

# East Dunbartonshire Council

Best Value Assurance Report

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

Prepared by Audit Scotland  
9 September 2021

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- securing and acting upon the external audit of Scotland's councils, integration joint boards and various joint boards and committees
- assessing the performance of councils and integration joint boards in relation to Best Value and community planning
- carrying out national performance audits to help councils improve their services
- requiring councils to publish information to help the public assess their performance.

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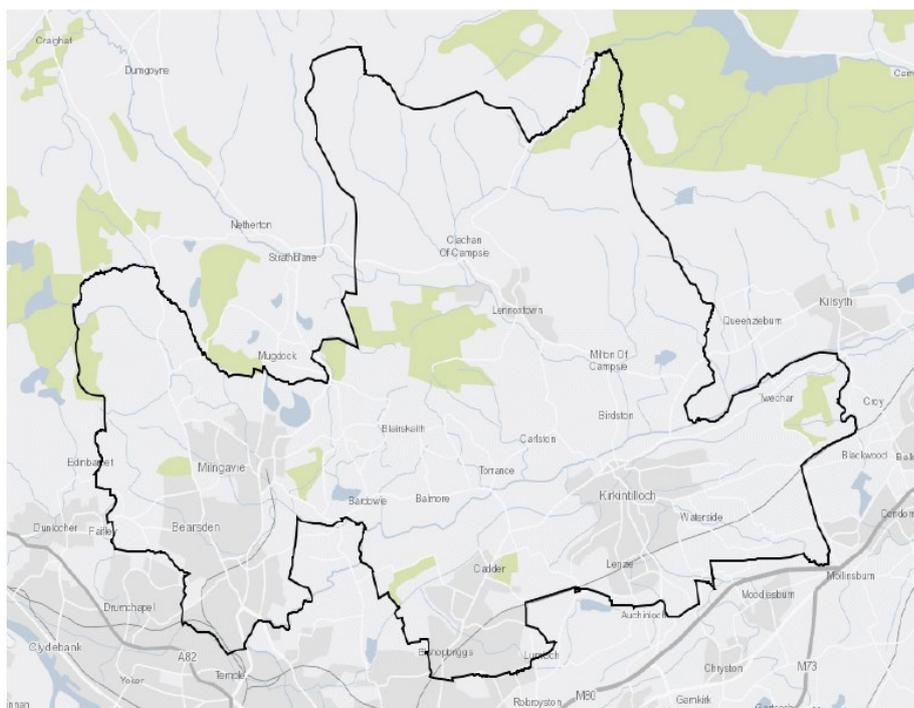
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# Key facts



		East Dunbartonshire	Scotland
Population	Population	108,640	5,463,300
Economy	Economically Active	79.2%	77.5%
	Unemployment	2.6%	3.5%
	Average Weekly Pay (gross)	£700.60	£577.70
Housing	Total number of dwellings	46,986	2,636,871
	Average Annual House Price	£244,558	£179,121
	Average Household Size	2.34	2.15
	One Person Households	11.8%	15.8%
Education	School leavers participating in Education, Training or Employment	96.5%	91.6%
Health	Female Life Expectancy	83.4 years	81.1 years
	Male Life Expectancy	80.4 years	77.0 years
	In very good or good health	84.9%	82.2%
	Day to day activities limited a lot	7.8%	9.6%
Community Safety	Crimes and offences per 10,000 population	461	909
	Deliberate dwelling fires per 100,000 dwellings	12.8	19.5

Source: [East Dunbartonshire Area Profile – Corporate Performance and Research June 2020](#)

# Audit approach

1. The statutory duty of Best Value was introduced in the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. The audit of Best Value is a continuous process, reported each year through the Annual Audit Report. The Controller of Audit also presents a Best Value Assurance Report to the Accounts Commission at least once during the five-year audit appointment for each council. The council's recent Best Value audit timeline is outlined in [Appendix 1](#). This is the first assurance report on East Dunbartonshire Council and it reflects on the council's progress since the [Best Value Follow-Up Audit 2017](#).
2. This report seeks to provide the Commission with assurance on the council's statutory duty to deliver Best Value. We are looking for councils to demonstrate Best Value by showing that they are continuously improving how they provide services. The pace and depth of this improvement is key to how well councils will meet their priorities in the future. Depth of improvement is the extent to which services implement improvements across a council.
3. Our work covers many Best Value themes in the statutory guidance but does not cover them all. Our audit approach is proportionate and risk based, and it reflects the context, risks and performance of the individual council. It also draws on the information from audit and scrutiny work we have carried out in previous years, as shown in [Exhibit 1](#).

