



# Inverclyde Council

**Best Value Thematic Report 2022/23:**

**Leadership in the development of the council's strategic priorities**

**30 November 2023**

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# 1 Key Messages

- The overall strategic framework within which the Council operates is outlined in the Strategic Planning and Performance Management Framework. This new Framework was implemented in 2023 and includes the Inverclyde Alliance Partnership Plan 2023/33 (the partnership plan), the Council Plan 2023/28, Committee Delivery and Improvement Plans 2023-26 and the Financial Strategy.
- The 2023/28 Council Plan sets out the vision for the Council as a whole and the ways in which it hopes to improve the lives of, and deliver better outcomes for, the people of Inverclyde. This was approved by Council in April 2023 and is published on the website for public access along with the other plans included in the new Framework.
- The Council Plan aligns to and supports the 10 year Alliance Partnership Plan (2023/33), ensuring that partners work together to create conditions that promote success for all and addresses inequalities. The Partnership Plan is available for public access in the same section as the strategic plan.
- The council has also approved an overall Performance Management Framework (PMF) which sets out the arrangements by which it plans, delivers, reviews and improves on what it aims to achieve, both as a Council and in partnership through the delivery of the Inverclyde Alliance Partnership Plan 2023/33, the Inverclyde Council Plan 2023/28 and the Committee Delivery and Improvement Plans 2023-26. The Framework is intended to act as a basis for performance measurement and reporting.
- The council runs a four-year Equality Outcomes Framework and issues progress reports against this every two years. This is specifically aimed towards achievement of the Equality objectives.
- At a service level, the Council adopted the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) in 2008, which is a framework developed and managed by the Improvement Service to drive quality and excellence in the public sector. A three-year cyclical programme of PSIF assessments is in place in the Council.
- Committee plans have been developed and approved for the three year period from 2023 to 2026 and include the performance targets for 2023/24. Service plans are currently in the process of development which will include performance targets on a more operational level.
- Performance reporting under the new Framework will be carried out from 2023/24. The 2022/23 annual performance reporting is yet to be carried out and will be under the previous Performance Management Framework.
- In developing this partnership plan a wide range of factors were taken into account. A key part of this was the public consultation. 2,800 people provided feedback on the key priorities for Inverclyde and how they might be achieved.

- We understand that the plans for localities were last developed in 2020 and require refreshing in light of the approval of the new Partnership plan and the Council plan.
- Consideration of tackling inequalities has been built into the Partnership plan and the Council plan and related outcomes are identified. There was no obvious evidence of involvement of any particular equality group with respect to development of the plan.
- Consideration of climate change has been built into the Partnership plan and the Council plan and related outcomes are identified. The Net Zero Strategy 2021-2045 was approved in October 2021 and sets out Inverclyde Council's route map to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. The Strategy is planned to be implemented through a series of Action Plans. The 2022-2027 Action Plan was approved in November 2022.
- The financial budget for 2023/24 was approved in March 2023. The council's latest financial strategy update covers the period 2023/24 to 2032/33. It is updated on a six-monthly basis. The plan with the latest update was presented to the Council and approved on 8 June 2023 and included updates to the strategic objectives as included in the latest approved Council plan.
- The Workforce Planning process needs improvement. The council has identified, as part of review of its governance arrangements, that some service workforce plans within Environment and Regeneration require to be refreshed in order to develop proposals which address wider issues relating to succession planning due to an ageing profile of some staff groups, staff retention challenges and single person dependencies. The Council needs to update delivery and service policies and plans in line with the revised strategic framework.
- Elected Members are supported by a comprehensive induction and training plan. The Council has a Members Budget Working Group, which brings together representatives of each political party and independents to seek to achieve consensus in the balancing the Council's budget, reflecting the priorities for the area. Additionally, there is a Strategic Leadership Forum in place with representation from each party / grouping with a high-level understanding of financial issues.
- There are a number of committees constituted to support the effective and collaborative working. A list of all committees is published on the website along with their remit for public access and understanding.

## 2 Scope of the audit

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.
- 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 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

#### **The council has established a clear vision supported by revised priorities**

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, the councils are expected to have reviewed their priorities.

The overall strategic framework within which the Council operates is outlined in the Strategic Planning and Performance Management Framework. A new Framework was implemented in 2023 and includes the Inverclyde Alliance Partnership Plan 2023/33 (the partnership plan), the Council Plan 2023/28, Committee Delivery and Improvement Plans 2023/26 and the Financial Strategy.

