



Leadership of the development of new local strategic priorities

Best Value thematic work in Argyll and Bute Council
2022-23

February 2024

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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 Argyll and Bute 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 four-year period covered by its Corporate Plan. This articulates a successful, vibrant Argyll and Bute with a growing population and thriving economy. This focuses on working with residents, communities, and businesses to deliver the best possible services and to target resources to those most in need. The Council has seven principles by which it seeks to deliver the agreed priorities.

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 upcoming the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP). The LOIP sets a clear leadership role for residents and the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) in addressing community needs and bringing positive change. As part of this, almost 2,000 participants were engaged between November 2022 and March 2023.

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 a Child Poverty Action Plan, as well as a COVID Recovery Action Plan, which aim to tackle inequalities and address fairness. The Council has also made tackling climate change a priority and 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?

There is a Council-wide Annual Business Planning process in place. The Annual Business Plan replaces the Council's previous approach of having individual service plans. The Annual Business Plan sets out the strategic priorities for all services and demonstrates how they align with the Council's priorities and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

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 four-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. ¹
- 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.

¹ The Controller of Audit will report the first tranche of council BV reports to the Commission between October 2023 and August 2024 on Moray, Falkirk, Dundee City, Orkney Islands, South Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Clackmannanshire and West Dunbartonshire.



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 four-year period covered by its Corporate Plan. This focuses on working with residents, communities, and businesses to deliver the best possible services and to target resources to those most in need. The Council has seven principles underpinning how it intends to achieve the vision and priorities set.

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 2022, 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 November 2022. This included setting strategic priorities to support the Council, its citizens and businesses to recover and renew after the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council agreed a continued commitment to the vision of a successful, vibrant Argyll and Bute with a growing population and thriving economy.

The Council's Corporate Plan seeks to help make Argyll and Bute a place where people want to come to live, work and do business as a result of actions to combat and reverse decline.

The Council's priorities for 2023 to 2027 are categorised under the themes of:

- Education;
- Roads, Amenities and Infrastructure;
- Potential and Growth - turning opportunities into reality; and
- Partnership and Action - everyone has a part to play in Argyll and Bute's success.

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. There are also seven principles guiding how the vision will be achieved:

- One council, one place;
- Focus on purpose and mission;
- Employees are empowered;
- Decisions informed by data;
- A learning council;
- Agile and adapt to change; and
- Maximise opportunities that technology offers.

The Corporate Plan sets a clear vision for the Council for the four-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 Argyll and Bute locality plans and from a budget consultation with the whole community to inform its priorities. These were then formally agreed by the Council at its meeting in November 2022. The Council consulted effectively with communities on the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP). The LOIP sets a clear leadership role for residents and the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) in addressing community needs and bringing positive change.

The Argyll and Bute CPP brings together local public services with communities they service and provides a focus for partnership working that targets specific local circumstances. Partners work together to improve local services and to ensure they meet the needs of local people, especially those who need the services most. The Argyll and Bute LOIP Outcome Improvement Plan has been in place for the last 10 years and had six key outcomes:

- Argyll and Bute's economy is diverse and thriving;
- Argyll and Bute has an infrastructure that supports sustainable growth;
- Education skills and training maximise opportunities for all;
- Children and young people have the best possible start;
- People live active, healthier, and independent lives; and
- People will live in safe and stronger communities

The Argyll and Bute CPP has completed its community engagement on identifying the priorities for the next 10 years (2023 – 2033) and these are:

- Housing;
- Transport; and
- Community well being.

As an example, on community well being /reducing inequalities, the Council's Community Planning and Community Development Team undertook extensive engagement on behalf of the CPP from November 2022 - March 2023 which focussed on equalities. In total, 1,978 people participated and the results have shaped the outcomes for the upcoming 10-year LOIP.

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 set out in the Corporate Plan and the annual business plan sets out the actions to deliver the priorities. The annual business plan is structured by priority, the activity for the year in line with that priority, and the success measures for the year. Both qualitative and quantitative performance measures are stated, with clear goals, making subsequent review of these possible. This ensures the Corporate Plan is closely aligned to the performance reporting as the targets are directly linked to the priorities, which are also aligned with the National Performance Framework.

The Council reports on its 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.

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 has established a Community Engagement group to develop an engagement framework, which has council wide representation. This framework will provide the an overall strategic approach. The group will then develop tools to be used in for engagement activities and will be used as the mechanism to allow representatives to share experience and findings from engagement activities undertaken. It is intended to facilitate learning and support for employees to help build their knowledge and confidence in engagement.

