The locality plans, by addressing the needs of disadvantaged communities, will be key to the council and its community planning partners reducing inequalities. The council consulted with equalities groups in developing the locality plans.

#### **Does the council have an agreed action plan aimed at tackling inequality, poverty and addressing fairness issues identified in local communities?**



The council's priorities and the locality plans clearly set out the council's actions to tackle inequality, poverty and address fairness in East Dunbartonshire.

### **Does the council use equality impact assessments and Fairer Scotland assessments to inform its strategic decisions? Is the council identifying a need to implement human rights based approaches in its design and delivery of services?**

The council carries out equality impact assessments as part of its policy development toolkit. This incorporates the Fairer Scotland duty and recognises requirements for the council to review its processes and raise awareness and training to undertake such assessments.

Council papers include a section on equalities implications. This sets out the council's commitments to comply with Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance on "Making Fair Financial Decisions" and confirms whether the proposed decisions support that objective.

The council is aware of developments in human rights approaches. For example, it is consulting with other councils through the Directors of Finance Group on the impact of new requirements on budget setting.

### **How clearly does the council reflect sustainability of the environment, and in particular climate change, in its vision and priorities?**

The council's community and environment priority theme has a specific priority focused on tackling climate change. This commits the council to making measures to tackle the climate emergency central to its policy making processes and corporate objectives. This includes ensuring that its corporate estate meets modern standards for energy efficiency to help achieve climate change targets.

The council made headline commitments in 2019 for reducing its impact on the environment. These are:

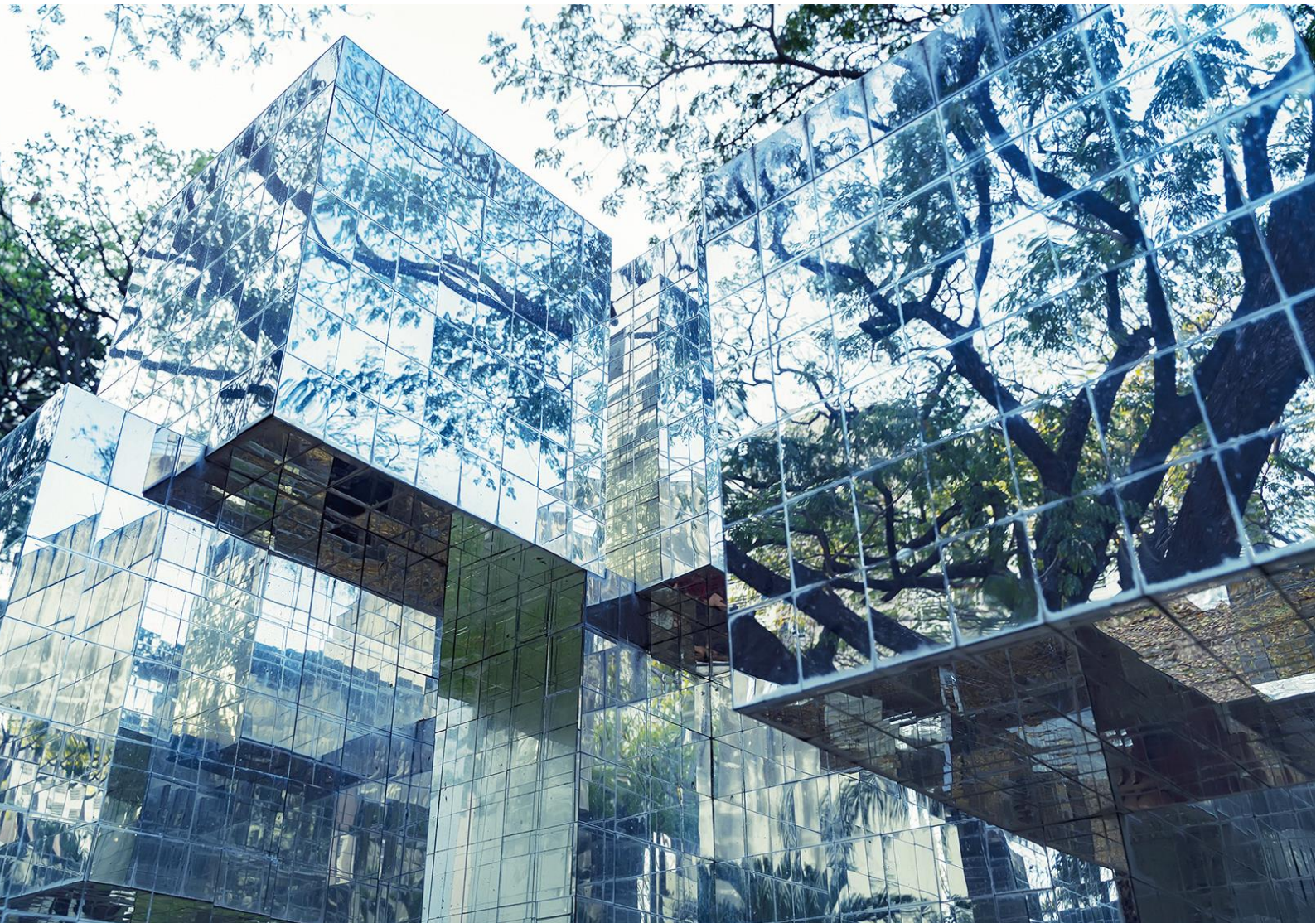
- The council will set a date by which it will reach net zero-emissions, including annual interim targets.
- The council will report on how its spending plans and procurement activities align with its agreed emissions targets.
- The council will report annually on progress towards achieving net-zero emissions.