The Partnership Plan is a high-level strategic partnership document setting out the vision and direction for the Inverclyde area, as agreed by all the Inverclyde Alliance partner organisations and communities.

The Partnership Action Plans set out the Partnership's actions which will contribute to the achievement of the Alliance priorities. The Council Plan sets out the ways in which Inverclyde Council hopes to improve the lives of the residents of Inverclyde through the delivery of a range of high-level outcomes. The Council Plan reflects the outcomes from the Partnership Plan and sets out, at a high level, what the Council will do to deliver the partnership priorities.

The 2023-28 Council Plan sets out the vision for the Council as a whole and the ways in which it hopes to improve the lives of, and deliver better outcomes for, the people of Inverclyde. This was approved by the Council in April 2023 and is published on the website for public access along with the other plans included in the new Framework.

Key Challenges identified in the plan, aligned with the partnership alliance plan, are as follows:

- An increasing concentration of older people within Inverclyde's communities;
- An anticipated population reduction over the next 5 years;
- Emergency hospital admission and alcohol related hospital admission statistics being higher than Scottish average levels;
- Annual earnings at a lower level than the Scottish average;
- Significant deprivation issues; and
- Life expectancy for males and females sitting below Scottish average levels.

The plan identifies three key themes / priority areas across which work is aimed to be performed (People, Place and Performance).

The plan further identifies the outcomes that are planned to be achieved under each of the priority areas. Exhibit one provides the details of the outcomes to be achieved.

### Exhibit 1

Priority Area	Outcomes
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Our young people have the best start in life through high quality support and education.</li> <li>▪ Gaps in outcomes linked to poverty are reduced.</li> <li>▪ People are supported to improve their health and wellbeing.</li> <li>▪ More people will be in employment, with fair pay and conditions.</li> <li>▪ Our most vulnerable families and residents are safeguarded and supported.</li> </ul>
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communities are thriving, growing and sustainable.</li> <li>▪ Our strategic housing function is robust.</li> <li>▪ Our economy and skills base are developed.</li> <li>▪ We have a sufficient supply of business premises.</li> <li>▪ Our natural environment is protected.</li> </ul>
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High quality and innovative services are provided, giving value for money.</li> <li>▪ Our employees are supported and developed.</li> </ul>

The Council Plan aligns to and supports the 10 year Alliance Partnership Plan (2023/33), ensuring that partners work together. The Partnership Plan is available for public access in the same section as the strategic plan. The Inverclyde Alliance Board is a partnership involving Community Councils, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Greenock Chamber of Commerce, Greenock and District Trades Council, Inverclyde Council, Job Centre Plus, Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, Police Scotland, Voluntary Sector representation facilitated by CVS Inverclyde and West College Scotland. The Inverclyde Alliance Board is chaired by the Leader of Inverclyde Council



Committee Delivery and Improvement Plans contain strategic service delivery actions for the Council's Policy and Resources, Education and Communities and Environment and Regeneration Committees, aligned to the delivery of the overarching Council Plan. In addition, the HSCP has its own Strategic Plan 2019-24 which supports the Inverclyde Integrated Joint Board.

The council has also approved a Performance Management Framework (PMF ) which sets out the arrangements by which it plans, delivers, reviews and improves on what it aims to achieve, both as a Council and in partnership through the delivery of the Inverclyde Alliance Partnership Plan 2023-33, the Inverclyde Council Plan 2023-28 and the Committee Delivery and Improvement Plans 2023-26. The Framework is intended to act as a basis for performance measurement and reporting.

Priorities under the strategic plan are aimed to be delivered through committee delivery and improvement plans and service delivery and improvements plans. Committee plans have been developed and approved for the three-year period from 2023 to 2026 and include the performance targets for 2023/24. Service plans are currently in the process of development which will include performance targets on a more operational level.

Performance reporting under the new Framework will be carried out from next year. The 2022/23 annual performance reporting is yet to be carried out and will be under the previous Performance Management Framework.

Latest available performance reporting relates to 2021/22 and has been carried out in pursuance of the previous council plan. We noted that the annual performance report for 2021/22 is available for public access on the Council's website. As part of review of the minutes we noted the 2021/22 report being presented to the Policy and Resource Committee in November 2022 for consideration.