The Council carries out regular satisfaction surveys through its customer service centre. It is extending its ability to provide information on services and feedback using "bots" and has performed highly in Customer Service Excellence accreditation.

Internal Audit has scrutinised the Council's approach to consultation and concluded that the approach was aligned with the principles of good practice in the Scottish Government Guide to Public Consultations.

Within the Corporate and Business Plans are commitments to creating area plans for all the Council's communities, providing more community wealth building opportunities and maximising the scope for community involvement and participation. Making this a reality, the Council's Policy and Resources Committee received a report in October 2023 and agreed there would be eight locality plans covering Argyll and Bute. The principles, design and implementation arrangements were set out alongside the planned resources and timescales. This included an allocation of £200,000 from the Council's Priorities Investment Fund to fund two temporary posts and associated costs.

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 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.

Argyll and Bute Council consults local communities and involves them in the decision making on some projects, for example, the Lochgilphead Front Green and active travel routes projects. Another example is that the Council consulted widely on its new Outcome Improvement Plan in 2022/23. Responses were gathered using a variety of methods of engagement to ensure inclusion. The three priorities were reported to the CPP in March 2023, a development day was held for partners on 18 May 2023 and a steering group to develop the ABOIP has been established. This will influence the long terms priorities for the area.

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 understands it needs to continually consider how it can support more local participation in decision making. In doing so, it seeks to be flexible and innovative in the way communities can be engaged and involved in its processes and decisions. A plan is being developed to address the CPP's three community engagement priorities so that the Council can ensure the priorities of the CPP and the Council are aligned. This will help ensure opportunities for public engagement and participation are not overlooked.

Improvement recommendations

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



5. Reducing inequalities and tackling climate change

5. Reducing inequalities and tackling 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 which will set 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 has 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 Community Planning and Community Development Team undertook extensive engagement on behalf of the CPP from Nov 22 - March 23 and they had a focus on ensuring equality in the participation. A total of 1,978 people participated and the results have shaped the outcomes for the upcoming 10-year LOIP. The focus on equality in participation groups should help the Council better meet the needs of some people and to address inequalities.

The Council's Financial Inclusion and Advice Group brings together council services and support agencies. To make it as easy as possible for people to get support when they need it, the Council provides a 'one-stop-shop' of information on their website at www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/advice-services. This provides key information and also help and information on money saving initiatives such as cheaper deals for internet connection and the availability of warm spaces provide by other organisations.

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

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 clearly set out the Council's actions to tackle inequality, poverty and address fairness in Argyll and Bute. The Council has a Child Poverty Action Plan, as well as a COVID Recovery Action Plan, which aim to tackle inequalities and address fairness.

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 standard part of its policy development toolkit. This incorporates the Fairer Scotland duty and recognises the requirement on the Council to review its processes and to raise awareness and training to undertake such assessments with appropriate robustness.

Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment processes are in place reflecting the current legislative and regulatory requirements. The Council has published guidance for staff entitled 'Argyll and Bute Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (2020) Guidance'. This guidance sets out the Council's Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (EqSEIA) process, why it has one, and how it is used. The guidance is designed mainly for officers who are required to complete an EqSEIA. However, it is also of use to anyone with a role to play, or an interest in, the EqSEIA process or equalities more generally.

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 has set clear goals on becoming a net zero organisation by 2045. In 2023 it also achieved Bronze Carbon Literate accreditation. All committee reports also have to consider Climate Change implications as part of impacts. The Corporate Plan 2023-2027 specifically records several actions / priorities relating to climate change, for example reducing waste and increasing energy efficiency.

Argyll and Bute Council has a Decarbonisation Plan 2022-2025, supported by a Climate Change Action Plan with tangible actions. The Climate Change Action Plan is regularly updated.

The Council monitors and reports progress internally via its Climate Change Board.

The Council monitors and reports its progress via the Policy and Resources Committee. These committee papers are available to the public. There is further public reporting of progress via the statutory annual Public Bodies Climate Change Reporting, with reports submitted to Sustainable Scotland Network (as required by 'Climate Change (Duties of Public Bodies: Reporting Requirements) (Scotland) Order 2015' and Climate Change (Duties of Public Bodies: Reporting Requirements) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020). Mandatory reporting began in 2015/16.

The Council also shares the Decarbonisation Plan, and Climate Change Action Plan Updates on its website.

Improvement recommendations

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



6. Alignment of delivery plans

6. Alignment of delivery plans

The Council sets an Annual Business Plan. This sets out the strategic priorities for the Council across all services and demonstrates how these align with the Council's priorities and the LOIP.