The council is developing a climate action plan setting out how it will support the Scottish Government's targets to:

- secure a 75% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030;
- achieve net zero emissions by 2045;
- set a local strategy for climate change adaptation.

### **Improvement recommendations**

We have not identified any risks or weaknesses as part of this thematic review section.



## 6. Alignment of delivery plans

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**Each service has a Business Improvement Plan. These set out the strategic priorities for the service and how they align with the council's priorities and the LOIP. The council is refreshing its financial, workforce, asset and digital strategies and plans. This is a significant programme of work and successfully implementing the new plans will be challenging.**

### **Background**

Making the best use of public resources is at the heart of delivering Best Value. With clear plans and strategies in place, and with sound governance and strong leadership, a council will be well placed to ensure that all of its resources are deployed to achieve its strategic priorities, meet the needs of its communities and deliver continuous improvement.

### **Detailed reporting on alignment of delivery plans**

**Are the council priorities clearly reflected in service plans? Do service plans demonstrate how the council will improve in its service priority areas?**

Each council service has a Business Improvement Plan (BIP), which is based on the council's priorities. These set out the strategic priorities for the service and how they align with the priorities and objectives of the LOIP and SPPF. The BIPs include improvement plans with key improvement actions for the year ahead.

**Is there evidence that the council has effectively aligned its 2023/24 budget to its new priorities?**

The council's 2023/24 budget paper provides context on the challenges the council and its communities are facing. It sets out the council's approach to delivering its priorities.

There is evidence of budget decisions that support the council's priorities. For example, the cost of living support programme. This aims to provide support to local communities and reach as many of the most vulnerable and those facing financial hardship as possible.

The council allocated £1.4 million to the programme in the 2023/24 budget. Significant projects funded through the programme include free swim and gym, pensioner support payments and the Community Grants Scheme.

**Can the council demonstrate how engagement with its citizens and communities have influenced its budget decisions?**

The council launched its 'Have YOUR Say' budget consultation on the 2022/23 budget in November 2022. This sought views on the council's cost of living support measures and whether there should be an increase in council tax and fees to help balance the budget.

The council received 857 responses. Most respondents were in favour of council tax increases and agreed with the council's cost of living support measures. The results of the budget consultation, including the common themes from individual comments, were included in the 2023/24 budget paper. The consultation

findings were also shared with elected members in a technical note in advance of the budget setting meeting.

The council can demonstrate that the budget consultation has influenced its budget decisions. Going forward the council should consider whether the scope of the consultation could be widened to consider a broader range of budget and savings options.

### **Does the council have a medium term and / or long-term plan that effectively demonstrates that financial resources are allocated to deliver its new priorities?**

Officers presented the council's medium term financial plan to Council in November 2022. The plan considers the financial climate the council is operating in and seeks to quantify its impact on the council's income and expenditure. It also makes several core assumptions on pay, inflation and demographics.

The medium term financial plan includes a financial model to develop expectations of funding gaps based on different scenarios. It sets out the assumptions underpinning best, mid and worst-case scenarios. The council uses the model to project its financial gaps over a five-year timeline under each of these scenarios.