In relation to the reported performance report for 2021/22, it reports an overall negative trend in performance in relation to priority 5 "To safeguard, support and meet the needs of our most vulnerable families and residents". It further reports that performance has deteriorated over time in 7 out of 12 measures, coupled with the inability to meet the latest performance target in 4 out of 9 measures for which target had been set. Further performance in relation to 4 of the measures for the latest period was not available as at the reporting date.

The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) brings together a wide range of information about how all Scottish councils perform in delivering services to local communities. The LGBF assists Councils in benchmarking their performance in key areas and creates opportunities to identify and share good practice.

The link to the LGBF dashboard is provided on the Council's website, which allows visualization of the council's performance by service areas and indicators. Additionally, the council's reports the same in summary in the form of a fact file which is available for public access.

As per the latest published data, the council's performance deteriorated as compared to the prior year for 42% of indicators and against the base year for 44% of the indicators, on an overall basis.

In relation to the relative position over time, the council is amongst the top performers with respect to highest percentage of indicators in the top 2 quartiles with the percentages improving from 36% to 64% for Environmental Services category, 43% to 71% for Corporate Services category and 57% to 60% on an overall basis. However this percentage decreased from 50% to 38% with respect to the Economic Development category.

In addition, each directorate periodically reports on performance in the delivery of their CDIP to their relevant committee. Inverclyde Council publishes performance information on the delivery of the Education and Communities, Corporate Services and Environment and Regeneration Services.

## 4 Citizen and community engagement

### **The council has effectively engaged with citizens and communities when developing the priorities**

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.

New Inverclyde Alliance Partnership plan has been implemented for 2023-33. This is the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, as required by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

The partnership plan recognises that Community Planning is all about how local public services work together with communities, third sector organisations and businesses to plan and deliver services that will improve long term outcomes and tackle inequalities.

In developing this partnership plan a wide range of factors were taken into account. A key part of this was the public consultation. 2,800 people provided feedback on the key priorities for Inverclyde and how they might be achieved. A separate report on the consultation is available on the website. The consultation methodology employed the following channels:

- Open Public Consultation;
- Listening events;
- Citizens Portals; and
- Employee Surveys.

The partnership plan identifies high level outcomes in the form of themes, the first theme being “empowered people” which identifies the following outcomes:

- Communities can have their voices heard and influence the places and services that affect them.
- Gaps in outcomes linked to poverty are reduced.

The partnership plan further lays out Locality Planning. Locality Planning aims to empower communities by strengthening their voices in decisions about public services. Locality Planning is guided by legislation - the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 placed a requirement on Community Planning Partnerships to produce Locality Plans for smaller areas of Inverclyde and work with communities to agree what the key priorities are that should be addressed in those Plans.

The following six localities have been created to boost community involvement:

- Kilmacolm and Quarriers Village;
- Port Glasgow;
- Greenock East and Central;
- Greenock West and Gourock;
- Greenock South and South West; and
- Inverkip and Wemyss Bay.

The localities are supported by Community Learning and Development resources to grow, continue to develop strong community involvement across Inverclyde, and develop and deliver locality plans for each area.

The plans for localities were last developed in 2020 and require refresh in light of the approval of the new partnership plan and the council plan. **Recommendation 1**

The Council plan reflects the outcomes from the Partnership Plan above and sets out, at a high level, what the Council will do to deliver the partnership priorities.

The identified themes emanating from the results of public consultation, as included in the partnership plan, translate into the themes and outcomes laid down in the Council plan.

The Council has put in place a Citizens' Panel. The purpose of Inverclyde Council's Citizens' Panel is to regularly consult with local people on a wide range of issues. Panel members are aged 18 years and over. The Panel is sent two surveys each year to complete. The questionnaires ask members for their views on a variety of issues. The Citizens' Panel enables the Council to regularly consult with local people and to use their feedback to improve and develop services. The results of this engagement is presented to the Policy and Resource committee and published on the Council's website.

The latest available survey results published on the website related to Autumn 2022 and provides evidence of the citizens' feedback in relation to the following:

- Covid-19 recovery – Inverclyde Council events and initiatives;
- Inverclyde Council Plan 2023/28 and Inverclyde Alliance Partnership Plan 2023/33; and
- Digital inclusion.

The results of the survey were presented to the Policy and Resource Committee dated 31 January 2023.

In addition to formal consultations and citizen's panel, the Council provides variety of additional media to get in touch.

