



Transformation: how councils are redesigning and delivering more efficient services to achieve planned outcomes

Best Value thematic work

West Dunbartonshire Council 2024-25

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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 West 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

Overview of engagement

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

To what extent does the council have clear plans for transformation that link to its priorities and support long-term financial sustainability?

The council's Strategic Plan outlines its commitment to service improvement and modernisation. However, its transformation activity is based on individual projects rather than a consolidated programme. This means it is difficult to measure the overall impact of transformation projects and their contribution to the Council's savings plans. Individual projects are generating savings and informing budget options; however, the Council recognises they will not fully address its medium and long-term financial challenges.

To what extent do the council's programme management arrangements facilitate effective oversight of its transformation plans?

The council has established governance structures for oversight of transformation projects. It has a consistent corporate approach to project management. Senior officers receive regular updates on transformation projects. Elected members are briefed primarily on savings delivery and do not have oversight of wider transformation outcomes which limits their ability to fully assess the impact of transformation projects.

The council's Digital and Change teams have specialist skills and are well connected to national networks. However, the council does not have sufficient resources to deliver transformation at the scale and pace it desires.

To what extent are partners and communities involved in the development and delivery of the council's plans for transformation?

The council works with partners to support transformation, particularly through Community Planning West Dunbartonshire and collaboration with other councils and national bodies. This has enabled the council to access external funding and shared expertise, strengthening its capacity to deliver complex projects.

The council uses targeted consultation to involve residents and service users in shaping changes. It shows awareness of the impact of transformation on vulnerable groups and has taken steps to mitigate risks such as digital exclusion.

To what extent has the council considered the impact of its transformation activity, including on vulnerable or protected groups?

The council has established success measures for major transformation projects, but these are mainly financial and operational. It tracks efficiency gains and cost savings, but there is limited reporting on social outcomes or equality impacts. The council has demonstrated that individual transformation projects deliver tangible benefits, but there is no consolidated corporate oversight and public performance reporting on transformation benefits.

2) Introduction

The [2023 Local Government Overview \(LGO\)](#) notes that councils have never faced such a challenging situation. Service demands have increased after the Covid-19 pandemic and funding is forecast to reduce in real terms. Transformation, through greater collaboration with partners, will be key for councils to deliver more sustainable service models in challenging financial climates.

This report sets out how the council is redesigning and delivering more efficient services to achieve planned outcomes.

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.

This report covers the thematic aspect of the Best Value audit requirements. The Commission has directed auditors to report on transformation and how councils are redesigning and delivering more efficient services to achieve planned outcomes. In carrying out the work, auditors have considered the following questions:

- To what extent does the council have clear plans for transformation that link to its priorities and support long-term financial sustainability?
- To what extent do the council's programme management arrangements facilitate effective oversight of its transformation plans?
- To what extent are partners and communities involved in the development and delivery of the council's plans for transformation?
- To what extent has the council considered the impact of its transformation activity, including on vulnerable or protected groups?

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) Transformation planning

This section of the report examines to what extent, the council has clear plans for transformation that link to its priorities and support long-term financial sustainability.

Background

The council needs to ensure it can deliver sustainable services now and in the future, and difficult decisions will need to be made to achieve this. The Accounts Commission’s [Local government budgets 2024/25](#) briefing noted that councils’ cumulative funding gap between 2025/26 and 2026/27 is £780 million. This means that, cumulatively, councils need to identify and deliver recurring measures such as savings or increased income of five percent of their overall revenue budget to be financially sustainable in the short term.