## Exhibit 1 – Assessing Best Value across the audit appointment period

Best Value themes reported in the Annual Audit Reports

Best Value characteristics	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Performance, outcomes and improvement		√				
Vision and leadership			√			
Governance and accountability	√			√		
Effective use of resources	√					
Partnership and collaborative working			√			
Working with communities			√			
Sustainable development		√				
Fairness and equality				√		

Best Value Assurance Report					√	
Best Value Assurance Report follow-up						√

4. The [2019/20 Annual Audit Report](#) was the starting point for our work. In keeping with this approach, we did some initial work to identify risks and council initiatives to build into the scope of our audit. This included:

- reviewing previous audit and inspection reports and intelligence
- reviewing key council documents and committee papers
- reviewing media coverage, including local press and relevant social media platforms
- meeting with senior officers.

[Exhibit 2](#) shows the key areas of focus for our audit.

## Exhibit 2

### Key areas of focus for our audit



How effectively the council’s self-assessment framework drives continuous improvement in service priorities.



How effectively the council plans the use of its resources to support delivery of its priorities. This includes service planning, financial planning, asset management, workforce planning and digital/ICT strategy. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on these plans is considered.



How effectively the council works with partners in tackling its specific challenges such as its ageing population.



How effectively the council encourages and supports community participation in setting its priorities and delivery of services. This includes its engagement with the public and responsiveness since the start of the pandemic and how this will influence the council’s future priorities and activities.



A review of the council’s assessment of its outcomes and performance, as reported to elected members and through public performance reporting.

Source: Audit Scotland

5. The detailed audit work on these areas then included:

- document review and analysis of performance and outcomes data
- interviews with elected members and senior officers
- other discussions with staff and partner organisations.

## **Impact of Covid-19 outbreak on the audit approach**

**6.** Most of the desk-based work for this report was completed by the end of May 2021, and because of Covid-19 restrictions the audit team held all interviews with key officers, elected members and partners remotely. Despite the restrictions on the on-site fieldwork, we were able to gather sufficient evidence to support the audit judgements in this report.

**7.** The outbreak has brought unprecedented challenges to organisations around the country. It is still unknown what long-term impacts these will have on populations and on the delivery of public services, but they will be significant and could continue for some time. The scope of our work covers the current impact of Covid-19 on the council where it is known.

## **Follow-up of the findings in this report**

**8.** The council's auditors will continue to audit Best Value over the course of the audit appointment. This will include a follow-up on the findings from this report and more detailed audit work on other Best Value characteristics as appropriate.

## **Acknowledgement**

**9.** We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation with and assistance provided to the audit team by all elected members, officers and other stakeholders during the audit.

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# Key messages

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- 1** The council has demonstrated a good pace of improvement since the last Best Value report in 2017. Service performance is strong and has improved in most services, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The council's priorities are clearly reflected in its financial plans and its Business and Improvement Plans (BIPs). It is well placed to meet the challenges of the future.
- 2** The people of East Dunbartonshire are more satisfied with council services than in other areas of Scotland, but the council is not complacent. It has delivered a range of improvement projects. Corporate projects, such as its review of assets and facilities services, are targeted at realising efficiencies and financial savings in the council. Others such as the Snack and Play programme, which helps children in poverty, are targeted at reducing inequalities in its communities.
- 3** The council and its partners have a clear vision for East Dunbartonshire, through the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) and Place Plans. Partners work well together and are focussed on the needs of their communities. This has been crucial in delivering services to those most in need during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 4** The Leaders of the Council and Chief Executive provide effective leadership in delivering the council's priorities from the LOIP. Officers and elected members work well together in the interests of residents. Elected members effectively scrutinise council decisions and performance.
- 5** The council is aware of where it needs to improve. Since the last Best Value report its performance management has improved. A comprehensive performance management framework is now in place for reporting progress against local outcome measures. Reviewing performance information triggers improvement actions, which are reflected in Business and Improvement Plans (BIPs). Progress is then reported through the council's How Good Is Our Service (HGIOS) progress reports.
- 6** The council consults widely and can demonstrate how communities are actively involved in decision-making. Covid-19 has presented an

opportunity to reassess priorities and further strengthen community engagement.