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?

The Council has an Annual Business Plan in place. This replaces the previous approach of having individual service plans. The Annual Business Plan sets out the strategic priorities for all services and how they align with the Council's priorities, the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan and the Corporate Plan. The change to an annual business plan, as opposed to the previous individual service plans, was implemented as a result of the Council's review of performance excellence, which sought to bring a harmonized approach to delivery which is consistent with overall strategy. There was input in this process from the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

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. This is illustrated by £30.638m being invested in "Priorities for Argyll and Bute" as part of the 2023-24 budget setting process. For example, the Council identified £8million of funding for priorities around education and the learning estate.

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

The Council can demonstrate that its budget consultation has influenced budget decisions. The Council carries out budget consultations on an annual basis and these are taken into account at the Council budget setting meeting. In 2023, the Council trialled a new approach to this by using a budget simulator tool in its consultation. This was reported to Policy and Resources Committee on 12th October 2023, highlighting that there were approximately 400 responses received. At this meeting, The Policy and Resources Committee agreed to take

into account the budget simulator results when considering and preparing the budget for 2024/25.

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?

A five-year financial outlook of the estimated budget gap covering the period 2023-24 to 2027-28 using best case, worse case and mid-range scenarios was kept up to date during 2022-23 and presented to the Policy and Resources Committee in May, August, October, and December 2022. The assumptions used to inform the outlook are reviewed, updated, and reported regularly. There was a budget underspend of £3.3m in 2022/23.

There is evidence of budget decisions being directed towards support for the Council's priorities. A total of £30.638m was invested in Priorities for Argyll and Bute as part of the 2023-24 budget setting process.

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 prepares Priority Investment Plans for the Capital Programme annually as part of the budget setting process. These plans link into the overall asset strategy through the capital investment strategy. Although the Council experiences some slippage in the delivery of its capital programme, there are no significant financial implications arising from this. This is because the Council has not borrowed to fund the schemes.

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 has a Capital Investment Strategy 2023-2038. This was presented to the Council and approved in August 2023. It demonstrates the plans and strategy to ensure the right assets are in place to facilitate service delivery in line with council priorities. This specifically includes the Council's £70m Rural Growth Deal (RGD) funding which seeks to stimulate economic growth, connect communities, and increase skills in the Argyll and Bute area.

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

The Council is seeking to implement the Scottish Approach to Service Design. The Council has also implemented innovation through the use of drones to deliver school meals and the use of bots in service delivery and intends to continue with similar initiatives into the future, guided by its ICT and Digital Strategy.

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 a workforce planning process in place. It covers the strategic and team specific levels . This includes a risk matrix to identify areas of priority. Workforce issues appear on risk registers where appropriate and action plans are also in place. The strategic workforce plan is being integrated into the new people strategy to create a single delivery plan.

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 has in place an ICT and Digital Strategy 2021-2024 which aims to position Argyll and Bute Council as a “digital by default” authority. The goals of this strategy are for the Council to be:

- inclusive and put customers’ needs first;
- more efficient through the adoption of new ways of working enabled by technology;
- online for services, encouraging all of the Council’s people and customers to use them by default;
- working in real-time - with systems available 24/7;
- automated - with minimal manual processing;
- intelligent and pre-emptive of the next steps and future trends; and
- secure and accessible anytime.

Examples of the successful implement of this strategy include using:

- “bots” for customer service;
- automation for a range of processes;
- drones to deliver school meals;
- e-ticketing for various services;
- a digital receptionist service in Helensburgh Civic Centre;
- a shared M365 access with NHS Highland to support health and social care; and
- a digital school supply staff booking system,

The Society for innovation, technology, and modernisation (SOCITM) assessed the Council in 2022 and rated it as being “high quality, low cost”. Going forward, the Council is developing a data platform and is investigating the potential for the use of Artificial Intelligence to support roads survey software.