Findings and evidence relating to the council’s transformation planning

| Findings | Evidence |
|--|---|
| <p>Alignment of service transformation to strategic priorities</p> <p>The council’s Strategic Plan outlines its commitment to service improvement and modernisation, with strategic priorities focused on transformation.</p> <p>The council does not have a standalone transformation programme bringing together all its transformation projects and workstreams. This means it is difficult to measure the overall impact of the Council’s transformation work. See Recommendation 1 within the Improvement Action Plan.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council’s Strategic Plan 2022-2027 contains specific priorities that focus on transformation. Priority 4 (<i>Our Council – Inclusive and Adaptable</i>) commits to modernising services and improving efficiency. This includes objectives such as “Deliver services that are fit for the future” and “Maximise use of digital technology.” • The ICT Strategy 2023-28 also sets out principles for digital enablement, cloud adoption, and automation. • The 2024/25 Annual Report and Mid-Year Strategic Plan Progress Reports provide performance updates against strategic priorities, including digital service uptake and customer satisfaction, but there is no stand-alone reporting on transformation work. • The Council can demonstrate a link between transformation initiatives such as automation, digital tenancy support, and regeneration and its Strategic Plan outcomes, particularly under the Our Council and Our Economy themes. Its capital investment decisions are aligned with transformation objectives, as evidenced by the Capital Strategy 2023/24–2031/32, which prioritises projects that support service redesign and sustainability. • Transformation initiatives are included in service-led projects and as actions in corporate strategies such as the ICT Strategy and People First Strategy. Governance is provided through corporate boards, including the Transformation and Visioning Board. Monitoring and reporting are focused on individual projects rather than the complete programme of transformation work. |

Contribution of transformation to long-term financial sustainability

The council’s transformation projects are generating savings and informing budget options; however the council recognises they will not fully address its medium and long-term financial challenges.

There is no consolidated monitoring and reporting of transformation costs and savings. As a result, the Council cannot demonstrate a clear link between transformation projects and their contribution to achieving long-term financial sustainability. See Recommendation 1 within the [Improvement Action Plan](#).

- We confirmed through interviews with management in April 2025 that there is currently no dedicated transformation fund, this previously existed but funding decisions are now based on business cases and ability to generate efficiencies. Capital bids are submitted for transformation work; for example, the new accounting system is described as a major transformation programme that will impact finance and wider council operations.
- The budget papers presented to Council in March 2025 highlighted that the council’s long-term financial sustainability will rely heavily on service reductions, with limited transformation-led benefits.
- We reviewed the 57 individual savings options within the 25/26 Budget report and found that most of these were based on reductions in three service areas:
 - **Education service**, including removal of secondary school registration, reductions in teaching staff, and scaling back transport and enrichment activities;
 - **Cuts to roads, greenspace, and environmental maintenance**, such as reduced park maintenance, street cleaning, footway gritting, and stopping weed-killing;
 - **Community and leisure service reductions**, including closure or downsizing of facilities such as Dalmuir Golf Course and bowling clubs, alongside reductions in community engagement budgets and cultural services.
- This indicates that the council is continuing to close budget gaps mainly by reducing services rather than through transformation.,
- The Council has acknowledged that its transformation projects will not fully address the known and projected medium- to long-term budget gaps. It expects these initiatives to contribute to mitigating financial deficits rather than eliminating them.

Strategic performance and outcome monitoring

The council has appropriate arrangements for monitoring and reporting performance against its Strategic Plan priorities, with detailed updates on indicators linked to transformation.

Annual and mid-year reports provide clear updates on progress, including performance indicators, achievements, and resident feedback.

- The Annual Report 2024/25 states that the council met or exceeded 60% of the 50 Strategic Plan indicators and narrowly missed targets for a further 22% of indicators.
- Performance against Strategic Plan indicators is an important indicator for understanding whether the council’s service change and improvement activity, including transformation, is having the intended impact on outcomes. In the absence of a consolidated transformation programme, the council’s strategic performance framework is one of the few mechanisms that demonstrates progress in areas linked to transformation
- The council’s planned transformation savings are presented in every Finance Update report and incorporated into its Medium-Term Financial Strategy. As such, transformational

changes and savings are integrated within the Council's overall financial planning framework.

- The 2024/25 mid-year progress report on the Strategic Plan 2022-27 provides detailed updates on indicators linked to transformation priorities including digital service uptake and customer satisfaction.
- Savings options are included within the Council's medium-term financial plans including any relating to transformation activities, these are also included in the five-year financial plans presented to Council in Finance Update reports.

Recommendations

We have identified one improvement recommendation as part of our work on the council's transformational planning. This recommendation has been included in the action plan at [Appendix 1](#).

4) Programme management

This section of the report examines to what extent, the council’s programme management arrangements facilitate effective oversight of its transformation plans.

Background

It is essential that the council has good programme management arrangements in place to ensure it is making sufficient progress against its transformation plans. It is important that the council has the structures and the staffing resource in place to deliver its transformation ambitions. In addition, the council must ensure that both senior officers and elected members have appropriate oversight of progress.