- 7** Financial management is effective, with budgets focused on the council's priorities. The council has consistently delivered services within budget. The financial impact of Covid-19 has been significant and will be enduring, but the council is well placed to meet the future challenges.
- 8** The council's medium-term financial model forecasts a funding gap of £23 million by the end of 2023/24. The plan now needs to be updated to consider the implications of Covid-19. Covid-19 restrictions have caused delays in the delivery of the capital programme.
- 9** The council takes a good practice approach to workforce planning. Workforce plans are in place which include demographic profiles and contain action plans to secure future workforce needs.
- 10** The council has good working relationships with the Health and Social Care Partnership, but the Integration Joint Board faces significant financial risk unless it transforms the way services are delivered in the longer term.
- 11** The council reacted well to the immediate challenges arising from the pandemic since March 2020. Governance arrangements were adapted quickly. Staff were supported and redeployed, and the council's progress with its digital strategy enabled it to adapt how services are delivered. The recovery from the pandemic is being built into the governance arrangements. The committee cycle has restarted, and this will aid scrutiny of the recovery phase. The ongoing risks from Covid-19 need to be managed through the corporate risk register.
- 12** The council recognises that its pace of improvement needs to be maintained as services adapt to the Covid-19 recovery phase. It is too early to see the full impact of the pandemic on service performance. The BIPs for 2021–2024 take the first steps to reflecting on how services will be delivered as the area recovers from the pandemic.

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

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The council and its partners have a clear vision for East Dunbartonshire. The Local Outcomes Improvement Plan sets out how the council will work with its partners to achieve its local priorities.

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Reducing inequalities for the area's most deprived communities is the focus of the Place Plans

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The council has effective leadership and a clear strategic direction. Officers and elected members work well together in the interests of the residents of East Dunbartonshire.

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The annual Transformational Change and Budget Reduction Strategy drives the service improvement and transformation programmes. Three year Business and Improvement Plans (BIPs) for each of the council's strategic service groups support the strategy.

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The delivery of improvement plans is monitored and reported through the council's How Good Is Our Service reports. The Covid-19 pandemic has delayed progress in some areas.

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The council has responded well to the challenges of the pandemic. Governance arrangements were restructured quickly to ensure that priority services were delivered.

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The transformation programme needs to be updated to reflect the Covid-19 recovery priorities.

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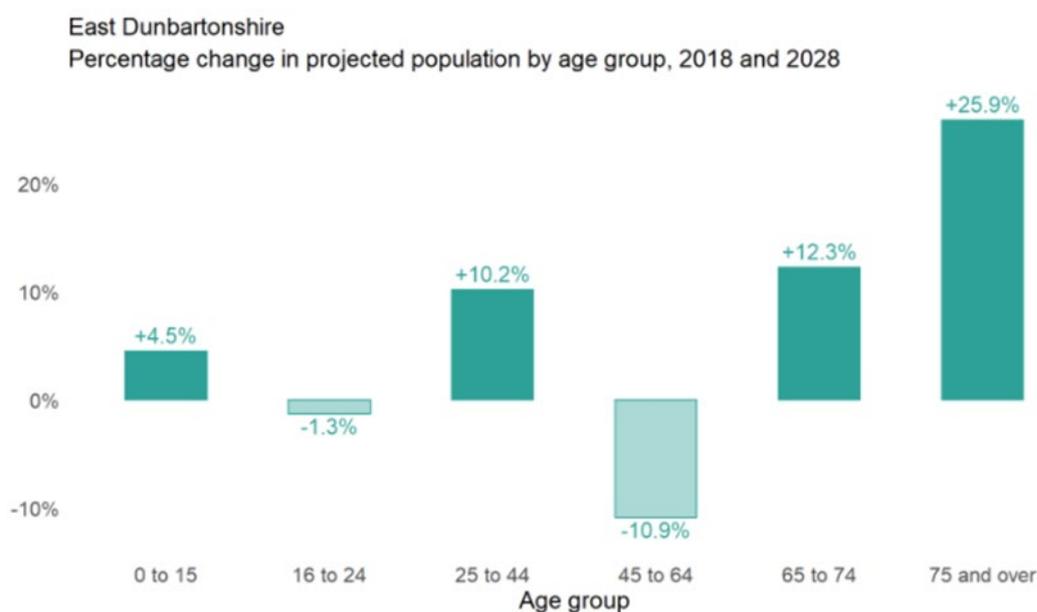
## The local context

**10.** East Dunbartonshire is north of Glasgow and sits between the Campsie Fells and the Kilpatrick Hills. It has a population of around 108,000 and covers an area of 77 square miles, putting it in the mid-range of Scottish local authorities. The council area comprises a mixture of urban and rural areas, including those in and around Bearsden, Bishopbriggs, Kirkintilloch, Milngavie, Lenzie, Milton of Campsie, Lennoxton, Torrance and Twechar.