The medium term financial plan projects a funding gap of £20m to £21m in 2023/24, rising to over £30m in 2027/28 under the medium case scenario. Officers will present an updated plan to the December 2023 Council meeting.

The council also has a long term financial plan, which was updated in October 2023. This is presented in a risk register format and describes the financial risks the council faces and mitigating controls and actions.

The council should ensure its plans demonstrate how it will address its financial challenges and allocate resources to deliver its priorities.

### **Do the council's annual and longer-term capital plans include projects that are aligned to the asset plans to support improved services? Is the extent of 'slippage' on key projects a concern?**

The council approved its 30-year capital investment plan in February 2023. This expands the timeframe for capital investment from ten years under the previous plan.

The plan includes a revised model for prioritising capital investment based on need for investment alongside consideration of affordability and the council's plans to close its funding gap.

In 2022/23, the council had an overall underspend of £13m (13%) against its £100 million general services and housing capital budget. The council reported that slippage was mainly due to general lack of resources, workforce, and materials.

### **Does the council have an asset strategy and plans in place that demonstrate that it has the right assets to support delivery of services in line with its priorities?**

The council's Corporate Asset Management Plan was approved in 2014. It is updating the plan and is aiming to present the new plan to Council in February 2024.

The plan will link the council's long term investment proposals to its strategic priorities. The council is aiming to ensure assets are suitable for their intended purpose, are in satisfactory condition and have capacity to meet demand. The council will also identify the investment required to meet its climate targets and deliver on net zero public sector building standards requirements.

## **Has the council taken an innovative approach when considering how services will be delivered in the future?**

The council has developed revised operating models introducing locality-based service delivery. This approach seeks to deploy services within localities identified across the council's communities. The council recognises that some services do not lend themselves to this approach. These services will continue to be delivered centrally.

In developing the locality-based model the council considered:

- Local information, insights and intelligence.
- The networks and assets within areas of East Dunbartonshire.
- How it can work with partners to ensure the whole system is aligned sensibly and practically in local places people identify with.
- How to tailor the approach to meet local requirements.

The council recognises that it needs to direct resources to the areas of greatest need and prioritise early intervention. This will inform how it implements the locality-based model.

The council has started delivering some services using this model. This includes the Streetscene and Greenspace teams, community planning and housing.

## **Are workforce plans in place, across the council, that demonstrate that it has the staff in place with the skills required to deliver services in line with its priorities?**

The council has developed an updated workforce strategy to reflect the future shape of the organisation and how it will deliver services under the locality-based model. This will be presented to the December 2023 Council meeting. Officers will then develop service workforce plans.

This is an important piece of work given the council's current workforce strategy covers the period to 2021. Since then, there has been significant changes in the economic climate, recruitment market and ways of working.

The council has identified skills and capacity gaps across services and is looking at different ways of attracting talent. It is expanding its use of social media and holding local recruitment events. It has also extended its early careers programme. Officers believe the council's approach to flexible and smart working is proving attractive to applicants. This focuses on outcomes, not attendance, and flexible working patterns.

Grad+ is a two-year programme for under employed and unemployed graduates. Individuals employed by the council through the programme are mentored by service managers and given active and experiential learning. The Graduate Accountant scheme is for school leavers. Individuals study for a degree alongside working and then progress to studying for the CIPFA qualification.

The council has found that the Grad+ programme has been particularly successful in retaining staff.

## **Does the council have a digital strategy and plans in place that demonstrate how its digital infrastructure supports delivery of services in line with its priorities?**

The council is developing a new digital strategy which will be aligned to the Scottish Government's digital strategy *A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world*. This council's strategy is due to be finalised in March 2024.

### **Improvement recommendations**

Any improvement recommendations that have been identified as part of our work on the council's alignment of delivery plans have been reflected in the action plan at Appendix 1.

## Best Value Assurance Report findings for alignment of delivery plans

We have followed up on Best Value Assurance Report findings, see the table below for the progress the council has made during 2022/23.