The most recent budget consultation approach was approved by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 20 September 2022 and was carried out in October 2022 utilising an online survey promoted through a range of mechanisms. The results of the survey were included in the budget approval agenda paper presented for approval to the Council.

Inverclyde Council mobile app allows residents and visitors to request services and report a variety of issues to the Council. These issues are logged in a central system and allows tracking the issue's progress via the app through to resolution.

## 5 Reducing inequalities and tackling climate change

**The council's priorities have a focus on the need to reduce inequalities and climate change**

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.

Consideration of tackling inequalities has been built into the partnership plan and the council plan and related outcomes are identified.

The following outcomes, related to equality, are identified in the partnership plan:

Theme	Outcome
THEME 1: EMPOWERED PEOPLE	Gaps in outcomes linked to poverty are reduced.
THEME 2: WORKING PEOPLE	More people will be in sustained employment, with fair pay and conditions.  Poverty related gaps are addressed, so young people can have the skills for learning, life and work.
THEME 4: A SUPPORTIVE PLACE	Vulnerable adults and children are protected and supported, ensuring they can live safely and independently.

The following outcomes related to equality are identified in the council plan:

Theme	Outcome
THEME 1: EMPOWERED PEOPLE	<p>Gaps in outcomes linked to poverty are reduced.</p> <p>More people will be in sustained employment, with fair pay and conditions.</p> <p>Our most vulnerable families and residents are safeguarded and supported.</p>

The subject of inequalities was specifically discussed as part of the listening event held to inform the new strategic framework including the Partnership Plan and the Council Plan. This included inquiry in relation to continuing relevance of tackling inequality and the key issues which are required to be tackled to reduce inequalities.

A detailed consultation exercise was followed in relation to the development of the Plan as reported in the previous section. A dedicated young persons' event was carried out to ensure related input is captured. However, there is no obvious evidence of involvement of any particular equality group with respect to development of the plan. **Recommendation 2.**

The council runs a four-year Equality Outcomes Framework. Through the delivery of these Outcomes, the Council wants to make sure that the children, citizens and community of Inverclyde:

- are protected from discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- have equality of opportunity in everything that they do; and
- have good relationships and are respectful and responsible to those who share Protected Characteristics and those who do not.

In relation to above the council has identified a range of protected characteristics including age, disability, race, religion, sex etc.

Following outcomes had been identified as part of the Framework for 2021-25:

- Increase the participation of seldom-heard/under-represented voices in local decision-making processes.
- Improve support for older people in the community.
- Take action to prevent violence against women and girls in Inverclyde.
- Increase the diversity of the Council workforce.
- Improve the economic prospects of people who are furthest from the Labour Market including young people, older people and disabled people.

The Council issues progress reports every two years against the outcomes included in the Plan. These are published for the public access on the Council's website.

Inverclyde Alliance Board approved the Year 4 Local Child Poverty Action Plan on 20 June 2022. This report provides a strategic overview of the priorities, and actions that have been delivered to mitigate poverty in the area. The plan also includes the interventions services will take forward throughout 2022-25 to deliver improvements for children living in poverty in Inverclyde.

The council uses Equality Impact Assessments and Fairer Scotland assessments to inform its decisions. A separate section is available on the Council's website which includes details of all such assessments.

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.

Consideration of climate change has been built into the Partnership Plan and the Council Plan and related outcomes are identified.

The Net Zero Strategy 2021-2045 was approved in October 2021 and sets out Inverclyde Council's route map to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

The net zero strategy has two main targets i.e. delivery of carbon footprint reductions of 73% from 2021-2030/31 (on a 2012/13 baseline) through specific identified actions supporting this strategy and improvement to Net Zero by 2045.

The Strategy is planned to be implemented through a series of Action Plans. The 2022-2027 Action Plan was approved in November 2022 and provides the objectives and associated actions that will target carbon reductions over the five years of the initial plan subject to the limit of available funding. Following key components have been identified as part of the action plan:

- Governance: Embed sustainability into policies, systems and processes across Council Service areas;
- Significant Carbon Emitters: The scale of the proposed actions relates to the significance of the carbon emission to the Council's carbon footprint in the areas of Energy Use in Buildings, Transport, Streetlighting and Water, and Waste;
- Awareness and Behaviour Change: Raising awareness of how individual actions contribute to carbon footprint and climate change; and
- Offsetting: Action intended to compensate for the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Guidance has been published on the Council's website in relation to energy and water conservation and reducing carbon emissions.