**11.** National surveys say that East Dunbartonshire is one of the best places to live in Scotland. Life expectancy in East Dunbartonshire is one of the highest in Scotland (80.4 years for men and 83.4 years for women). Like all other areas it has an increasingly ageing population, with 22.2 per cent of residents aged over 65, and 10.5 per cent aged over 75. This demographic profile puts significant pressure on a number of council services.

### Exhibit 3

East Dunbartonshire projected population by age group between 2018 and 2028



Source: [National Records of Scotland](#)

**12.** [Exhibit 3](#) shows a significant increase in the percentage of people aged over 65 years old in the council area, with the most significant increase in the 75 and over age group. Population estimates provided by the National Records of Scotland show that by 2028 East Dunbartonshire's population is expected to grow a further 3.8 per cent. The number of people of pensionable age is projected to rise by 5 per cent, and the highest increase is expected to be seen in those aged 75 and over with a predicted increase of 26 per cent. This is

expected to put some council services, such as care services, under substantial pressure.

**13.** The council has low levels of poverty compared with other Scottish local authorities. Most East Dunbartonshire geographical data zones fall into the least deprived areas of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Data (SIMD), although the authority does have eight data zones in the most deprived 25 per cent in Scotland, including Hillhead, Auchinairn and Lennoxtown.

**14.** The average gross weekly earnings of full-time workers living in East Dunbartonshire are substantially higher than in Scotland as a whole. A key contributor to this is the type of jobs residents do, with 28.9 per cent of adults working in professional jobs, which is 7.7 per cent higher than the Scottish average. The council area also has higher levels of employment than average, with 79.2 per cent economically active compared with the national average of 77.5 per cent.

### **The Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017–2027 sets out a clear vision for East Dunbartonshire**

**15.** The council priorities are set out in its Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) 2017–2027, published in November 2017. The LOIP sets clear a strategic direction, priorities and outcomes that have been agreed with community planning partners. There are six local priorities in the LOIP – these are reflected in local outcome measures, [Exhibit 4](#). The LOIP also contains seven guiding principles that underpin how the outcomes will be delivered: Best Value; co-production and engagement; evidence-based planning; fair and equitable services; planning for place; prevention and early intervention; and sustainability.

## Exhibit 4

### East Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017–2027 strategic priority themes and outcomes

#### Local Outcome 1

East Dunbartonshire has a sustainable and resilient economy with busy town and village centres, a growing business base, and is an attractive place for visitors and investors.

#### Local Outcome 2

Our people are equipped with knowledge and skills for learning, life and work.

#### Local Outcome 3

Our children and young people are safe, healthy and ready to learn.

#### Local Outcome 4

East Dunbartonshire is a safe place in which to live, work and visit.

#### Local Outcome 5

Our people experience good physical and mental health and wellbeing with access to a quality built and natural environment in which to lead healthier and more active lifestyles.

#### Local Outcome 6

Our older population and more vulnerable citizens are supported to maintain their independence and enjoy a high quality of life, and they, their families and carers benefit from effective care and support services.

Source: East Dunbartonshire CPP Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017–2027

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**The LOIP reflects the needs of the communities. Reducing inequalities is a focus through the Place Plans for its most deprived communities**

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## Exhibit 5

### Addressing inequalities through the LOIP

‘Despite some local issues and needs, quality of life in East Dunbartonshire as a whole compares favourably to other local authority areas and Scotland as a whole. We have a high percentage of home ownership, low unemployment and a high percentage of economically active residents. Socio-economic inequality in East Dunbartonshire can often be overlooked due to good outcomes for people on average in the authority area.’

‘Planning for place – We will target resources where they are most needed to reduce disadvantage caused by socio-economic inequality. This is known as using a ‘Place’ approach.’