Findings and evidence relating to the council’s programme management arrangements

| Findings | Evidence |
|---|---|
| <p>Transformation governance The council has established governance structures for oversight of transformation projects. These include the Strategic Risk and Resilience Strategic Reflective Review Panel and the Transformation and Visioning Board. It has a consistent corporate approach to project management, and work is underway to implement change management and project management methodologies.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on management responses, governance of transformation projects is provided through the Strategic Risk and Resilience Group (SRRG) and coverage at the Digital Board and Innovation Board. These groups report on a bi-monthly basis. • The Strategic Plan 2022–2027 sets out governance and scrutiny arrangements for strategic priorities. This would cover any priority linked to ongoing transformation work , . This demonstrates a degree of strategic oversight for some of the transformation work underway. • The Biannual Report on Strategic Risks presented to the Audit Committee confirms oversight of governance and risk, including transformation-related risks. |
| <p>Resourcing and capacity to deliver transformation The council’s Digital and Change teams have specialist skills and are well connected to national networks. However, these are small teams with limited capacity. The council does not have sufficient resources to deliver transformation at the scale and pace it desires. See Recommendation 2 within the Improvement Action Plan.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council no longer maintains a dedicated transformation fund, and resources are not specifically ring-fenced for transformation projects. Historically, a transformation pot existed, but this stopped due to financial constraints. • Transformation delivery is currently managed through a cascade approach using digital leads and champions across service lines, rather than a fully resourced central team. While this enables local ownership, the council acknowledges that limited capacity in the small corporate digital transformation team and fragmented service-led projects create risks of duplication and inefficiencies. • Transformation work is increasingly being absorbed into day-to-day responsibilities, particularly within ICT, due to cuts and staffing shortages. This has constrained progress and created a reliance on staff balancing transformation with operational |

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| | <p>delivery. Senior Leadership Team oversight exists, but stronger central coordination could improve consistency and pace of implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council has accessed external support from the Digital Office, Improvement Service, and SOLACE, including training opportunities, project tools, and access to the Microsoft SharePoint 365 national hub. Additional community-based funding has been secured to address the digital gap and promote inclusiveness, but this is targeted at outcomes rather than internal capacity. • National engagement continues, including participation in Artificial Intelligence focused workstreams and digital council collaboration groups, but resource constraints limit the Council's ability to fully exploit these opportunities. |
| <p>Oversight and reporting to senior leadership and elected members Senior leadership receives regular updates on transformation projects through bi-monthly reports to the Transformation and Visioning Board, and financial performance is monitored through Budgetary Control Reports. Elected members are briefed primarily on savings delivery, supplemented by discussions at the Budget Working Group and regular updates from the Chief Executive and Chief Officer - Resources Officer. They do not have oversight of wider transformation outcomes which limits their ability to assess the full impact of transformation.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Transformation and Visioning Board receives updates on progress, savings delivery, and key milestones for transformation projects. These reports are supplemented by input from the Finance and People and Change teams, which monitor delivery against approved saving options. • Budgetary Control Reports provide detailed financial updates to senior officers and committees, ensuring scrutiny of savings performance. These reports are a primary mechanism for tracking financial progress but do not include non-financial benefits or transformation-specific KPIs. • Reporting to elected members occurs primarily through savings options realised and Budgetary Control Reports presented to relevant committees. Additional oversight is provided through discussions at the Budget Working Group and weekly briefings by the Chief Executive and S95 Officer to the Council Leader, with periodic updates to other political group leaders. • Officers explained that elected members currently lack visibility of non-financial benefits and wider transformation outcomes, which limits their ability to assess the full impact of transformation beyond financial savings. This has been partially addressed by actions taken by management in response our previous recommendations, see Appendix 1 of this report. |

Recommendations

We have identified one improvement recommendation as part of our work on the council's programme management. This recommendation has been included in the action plan at [Appendix 1](#).

5) Partnership working and community engagement

This section of the report considers to what extent are partners and communities involved in the development and delivery of the council's plans for transformation.

Background

The [Best Value in Scotland](#) report noted that councils must now rethink how they work together, and with local partners and communities, to provide financially sustainable services. Few councils provide services jointly or share support services across different councils to a great extent.