An update on progress was presented to the Environment and Regeneration Committee in June and August 2023 and is published on the Council's website for public access.

All proposed agenda items include sections for consideration of equality and environment outcomes of the proposed item.

## 6 Alignment of delivery plans

**The Council has developed plans to align with the new council plan however more work is needed to achieve this objective**

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.

The Inverclyde Alliance brings together the Community Planning partners for Inverclyde. The Partnership Plan sets out the shared commitment by Inverclyde Alliance partners to work together towards their collective aims, with a particular focus on tackling inequalities and the added value of partnership working. A new Partnership Plan was approved in early 2023 and covers the period 2023/2033.

The Council's purpose, priorities and values are set out in the Council Plan 2023/28. It also shows how Inverclyde Council contributes to the strategic priorities for the area, as set out in the Inverclyde Alliance Partnership Plan 2023/33.

In March 2023, the Council approved a new model for Directorate and service planning to support the new Council Plan. The new model sets out more explicitly the linkages between actions, strategic priorities and local outcomes as well as reflecting the new approach to Best Value.

The Delivery and Improvement Plans cover the period 2023/26 and capture: Actions derived from the Council Plan strategic priorities, cascaded to individual Directorates / services;

- Corporate self-evaluation improvement actions;
- Priorities relating to areas of strategic service delivery;
- Improvement actions from External Audit Reports;
- Improvement actions arising from Service Review; and
- Key Performance Indicators linked to the delivery of the actions.

Although a three-year rolling plan, the delivery and improvement actions are aimed to be refreshed on annual basis with performance reports considered by the CMT prior to every second Committee meeting, continuing with the reporting schedule established by the former CDIPs.

The new planning model also includes the introduction of Service Delivery and Improvement Plans for each Head of Service. This is to ensure that there is a consistent corporate approach to service performance and improvement in place. These plans are aimed towards setting out linkages to Council priorities with a focus on:

- Actions / activities for the Service for the year that are more operational in nature.
- Service self-evaluation improvement actions (PSIF).
- Lower level KPIs monitored by the Service that are not reported to Committee.
- LGBF indicators with benchmarking data for the service.

Service plans are yet to be developed.

Progress in the delivery of the Service Delivery and Improvement Plans will be monitored by Directorate Management Teams on a quarterly basis.

The themes identified in the council plan serves as an overarching framework in relation to development of community and service delivery plan and have been mentioned therein accordingly. Innovation in delivery of service is identified as an integral theme as part of the council plan as follows:

Theme 3 Performance: Outcome 3.1 High quality and innovative services are provided, giving value for money.

The financial budget for 2023/24 was approved in March 2023. The budget proposal presented for approval included a section which noted that all savings proposals for savings, the Capital Programme and use of Reserves were assessed against the Councils stated priorities in order to minimise any negative impacts and optimise impact in areas of investment/growth. The budget included proposals to support a couple of identified strategic objectives e.g. net zero action plan and anti-poverty initiatives.

The Council's latest Financial Strategy update covers the period 2023/24 to 2032/33. It is updated on a six-monthly basis. The plan with the latest update was presented to the Council and approved dated 8 June 2023 and included updated of the strategic objectives as included in the latest approved Council Plan.

The Financial Strategy covers the period 2023/33 in terms of identifying potential issues, but the revenue forecasts are limited to the period which can be reasonably forecast. The primary financial challenge, identified in the strategy, facing the Council over the coming period, given the continued pressure on public sector budgets, will be to stay within the approved revenue budget and deliver a capital programme that continues to maintain the required level of investment in key infrastructure whilst contributing to the Net Carbon Zero targets and support the needs of the local community.

In preparing the Medium Term Financial Plan the following approach has been adopted:-

- The base budget for prior year has been used as the basis for the Medium Term Financial Plan
- An analysis of anticipated pressures has been undertaken to inform future years projections
- A review of funding assumptions has been undertaken to determine the anticipated level of funding available for service delivery

The plan takes into account the cost pressures and identifies inflation (including pay inflation) as the main driver for future projections.

The Strategy takes into account key financial issues that are known or anticipated events and activities that have to be addressed within overall financial resources in the short-term (within 2 years), medium-term (within 4 years) or longer (over 4 years).