Source: East Dunbartonshire CPP Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017–2027

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**16.** The LOIP was developed in consultation with communities and reflects their needs; this is discussed further at paragraph 144. For example, the council responds to the challenges for the area’s ageing population through LOIP Outcome 6. The council and its partners are planning to revise the LOIP during the Covid-19 recovery phase, reporting to the Council in early December 2021.

**17.** Reducing inequalities is a focus through the council’s four Place Plans for its most deprived communities (see [Exhibit 5](#)). This is discussed further at paragraph 148. Examples of how the council addresses inequalities in practice are reflected throughout this report:

- Education services have been performing particularly well for a number of years even in the council’s most deprived areas (paragraph 70).
- The Snack and Play programme helps children in poverty (Case study 6).

### **The annual transformational change and budget reduction strategy drives service improvements**

**18.** The annual transformational change and budget reduction strategy is the driver for ensuring that the council meets its current and future financial challenges while delivering its outcomes. Exhibit 13 in Part 3 shows that, before Covid-19, the council delivered more than 70 per cent of its planned efficiency savings over several years.

**19.** In previous Best Value reports the Accounts Commission reported that there was a gap between the council’s ambitions and its ability to deliver its improvement programmes. Since then, the council has improved the delivery of its plans. The Transformation Programme Board, chaired by the chief executive, and attended by the strategic management team (SMT), leads the Transformational Change and Budget Reduction Strategy. The Organisational Transformation strategic service group manages all transformation projects. In addition, the strategy supports the delivery of Business and Improvement Plans (BIPs) for each of the council’s strategic service groups (including the Health and Social Care Partnership and East Dunbartonshire Leisure and Culture Trust). The BIPs are three year rolling plans that are updated annually. The Budget Strategy drives the BIPs which are linked to the LOIP.

**20.** The BIPs identify strategic service group improvement priorities and contributions to be made to the local strategic outcomes set out in the LOIP. They identify what services need to do to respond to the needs of local stakeholders and to implement local and national policy priorities. They also include details of the services’ consultation and engagement with stakeholders. The BIPs contain an improvement plan aligned to the delivery of local outcomes

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#### **The BIPs include the following sections:**

- Purpose and priorities.
  - Achieving our local outcomes.
  - Planning for place.
  - Evidence-based planning.
  - Plans, policies programmes and strategies.
  - Stakeholder consultation and engagement.
  - Fair and equitable service delivery.
  - Sustainable development.
  - Benchmarking.
  - Our improvement plan.
  - Contact details.
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within the LOIP, together with a range of performance indicators designed to enable an effective review of progress. Progress made against the BIPs is monitored through quarterly How Good Is Our Service (HGIOS) reports for each strategic service group.

**21.** Progress made against the BIPs and the transformation programme is monitored by elected members. The HGIOS reports and transformation plan updates are scrutinised at the relevant strategic service committees and by the Policy and Resources Committee. The scrutiny of performance is discussed further in Part 2.

### **The 2021–2024 Business and Improvement Plans consider the impact of Covid-19 on service delivery and priorities**

**22.** BIPs are usually presented to the Council as part of the annual budget-setting meeting but, as a result of the impact of Covid-19, the BIPs for 2021–2024 were presented to the Council in March 2021, a month later than the budget. Each BIP explains how that service will contribute to achieving the LOIP outcomes. It includes a section setting out the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on service delivery and the priorities of each strategic service. Officers also examined the performance target levels for each performance indicator in the BIPs to decide whether these remain achievable.

**23.** While it is too early to see the full impact of the pandemic on services, the BIPs for 2021–2024 take the first step to reflecting on how services will be delivered as the area recovers from the pandemic. The intention is for the 2022 BIPs update to be tabled alongside the annual budget papers.

### **The transformation programme needs to be updated to reflect the council's Covid-19 recovery priorities**

**24.** Alongside the BIPs, the council manages a transformation programme of projects: some will achieve financial savings and others are designed to deliver service improvements or address inequalities for some citizens. In February 2020, when the latest version of the transformation programme was approved, there were 23 projects included in this programme with planned savings of £2.2 million, including six East Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) projects with savings of £1.4 million. In recent years, service changes from the programme include cashless payments and a parents' portal for clothing grants.