Original finding as reported by previous auditor	Management response and implementation timeframe	Work undertaken and judgements made in 2022/23	Conclusions reached
<p><b>2021 Best Value Assurance Report</b></p> <p><b>Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) reports to elected members</b></p> <p>The LGBF reports to elected members should include a link to Business and Improvement Plans for those indicators where performance is identified for improvement.</p>	<p>Management Response (November 2021):</p> <p>The council's performance improvement actions plan sets out future planned activity in relation to the Business Improvement Planning. Guidance is currently being prepared for with improvements being implemented for the financial year 2022/23 onwards.</p> <p>The revised format will ensure that any priority indicators identified in the LGBF are assigned Improvement actions and targets in the BIPS as appropriate.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: 31 March 2022</p>	<p><b>Progress against the recommendation</b></p> <p>Each council service has a Business Improvement Plan (BIP), which is based on the council's refreshed priorities. The BIPs set out the strategic priorities for the service and how they align with the core priorities and related objectives of the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) and the council's strategic planning and performance framework.</p> <p>The BIPs include improvement plans. These set out the key improvement actions for the service for 2023/24. Each action is linked to a LOIP outcome or the council's priorities.</p> <p>The council has dedicated an area of its website to public performance reporting, East Dunbartonshire Performs. This includes links to the BIPs and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework data.</p>	<p><b>Conclusions</b></p> <p>Complete</p>

Original finding as reported by previous auditor	Management response and implementation timeframe	Work undertaken and judgements made in 2022/23	Conclusions reached
<p><b>2021 Best Value Assurance Report</b></p> <p><b>Financial plan</b></p> <p>Officers are planning to update the medium-term financial plan to reflect the impact of Covid-19. Once this is completed, the council should consider developing a long-term financial plan which includes forecasts of its financial position in the years ahead.</p>	<p>Management Response (November 2021):</p> <p>The council will review the outcomes of the updated financial planning exercise with extended timelines and an assessment of the financial gap over 5 rather than the existing 3 years. The council’s existing long term plan will be reviewed thereafter.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: June 2022</p>	<p><b>Progress against the recommendation</b></p> <p>Officers presented the council’s medium term financial plan to Council in November 2022. This includes a financial model to forecast funding gaps based on different scenarios. The council uses the model to project its financial gaps over a five-year period. Officers will present an updated medium term financial plan to Council in December 2023.</p> <p>The council also has a long term financial plan, which was last updated in October 2023. This is presented in the form of a risk register and describes the financial risks the council faces and mitigating controls and actions.</p>	<p><b>Conclusions</b></p> <p>Complete</p>
<p><b>2021 Best Value Assurance Report</b></p> <p><b>Corporate risk register</b></p> <p>The corporate risk register should be updated to reflect the council’s risks in the Covid-19 recovery phase. Regular review of the corporate risk register by elected members should be introduced.</p>	<p>Management Response (November 2021):</p> <p>Work to update the corporate risk register in collaboration with the Senior Management Team will be a priority in Quarter 3 of 2021/22 with a view to having the corporate risk register formally submitted to Council for consideration by the end of January 2022.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: 31 January 2022</p>	<p><b>Progress against the recommendation</b></p> <p>The updated corporate risk register was agreed by Council in November 2022. The council’s Corporate Risk Management Strategy sets out the process for corporate risk reporting and progress reporting. This includes an annual status report being submitted to a Council meeting each year.</p>	<p><b>Conclusions</b></p> <p>Complete</p>



Original finding as reported by previous auditor	Management response and implementation timeframe	Work undertaken and judgements made in 2022/23	Conclusions reached
<p><b>2021 Best Value Assurance Report</b></p> <p><b>Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) progress reports</b></p> <p>The council should work with the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to revise the LOIP annual progress reports to include a summary of progress against the outcome performance indicators.</p>	<p>Management Response (November 2021):</p> <p>A comprehensive review of the Place / Locality Plans has commenced. In addition, and in order to support this review the council is currently undertaking the 'Your Voice Matters' budget consultation and engagement which will support identifying public and community priorities. The plans thereafter include to review the LOIP through a Covid lens and ensure priorities are relevant and updated as required. This should all support the commitment to incorporate the improvements highlighted, and to incorporate performance progress against the indicators.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: Autumn 2022</p>	<p><b>Progress against the recommendation</b></p> <p>The four locality plans for Auchinairn, Hillhead and Harestanes, Lennoxton and Twechar were approved by the Council in September 2023.</p> <p>The council did not produce an annual report this year because it is reviewing partnership working arrangements, including implementation of outcome focused performance indicators.</p> <p>The CPP is in the process of refreshing the LOIP.</p>	<p><b>Conclusions</b></p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>The council is reviewing partnership working arrangements as it implements the new locality plans.</p>



## 7. Leadership

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**Officers and elected members worked effectively to agree the council's refreshed priorities shortly after the May 2022 Council elections.**

### **Background**

Effective leadership from councillors, chief executives and senior officers, is key to councils achieving their objectives and providing clear strategic direction. The complex local government environment means collaborative leadership, working with partners, communities and citizens to improve outcomes is more important than ever.