The Council agreed a 3 year Capital Programme covering 2023-26 in March 2023. A 5% overprovision was built in to allow for future variations.

The Council has undertaken extensive consultation, as noted in para 31 above, in relation to the development of priorities for inclusion in the partnership plan and the Council plan which in turn inform the development of annual budgets and longer-term financial plans.

The Council has identified, as part of review of its governance arrangements, that some service workforce plans within Environment and Regeneration require to be refreshed in order to develop proposals which address wider issues relating to succession planning due to an ageing profile of some staff groups, staff retention challenges and single person dependencies. **Recommendation 3**

The Council currently has a workforce improvement plan in place. Latest update provided against the plan relates to October 2023.

Following slippage was reported as part of the update:

- Service Plan actions are clearly mapped to the delivery of Council priorities.
- Heads of Service and Service Managers to raise awareness of the new Council Plan at team meetings and increase emphasis on roles and responsibilities during performance appraisals.
- New Service Plan to include a focus on the development of ICT skills.

The following actions are due by August 2024, however it has been reported that work has commenced against the same:

- Conduct a review of the Competency Framework, for Chief Officers initially.
- Phase two: cascade to remaining employees.
- Promote manager participation in the Leadership Course.

The Council has Digital and ICT strategies approved in May 2021 spanning for a period of 3 years. This will need to be updated/ refreshed to reflect the updated Council plan approved in 2023.

The Council has a corporate assets management strategy spanning over a period of three years from 2019 to 2022. This is yet to be updated. **Recommendation 4**

There is slippage in relation to capital projects from previous years relating to City Deal projects. The Council has made progress i.e. one project has been completed while the remaining two projects continue to be in process.

As part of the BVAR 2017 it was noted that the Council should embed the recent introduction of directorate change management groups to prioritise, manage and monitor service improvement activity. Appointment of a lead change officer and the production of a detailed Business Plan for shared services. As per the latest update from the council the delivering differently programme is reported to the Environment & Regeneration Committee. The Council also has a Change Management Programme with performance reporting. The Shared Services Committee meets twice yearly and a decision was made to disband Roads, Transport and Waste Shared Services.

## 7 Leadership

### **The leadership been effective in setting clear priorities but now needs to demonstrate sustainable plans for delivering them**

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.

There are a number of committees constituted to support the effective and collaborative working. List of all committees is published on the website along with their remit for public access and understanding.

The proposals presented to the Council include a section for documenting alignment with the strategic objectives.

Minutes of the meetings and related documents are available on the website to ensure transparency.

The Council has a Members Budget Working Group, which brings together representatives of each political party and independents to seek to achieve consensus in the balancing the Council's budget, reflecting the priorities for the area.

There is a Strategic Leadership Forum in place with representation from each party / grouping with a high-level understanding of financial issues.

As part of the development of the new Council Plan and Committee Plans, a number of workshops were held for Elected Members to contribute to the setting of priorities.

Strategic priorities were considered when allocating resources as noted earlier in this report.

In relation to setting and monitoring performance targets, the Council has a Performance Management Framework in place aligned to the overarching Partnership Plan and the Council Plan as part of the strategic planning and

Performance Management Framework. A new Framework has been implemented in 2023.

Performance management and monitoring of service delivery is reported principally through the Policy & Resources Committee and to other Committees on a regular basis. The Council publishes information about its performance regularly as part of its public performance reporting requirements.

The Council notes the following underlying principles in relation to self-evaluation:

- Improvement activity must be aligned to the delivery of the Council Plan 2023/28 and the achievement of the Council Vision;
- Continuous improvement is everyone's responsibility;
- There should be a clear understanding of the purpose and benefits of self-evaluation at all levels;
- Self-evaluation frameworks must be flexible, adaptable and proportionate; and
- There should be transparency at each stage of the process.

At a service level, the Council adopted the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) in 2008, which is a framework developed and managed by the Improvement Service to drive quality and excellence in the public sector. A three-year cyclical programme of PSIF assessments is in place in the Council, involving a team from each service carrying out a review of evidence, performance information and customer and stakeholder feedback to assess how well the service is performing and identify areas for improvement.

Inverclyde Council publishes performance information on the delivery of the Education, Communities and Organisational Development Corporate Directorate Improvement Plan 2019/23 and the Environment, Regeneration and Resources Corporate Directorate Improvement Plan 2019/23.