Improvement recommendations

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

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>2020 Best Value Assurance Report</p> <p>Is the Council demonstrating continuous improvement?</p> <p>The Council should increase the pace of change through transformation to deliver the business outcomes and this should be monitored and reported on a regular basis.</p>	<p>Management Response (June 2020):</p> <p>The Council will develop and agree a refreshed approach to transformational activity, identify thematic areas of activity and explore opportunities to shift investment towards prevention and more effective and efficient interventions.</p>	<p>Progress against the recommendation</p> <p>In September 2020, the Council embarked on the Performance Excellence Project. Some key changes arising from this project included the removal of Business Outcomes, the decommissioning of Pyramid (web-based performance management system), and the cessation of annual Service Plans.</p> <p>The project also led to the identification of a suite of 47 Corporate Outcome Indicators aligned to the Corporate Outcomes. The Corporate Outcome Indicators are reported annually.</p> <p>Quarterly performance reports continue to be presented to all 4 Area Committees; these largely contain indicators that are of interest at a local level.</p>	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>Complete</p>
<p>2020 Best Value Assurance Report</p>	<p>Management Response (June 2020):</p>	<p>Progress against the recommendation</p> <p>The Council is undertaking a wide number of initiatives relating to economic development</p>	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>Complete</p>

<p>The Council should assess the extent to which regeneration and economic development initiatives are delivering the vision and corporate outcomes. The Council should put in place robust options appraisal processes and a benefits monitoring framework, proportional to the size of initiatives, to evaluate the benefits and costs of future projects.</p>	<p>The Council will review options appraisal processes and benefits monitoring framework to ensure systems are robust and evaluate the benefits and costs of projects, create inter-departmental project review team and scope review of project process to align to BV3 Objective.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: April 2022</p>	<p>activity. These include the ongoing work relating to the Rural Growth Deal and various other outline business cases they are undertaking in relation to the agreed themes with Government. These considerations include option appraisals, and following approval by the Council and both Governments, full business cases will be submitted for final approval.</p> <p>As part of the RGD process the Council is also required to develop a detailed realisation plan which will set out the anticipated benefits and how these will be monitored over the lifetime of the RGD programme.</p>	
<p>2020 Best Value Assurance Report</p> <p>Community Engagement</p> <p>The Council should work with communities and community groups to understand and address their concerns and establish priorities in how it can better support them. This should include engaging with communities to understand and improve levels of satisfaction with council services.</p>	<p>Management Response (June 2020):</p> <p>The Council will engage with communities to understand and improve levels of satisfaction with council services in order to understand and address their concerns.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: December 2021</p>	<p>Progress against the recommendation</p> <p>The Council has established a Community Engagement group to develop its engagement framework. This group has council wide representation. It will determine the overall strategic approach, tools to share engagement activities and any findings internally and will support the learning/ training of staff to build knowledge and confidence around engagement activity. This group will also lead on establishing a dedicated space for the public to view engagement findings.</p> <p>The Council carries out regular satisfaction surveys through the customer service centre.</p>	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>Complete</p>



7. Leadership

7. Leadership

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 the administration's elected members worked effectively to agree the Council's refreshed priorities soon after the May 2022 council elections. The administration also worked with other councillors to gain consensus on the priorities.

Officers engage with the administration in advance of council and service committee meetings and on major policy initiatives. There is also engagement and joint working between officers and elected members as guided by the Ethical Framework and the Constitution. Specific activities to support collaboration include:

- Members seminars;
- the Budget Working Group which is cross party;
- Policy Leads having dedicated time with Chief Officers relative to their portfolio,
- the CEO holding weekly meetings with the Leader and Deputy Leader and, frequent one to one meetings with the Leader of the main opposition group; and
- the CEO having a monthly joint session with all Group Leaders.

To demonstrate its commitment to good governance, there are codes of conduct for both members and employees in place which include a zero-tolerance policy on fraud. The Council has an internal audit department, which includes a counter fraud team, to investigate any such matters reporting to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on investigations results. The leadership within the Council at both member and executive management level has an appropriate attitude to the risk of fraud and encourages whistle blowing where appropriate.

We have reviewed minutes of meetings that demonstrate the positive attitudes towards concerns raised in these areas and the commitment to ensuring such issues are followed up. We have reviewed reports prepared by the Internal Audit department and Counter Fraud team. Furthermore, we have reviewed the National Fraud Initiative returns submitted by the Council and the input of the internal audit team in the various elements of the checklist.

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?

The Council's senior leadership team is the Chief Executive, supported by two Executive Directors. Although small, the leadership team and the structure supporting it is well established. The Council's focus is on ensuring it has the capacity within 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/induction programme for all elected members following the Council elections. Specific additional training was then offered to members in line with the requirements for specific committee roles and functions.

Our attendance at Audit Scrutiny Committee meetings confirms that elected members provide a reasonable level of scrutiny and challenge. Full council meetings also show elected members understand what is expected of them.

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

We have not identified any improvement areas.

Rating	Description
Level 1	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.
Level 2	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.
Level 3	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.

Leadership of the development of the Council's strategic priorities

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

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