Findings and evidence relating to the council's partnership working and community engagement arrangements

| Findings | Evidence |
|--|---|
| <p>Partnership working to deliver transformation</p> <p>The council works with partners to support transformation, particularly through Community Planning West Dunbartonshire and collaboration with other councils and national bodies. This has enabled the council to access external funding and shared expertise, strengthening its capacity to deliver complex projects.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The council works closely with Community Planning West Dunbartonshire (CPWD), which approved a themed approach for 2024/25 focused on anti-poverty initiatives. This includes a geographically targeted pilot project and the establishment of the Family Prosperity Network, which brings together partners from the third sector and employers to address child poverty. This new theme and approach were selected in response to feedback from individuals and community groups across the local authority gathered by the council's Communities Team and West Dunbartonshire Community and Volunteering Services. This demonstrates that the Council and its partners are using community feedback to help inform transformation projects.• The council is in a Net Zero Cooperation Agreement with Glasgow City Council, creating a framework for collaboration on shared priorities such as electric waste vehicles, active travel, and sustainability. This partnership aims to reduce duplication and deliver financial savings through joint workstreams.• The council successfully secured £19.9 million Levelling Up Funding for three interlinked regeneration projects, including Glencairn House, by highlighting partnership support and external funding opportunities. See further details of this included within Case Study 1 below.• The Council participates in national initiatives such as the Digital Office and SOLACE workstreams. These provide access to tools, training, and collaborative forums on digital transformation and Artificial Intelligence.• Interviews with officers confirmed that while partnership working is strong at a strategic level, formal shared service arrangements with other councils remain limited, reflecting a sector-wide challenge. |

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| <p>Community engagement and influence on service redesign</p> <p>The council includes community engagement within its transformation approach, with targeted consultation to involve residents and service users in shaping changes. Engagement has influenced decisions in areas such as catering services and cultural regeneration. However, this is often project-specific rather than consolidated under a corporate transformation framework.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council applies a service design approach with its Fit for Future reviews, involving users in redesigning services. The council has trained staff on service design. The council has also established community of practice; this is a group of individuals within the constituency who collaboratively engage in promoting local interests or concerns. • Engagement with pupils and parents during the school catering review informed changes to service delivery, demonstrating responsiveness to user feedback. • The Glencairn House project (Case Study 1) involved extensive consultation including online surveys and drop-in sessions, with strong community support for the redevelopment. Targeted engagement with seldom-heard groups shaped design features such as accessibility and the programme of activities offered. • The council conducts quarterly telephone satisfaction surveys and uses a Citizens Panel to gather feedback on services, with results reported to the Corporate Management Team and published on the Public Performance Reporting pages on the council's website, promoting transparency. |
| <p>Consideration of vulnerable groups and equalities in transformation</p> <p>The council shows awareness of the impact of transformation on vulnerable groups and has taken steps to mitigate risks such as digital exclusion. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are carried out for major projects, and targeted engagement with seldom-heard voices informs design decisions.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Glencairn House Levelling Up Fund application included a detailed Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), addressing accessibility and inclusion. The design incorporated features such as Braille signage, dementia-friendly audits, and consultation with disability access panels. • The council participates in national digital inclusion initiatives and has secured community-based funding to address the digital gap. • In November 2024, CPWD approved a locality planning pilot in Alexandria as part of its 2024/25 anti-poverty theme. The pilot will bring together community planning partners and anchor organisations to address priorities identified in the Leven Locality Plan. This initiative demonstrates the Council's place-based approach to transformation by aiming to improve outcomes for disadvantaged communities and strengthen collaborative working. • The council's People First Strategy embeds equalities considerations within workforce transformation, supporting diversity and inclusion in organisational change. • While EIAs and targeted engagement are evident at project level, programme-level reporting on equalities impacts is not consolidated, limiting visibility for elected members and external stakeholders. |

Case study 1

Glencairn House Library and Museum

Glencairn House is Dumbarton's oldest building which is currently being transformed into a state-of-the-art library, museum, and community hub at the heart of the High Street, with a children's library pavilion and garden. The project is one of three Levelling Up Fund (LUF) town-centre regeneration projects totalling £19.9 million and includes targeted external funding and local investment. Work on site began in April 2024, following contract award and procurement. Although scheduled for completion in the Summer of 2025, work remains ongoing"

Process and Engagement

The council adopted a collaborative approach to design and delivery, working with specialist partners and leveraging external funding to enhance capacity. Extensive community engagement shaped the project from its inception. Early consultations in 2019–2021 included online surveys and public drop-in sessions, which confirmed strong support for bringing Glencairn House back into public use. Some 238 residents responded to an online survey, with 88% agreeing to the importance of seeing this historic building brought back into use and 84% agreeing that it should remain in public ownership.