Leaders need to be skilled in effective strategic thinking, decision-making and collaborative working and able to learn lessons from new ways of working. Councillors and officers must be clear on their roles in setting the vision and planning for its delivery.

Leaders should demonstrate behaviours and working relationships that foster a culture of cooperation, and a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation. Good conduct and behaviours when working together are crucial. Working relationships between members and between members and officers should be constructive and productive. Councillors should show a commitment to agreed council priorities and work together to achieve them.

### **Detailed reporting on leadership**

**Is there effective collaborative working between members and with members and officers towards the achievement of the priorities?**

Officers and administration elected members worked effectively to agree the council's refreshed priorities shortly after the May 2022 council elections. The administration also worked with other councillors to gain consensus on the priorities. These were unanimously supported by elected members.

Officers engage with the administration in advance of council and service committee meetings and major policy initiatives. There is also engagement and joint working between officers and elected members in groups such as the Housing Health and Care Forum and Local Development Plan Working Group.

**Have any issues been identified with the capacity and skills of senior officers that could impact on the ability of the council to deliver its objectives?**

All major council decisions are linked to its priorities. This means that, in agreeing these, elected members are demonstrating a commitment to the council's priorities.

The council's senior leadership team is the Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive and eight executive officers. The leadership team and structure is well established. The council's focus is on ensuring it has the capacity in individual services to deliver its priorities.

**Have any issues been identified with the skills of elected members that could impact on their ability to scrutinise and make decisions that contribute to the council delivering its objectives?**

The council delivered a training programme for all elected members following the Council elections.

Elected members demonstrate reasonable scrutiny and challenge at Audit and Risk Management Committee meetings.

**Improvement recommendations**

We have not identified any risks or weaknesses as part of this thematic review section.



# Appendices

1: Improvement Action plan

## Appendix 1 – Improvement Action plan

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	The identified risk and/or significant deficiency is critical to the business processes or the achievement of business strategic objectives. There is potential for financial loss, damage to reputation or loss of information. The recommendation should be taken into consideration by management immediately.
<b>Level 2</b>	The identified risk and/or significant deficiency may impact on individual objectives or business processes. The audited body should implement the recommendation to strengthen internal controls or enhance business efficiency. The recommendations should be actioned in the near future.
<b>Level 3</b>	The identified risk and/or significant deficiency is an area for improvement or less significant. In our view, the audited body should action the recommendation, but management do not need to prioritise.

The table overleaf details the issues/risks that we have identified as part of this thematic review and our recommendations to the council to address.

Issue/risk	Rating	Recommendation	Agreed management action/ timing
<p><b>1. Delivery plans</b></p> <p>The council is refreshing and agreeing several key strategies and plans over the next few months. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium term financial plan – December 2023</li> <li>• Workforce strategy – December 2023</li> <li>• Corporate Asset Management Plan – February 2024</li> <li>• Digital strategy – March 2024.</li> </ul> <p>This is a significant programme of work and successfully implementing the new plans will be challenging.</p> <p><b>Risk</b> – The council does not have the capacity to implement plans and ensure resources are aligned to deliver its priorities.</p>	<p>Level 2</p>	<p>The council should ensure it has the capacity to implement its financial, workforce, asset and digital plans effectively.</p>	<p><b>Management’s response</b></p> <p>Officers will continue to develop and present key strategic plans to Council in accordance with the agreed timescales and refreshed as part of an ongoing cycle.</p> <p><b>Responsible officer</b></p> <p><b>Chief Executive</b></p> <p><b>Implementation date</b></p> <p>Timescales for individual strategic updates will vary however it is planned that these will be refreshed by March 2024 and thereafter kept under review.</p>

## Leadership of the development of the council's strategic priorities

Audit Scotland's published material is available for download on the website in a number of formats. For information on Audit Scotland's accessibility principles, please visit:

<https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accessibility>

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