Performance is reported to:

- the Education and Communities Committee;
- the Environment and Regeneration Committee; and
- the Policy and Resources Committee.

From April 2023, the Council moved to a new planning model, known as Committee Delivery and Improvement Plans, with a Committee Plan developed for each three Committees listed above.

As part of self-evaluation, status of progress of audit (external and internal) recommendations and action points are regularly reported and considered by the Audit Committee.

As part of review of minutes we did not identify any indications of lack of mutual respect, trust, honesty, openness and appropriate behaviour.

The management of Inverclyde Council is led by the Chief Executive. The operational structure is divided into three directorates providing services to the public:

- Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP).
- Education, Communities & Organisational Development.
- Environment and Regeneration.

The Interim Director of Inverclyde HSCP was replaced by a permanent holder of the position in August 2022 and the Chief Social Worker position was filled in February 2023. In addition, the Interim Director of Environment and Regeneration was appointed permanently to that post in January 2023 and the Interim Director, Finance & Corporate Governance during the year returned to his position of Chief Financial Officer in April 2023.

Currently the position of Head of Organisational Development, Policy and Communications is filled on an interim basis.

The Council's Corporate Management Team complete a register of interests. The purpose of the register is to identify potential conflicts of interest when officers are making decisions. This register is available for public access.

Inverclyde Council has 22 Councillors. The political make-up of the Council is as follows:

- 9 Labour;
- 8 SNP;
- 3 Independent; and
- 2 Conservative.

Elected Members are supported by a comprehensive induction and training plan, which includes regular dedicated briefings out with of Committee meetings to support Members in their scrutiny role on areas of particular strategic importance. Between April 2022 to March 2023, 47 Elected Member briefings have been delivered on a range of topics such as the Financial Strategy, LGBF, Net Zero and Community Councils. This is aimed towards providing a robust knowledge base which supports informed decision making.



## 8 Improvement Action Plan (Appendix one)

#	Issue, Impact and Recommendation	Management response
1	<p><b>Locality Plans</b></p> <p>We understand that the plans for six localities were last developed in 2020 and require refresh in light of the approval of the new Partnership Plan and the Council Plan.</p> <p>There is a risk that locality plans do not align with the new Strategic Framework.</p> <p>We recommend that locality plans are updated in line with the new Partnership and Council Plan.</p>	<p>The review of Inverclyde’s locality planning model which will include refreshing locality plans will follow the conclusion of the Community Council review.</p> <p><b>Corporate Director (Education, Communities &amp; Organisational Development)</b></p> <p><b>June 2024</b></p>
2	<p><b>Equality Groups – Strategy Development</b></p> <p>We did not see any evidence of involvement of any particular equality group with respect to development of the Plan.</p> <p>There is a risk that relevant input is not incorporated in the Plan.</p> <p>We recommend that a specific equality group in the Council’s jurisdiction is identified and involved in the strategy setting process.</p>	<p>Equality groups will be involved in the development of the next Council Plan from 2027 and in the mid term review of the Partnership Plan in 2028.</p> <p><b>Head of OD, Policy and Communications</b></p> <p><b>From 2026/27</b></p>
3	<p><b>Workforce Plans</b></p> <p>Some service workforce plans within Environment and Regeneration are required to be refreshed in order to develop proposals which address wider issues relating to succession planning, due to an ageing profile of some staff groups, staff retention challenges and single person dependencies.</p> <p>There is a risk of ineffective work force planning.</p> <p>We recommend that workforce plans are refreshed on a timely basis.</p>	<p>Refreshed workforce plans within Environment and Regeneration will be produced by June 2024.</p> <p><b>Director - Environment and Regeneration</b></p> <p><b>June 2024</b></p>

#	Issue, Impact and Recommendation	Management response
4	<p><b>Strategy update</b></p> <p>The council has a corporate Assets Management Strategy spanning over a period of three years from 2019 to 2022. This is yet to be updated. Further, the ICT strategy needs to be updated to align to the latest council plan.</p> <p>There is a risk of obsolete and out of date policy resulting in ineffective asset management.</p> <p>We recommend timely review and update of all policy and procedures documents.</p>	<p>The Corporate Asset Management Strategy is scheduled to be updated and adopted by April 2024</p> <p>The ICT Strategy is due to be updated and adopted by September 2024</p> <p><b>Head of Physical Assets/ Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital &amp; Customer Services</b></p> <p><b>September 2024</b></p>

## **Key contacts**

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