In 2021, targeted consultations were held with Dumbarton-based community groups supporting young people and seldom-heard groups. The aim was to explore how an expanded cultural offer could enable future activities for these audiences. The organisations consulted collectively served around 650 individuals annually. These consultations influenced key design features, such as the inclusion of a dedicated children's library pavilion and accessible signage. Equality Impact Assessments were embedded in the LUF application, with commitments to dementia-friendly audits and consultation with disability access panels. Governance arrangements ensure progress is monitored through service delivery plans and committee reporting, with milestones tracked under the council's regeneration programme.

Alignment with Best Value Principles

This project demonstrates the council's commitment to partnership working and community engagement. External collaboration enabled significant investment and technical expertise, while co-design ensured the facility reflects local needs. Equalities considerations were integrated throughout, mitigating risks of exclusion and supporting inclusive access. The project aligns with strategic priorities under the council's Strategic Plan, contributing to cultural regeneration, economic development, and community wellbeing.

Recommendations

We have not identified any recommendations to report in respect of Partnership working and community engagement as part of this thematic review.

6) Impact of transformation

This section of the report assesses to what extent, the council has considered the impact of its transformation activity, including on vulnerable or protected groups.

Background

It is important that the council has success measures in place to demonstrate the impact of its transformational activity on service quality; outcomes for people who use services, inequalities and/or savings.

Findings and evidence relating to the impact of the council's transformation activity

| Findings | Evidence |
|---|---|
| <p>Reporting on transformation measures and outcomes The council has established success measures for major transformation projects, but these are mainly financial and operational. It tracks efficiency gains and cost savings, but there is limited reporting on social outcomes or equality impacts.</p> <p>See Recommendation 1 within the Improvement Action Plan.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Strategic Plan and associated Delivery Plans include performance indicators linked to transformation, but these indicators largely focus on financial savings and operational efficiency rather than broader social or equality outcomes. For example, progress reports highlight savings options and service redesign milestones but do not provide information on community benefits or inclusion.• The Glencairn House regeneration project demonstrates positive cultural and social outcomes, such as improved access to learning resources, promoting local heritage, and community cohesion. However, these benefits are reported at a project level and are not integrated into a corporate framework for measuring transformation impact.• Case Study 2 (Chatbot for Missed Bins) demonstrates clear operational success measures including 1,367 calls avoided over 17 weeks resulting in a financial saving of around £20,000. Despite these operational improvements, there was no assessment of wider service user experience or equality impacts. For instance, equity of access, impact on complaint resolution time across demographics, or if satisfaction was sustained beyond the pilot period.• The council completes EIAs for major projects, such as Glencairn House, and incorporates these into funding applications. However, we found no evidence of systematic equality reporting across all its transformation initiatives.• The council's limited reporting on non-financial outcomes from transformation projects means it is difficult to assess whether transformation delivers broader benefits for communities. |

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|---|---|
| <p>Transformation benefits</p> <p>The council has demonstrated that individual transformation projects deliver tangible benefits, but there is no consolidated corporate oversight of transformation benefits.</p> <p>See Recommendation 1 within the Improvement Action Plan.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Study 2 provides strong evidence of benefits: call volume reduction, efficiency gains in Waste services via “Agent Assist”. The council has quantified time savings producing a 395% return on investment on a £4,000 pilot cost in 17 weeks. These results indicate potential for this technology to be used more widely across services, however there is no programme-level approach to ensure such benefits are tracked and validated. This would help the council assess whether successful projects could be applied to other services. • The council has reported that the Integrated Housing Management System has streamlined workflows, improved data quality, and enabled mobile working, supporting service delivery improvements. |
| <p>Public reporting on impact of transformation projects</p> <p>The council communicates progress on transformation through committee reports, Strategic Plan updates, and the Public Performance Reporting pages of its website. There is no consolidated public reporting on transformation.</p> <p>See Recommendation 1 within the Improvement Action Plan.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Strategic Plan Mid-Year Progress report presents performance indicators and trend analysis aligned to Strategic Plan priorities. It does not cover the impact of transformation work or provide an overall assessment of project outcomes. • Case Study 2 provides internal evidence of impact such as efficiency and satisfaction, but these pilot results do not appear within any public-facing reporting that would allow residents and elected members to see outcomes. • The council’s equality and social impact reporting is project-specific (e.g. Glencairn EIA) and is not consolidated into an overall report. Regular reporting on transformation outcomes would improve transparency and allow the Council to better communicate positive outcomes to stakeholders. |