**25.** The programme has not been updated since the pandemic, as service improvements have focused on the council's Covid-19 response. Part 4 includes some case studies to demonstrate this. An interim updated programme is due to be reported to the Council in September 2021. The full transformation programme will then be updated to reflect any changes in priorities or the Covid-19 response following the council's public engagement process.

## **The Joint Leaders of the Council and Chief Executive provide effective leadership, and officers and elected members work well together**

**26.** East Dunbartonshire Council has been controlled by a coalition administration between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties since March 2018. Before that, it was controlled by an SNP minority administration following the 2017 local government elections.

**27.** The Joint Leaders of the Council (one Conservative elected member and one Liberal Democrat elected member) and Chief Executive provide effective leadership and a clear strategic direction. Officers and elected members work well together in the interests of the residents of East Dunbartonshire. They understand their respective roles, which allows a constructive and professional working relationship between them.

**28.** With the exception of political differences, there is a good degree of cooperation and consensus between elected members on the vision and objectives of the council and how to apply resources to achieve these objectives. Auditors have observed a good level of challenge and scrutiny from elected members in Council and committee meetings.

**29.** Officer leadership is stable. The Chief Executive has been in post since 2009 and there have been no other new appointments to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) in recent years. The CMT structure has been in place for a number of years. In September 2018 the Council approved a revised strategic delivery model in which the Chief Finance Officer became a member of the CMT reporting directly to the Chief Executive. This structure has been temporarily amended during the Covid-19 pandemic period with the Chief Finance Officer reporting directly to the Depute Chief Executive of Education, People & Business in order to streamline the council's decision-making structure as part of the command and control arrangements. The Chief Officer of East Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) is also a member of the council's CMT.

**30.** Each strategic service group has an executive officer, who is the equivalent of a head of service. These officers report directly to the council's two Depute Chief Executives and this reporting line mirrors the financial reporting format across the council. Executive officers are members of the Senior Management Team, along with members of the CMT.

**Exhibit 6**

## East Dunbartonshire Council organisational structure



**31.** We are satisfied that the CMT has the skills and expertise to deliver the council's strategic objectives and improvement plans. The CMT is supported by executive officers who have a good understanding of how their service contributes to the LOIP objectives.

### The council's committee structure works effectively

**32.** The decision-making structure of the council has been in place since the May 2017 local government elections. The committee structure includes two service committees (Education and Place, Neighbourhood and Corporate Assets), a Policy and Resources Committee, the Audit and Risk Management Committee and a Planning Board. There are also two scrutiny panels that report to the Audit and Risk Management Committee. The structure provides effective scrutiny of decisions and performance.

**33.** The Audit and Risk Management Committee has been a full committee since September 2016 (previously a sub-committee of the Policy and Resources Committee) and includes members from all political parties. In line with good practice, the Convenor is a member of an opposition party. The committee provides effective scrutiny of decision-making and undertakes its business in an open and transparent manner.

**34.** In December 2020, the Audit and Risk Management Committee discussed the results of a self-assessment exercise, and some low-risk improvement actions were agreed. These include updating the committee's terms of reference, approving the annual governance statement with the unaudited financial statements and publishing an annual report, summarising the committee's work. At this meeting the committee also discussed Audit Scotland's [Covid-19: Guide for audit and risk committees](#) report, which helped elected members to understand how they could effectively scrutinise the council's response to the pandemic.

**35.** The council's two scrutiny panels (Transformation, Economy and Employment, and Transformation and Community Wellbeing) help elected members scrutinise the council's transformation programme and its impact on services, as well as the council's priorities and financial challenges.

**36.** The convenor and vice-convenor of the Audit and Risk Management Committee meet with scrutiny panels' chairs in turn to discuss potential scrutiny topics and ensure that the reasons for selecting topics are clear and relevant. Recent topics discussed by scrutiny panels include the waste to landfill targets, universal credit, review of third sector grants, parking and traffic management around schools, homelessness and payroll control systems.

**37.** Elected members and officers, interviewed as part of our work, said that they feel that the council's committee structure and meeting arrangements are effective. There is opportunity for debate, members treat each other with respect and understand their respective roles and responsibilities in each committee. Based on our observation of meetings, and discussions with members and officers, we are assured that the committee structure and meeting arrangements work well for the council.