Case study 2

Chatbot Proof of Concept – missed bins

West Dunbartonshire Council introduced a chatbot proof of concept in late 2023 to improve the process for reporting missed bins. The initiative aimed to reduce high call volumes to the Contact Centre, streamline case handling for Waste Services, and enhance customer experience through a self-service digital channel. The pilot was designed as part of the council’s wider digital transformation agenda to reduce demand on the Contact Centre, improve case management efficiency, and provide self-service options that enhance user experience.

Prior to the chatbot pilot, residents reported missed bins through multiple channels, including online forms and phone calls. The proof of concept aimed to streamline missed bin reporting and resolution via a conversational interface (“Citizens Assist”), supported by “Agent Assist” for frontline Waste teams, replacing paper-based processes with an auditable, real-time workflow.

Process and Engagement

The project was scoped collaboratively with Contact Centre and Waste Services staff to map existing processes and identify automation opportunities. The chatbot, developed with robotic process automation, enabled residents to report missed bins and check status updates via a conversational interface. To mitigate digital exclusion risks, assisted access was retained through the Contact Centre, allowing staff to guide residents through the chatbot process. While the pilot included operational engagement and promotion to residents, there was no formal Equality Impact Assessment or structured engagement with vulnerable groups, highlighting a gap in post-implementation equality monitoring.

Alignment with Best Value Principles and Impact Theme

The pilot demonstrates innovation and efficiency, delivering measurable benefits with internal monitoring data reporting:

- 1,367 calls avoided
- 1,523 cases updated with an average time saving of 10 minutes per intervention
- an estimated £20,000 time-value saving against a £4,000 cost (395% return on investment).
- Customer satisfaction averaged 3.6 out of 5, with 57% rating the service highly.

These outcomes align with Best Value principles of continuous improvement and financial sustainability. In September 2024, the Council won the COSLA Excellence Award for Service Innovation & Improvement for this project.

Recommendations

We have identified improvement recommendations as part of our work on the council's impact evaluation of transformation. These recommendations have been included in the action plan at [Appendix 1](#).

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Improvement Action plan

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

| Issue/risk | Recommendation | Agreed management action/ timing |
|--|--|---|
| <p>1. Reporting Transformation Outcomes The council does not monitor and report on the overall costs, savings and outcomes from its transformation projects. There is also no consolidated public reporting on transformation.</p> <p>Risk – The council cannot measure and demonstrate to stakeholders how effectively it is delivering its service improvement and modernisation strategic priorities.</p> | <p>The council should review how it reports on transformation to ensure it can clearly demonstrate the costs, savings and outcomes from transformation projects to stakeholders.</p> | <p>Management’s response The Council will carry out a review of current transformation reporting to ensure it provides a balance between providing sufficient information to stakeholders and not creating an excessive demand on limited resource. Any identified changes to current reporting will be implemented in the 2027/28 financial year.</p> <p>Responsible officer Chief Executive Officer</p> <p>Implementation date 31 March 2027</p> |

| Issue/risk | Recommendation | Agreed management action/ timing |
|--|---|---|
| <p>2. Resourcing and capacity to deliver transformation</p> <p>The council's Digital and Change teams have specialist skills and are well connected to national networks. However, these are small teams with limited capacity.</p> <p>Risk – The council does not have sufficient resources to deliver transformation at the scale and pace it desires.</p> | <p>The council should review whether it has sufficient resources to achieve its service improvement and modernisation priorities and, if necessary, consider options for increasing capacity.</p> | <p>Management's response</p> <p>The Council has recently reviewed capacity to support the delivery of transformation and put in place funding to secure additional capacity to support fit for future reviews.</p> <p>Responsible officer</p> <p>Chief Executive Officer</p> <p>Implementation date</p> <p>31 March 2026</p> |

Appendix 2 – Follow up of previously reported Best Value findings for the Council

We have followed up on previously reported Best Value Thematic Report findings, see the table below for the progress the Council has made during 2024/25.

| Previously reported Best Value findings | Management response and implementation timeframe | Work undertaken and judgements made in 2024/25 | Conclusions reached |
|--|--|--|---|
| <p>1. Workforce data – Level 2 The council could make better use of the data available at organisation and service level, and through the workforce planning console, to identify future resource needs and improve succession planning.</p> <p>Risk – The council is not able to easily identify resource gaps, through the workforce planning console, and make informed resourcing and recruitment decisions.</p> <p>Recommendation – The council should ensure workforce data allows officers to identify resource gaps and supports succession planning.</p> | <p>Management Response: Action is agreed as already part of planned developments to console.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: March 2025</p> | <p>Progress against the recommendation</p> <p>During 2024/25, the council strengthened its workforce planning arrangements by updating its Workforce Planning Toolkit, which is a set of practical resources designed to help managers forecast staffing and plan for future skills. The council also introduced Succession Planning Guidance in February 2025, which explains how to identify critical roles, assess successors, and create development plans. This guidance was supported by standard templates, including a succession planning status sheet to record risks, readiness levels, and priority actions for key posts.</p> <p>The council launched Phase 1 of succession planning for senior leadership roles in March 2025. This included issuing an information pack to senior managers outlining the process, timelines, and tools available, and providing support through People & Change advisers.</p> <p>In addition, the council enhanced its Workforce Planning Console, the main digital system used by managers to access real-time workforce data. New features added during the year included:</p> | <p>Conclusions</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>The council has implemented the core elements needed to use workforce data effectively for identifying resource gaps and supporting succession planning. Governance, tools, and system improvements are in place, and managers are engaging with them. Remaining enhancements (such as predictive analytics) are planned for future phases of the work programme.</p> |

| Previously reported Best Value findings | Management response and implementation timeframe | Work undertaken and judgements made in 2024/25 | Conclusions reached |
|---|--|---|---------------------|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tool to analyse voluntary severance and early retirement trends • Integration of training records and skills passports so managers can see completed and outstanding learning • A new Finance dashboard to support workforce cost planning. <p>While these developments represent good progress, advanced features such as automated workforce forecasting and predictive analytics are still under development and not yet available for routine use.</p> <p>Training sessions were delivered to managers to improve understanding and use of the console. Usage data shows a significant increase, from an average of eight daily users in April 2024 to 31 by March 2025, indicating wider adoption across services.</p> | |

| Previously reported Best Value findings | Management response and implementation timeframe | Work undertaken and judgements made in 2024/25 | Conclusions reached |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>2. Hybrid and flexible working policy – Level 3 The council’s flexible working policy has been in place for several years. Since then, the way people work has changed significantly with home and hybrid working becoming common.</p> <p>Risk – The council’s policy does not fully reflect current working practice.</p> <p>Recommendation – The council should develop a new flexible/hybrid working policy or update its existing policy.</p> | <p>Management Response: Action is agreed as already part of planned policy review and will likely only require an update.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: December 2024</p> | <p>Progress against the recommendation</p> <p>The council updated its Flexible Working Policy in April 2024 to reflect current legislation and modern working practices.</p> <p>The updated policy formally links to Remote Working Guidance, which sets out different work styles (such as home-based, mobile, and hybrid arrangements), and to the new Right to Disconnect Guidance introduced in July 2024. This guidance explains how employees can switch off outside working hours and includes practical advice on email etiquette, meeting scheduling, and wellbeing.</p> <p>To support managers in applying the policy consistently, the council issued Manager’s Guidance on Processing Flexible Working Requests in July 2024. This provides step-by-step instructions, timelines, and template letters for approvals and appeals.</p> | <p>Conclusions</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>The council has updated its policy and supporting guidance to reflect current practice and legislative requirements.</p> |

Transformation – How councils are redesigning and delivering more efficient services to achieve planned outcomes.

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