### **The council has improved its reports for elected members**

**38.** Previous Best Value reports recommended improving committee report papers, as elected members said that papers taken to some meetings were lengthy. As a result, in 2017 the council changed the format of committee reports to distinguish between items for decision and items for information. The new template for committee reports was developed to make recommendations and the risks associated with decisions clearer. The volume of complex information presented to members has been reduced with for example, budget reports providing high-level detail supplemented with useful guidance for members similar to that provided in Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland national performance audit reports. Council officers say that verbal feedback from elected members on the effectiveness of the new report format, level of detail and use of plain English in the current reports is positive.

### **In March 2020, arrangements were adapted to provide an emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic**

**39.** In March 2020, the committee structure was suspended and arrangements adapted to provide an emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic:

- All council meetings were suspended from 18 March 2020 in response to the developing public health crisis and the need to protect the health and wellbeing of elected members and officers.
- Powers were delegated to the Chief Executive (and Depute Chief Executives in his absence) from 18 March 2020.
- It was agreed that there would be no traditional 2020 Council recess because of the council's ongoing response to the pandemic and recovery planning.
- The Chief Solicitor & Monitoring Officer made arrangements for meetings of the Council to take place on 20 August and 1 October 2020 by video-conferencing.
- Authority was delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Joint Leaders of the Council, to call a Special Meeting of the Council when, in his opinion, there is a matter of such importance or significance that it requires consideration and/or determination by the Council and is so urgent that it cannot wait until a scheduled meeting.
- The Chief Executive provided updates to elected members at weekly briefings for group leaders. Officers also provided fortnightly service update technical notes for elected members; and the CMT continued to liaise with political group leaders and the joint administration leadership team.
- The Chief Solicitor and Monitoring Officer reviewed the Administrative Scheme, and a report detailing any necessary amendments was approved by the Council.
- It was agreed that a number of Standing Orders would be suspended, as a consequence of the above changes in governance arrangements, for example to allow video-conferencing for Council meetings.

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### Impact of Covid-19 outbreak

All committee meetings were suspended in March 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. Delegated powers were approved that enabled the Chief Executive to make decisions in consultation with the convener of the appropriate committee and the relevant spokesperson for each of the political groups. Arrangements have now been put in place to hold Council and committee meetings virtually using YouTube.

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**40.** Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, if officers have produced reports that do not need a specific decision and are for 'noting', these can now be presented through technical notes. This change was implemented to reduce the number of papers going to each Special Council meeting while the committee structure was suspended. This has reduced the time taken for meetings and focused the time that elected members have on discussing and scrutinising areas needing decisions. A [Hub](#) was developed on the council's website, where relevant technical notes could be uploaded, and became operational in early April 2021. These changes to the council's governance arrangements could have reduced the level of scrutiny provided by elected members, but the council has managed this risk effectively.

**41.** At the Council meeting on 1 October 2020, a report was presented updating elected members on the impact of ongoing Covid-19 measures on the council's governance arrangements. The report sought approval for the cycle of meetings (using video-conferencing) to be extended until December 2020. The report highlighted that, due to the ongoing restrictions as a result of Covid-19, the

cycle is not as comprehensive as normal, and meetings of some sub-committees and quasi-judicial bodies have not been scheduled as usual, for example meetings of the Human Resources Appeals Board.

**42.** In January 2021, the Scottish Government introduced further Covid-19 restrictions and, consequently, all committee meetings were again cancelled and held as part of Special Council meetings from January 2021. The council's committee cycle was reinstated in May 2021 and a full cycle has been approved for 2021/22.

**43.** A further paper detailing revised governance arrangements was presented to elected members in June 2021. This noted the willingness to return to face-to-face meetings when possible and the need to consider factors such as accommodation/logistics, technology and governance before this could be reintroduced. The current level of Covid-19 restrictions means that there are some challenges that the council must overcome before this can happen. A report will be submitted to a future meeting of the Council setting out the available options and what is needed (cost, time and other considerations) to implement each.

**44.** The paper also notes that, if the current volatility continues, then it is likely that a blended model of virtual, in-person and hybrid meetings will be put forward for consideration, ensuring that the council has flexible arrangements in place to quickly adapt to changing circumstances without significantly affecting the agreed cycle of meetings.

**45.** In its November 2020 paper '[Transitioning to the new normal: Political Governance](#)' the Improvement Service notes that around half of councils are now live-streaming meetings or allowing members of the public to participate. All meetings of East Dunbartonshire Council and its committees, boards and HSCP that have taken place since the reintroduction of meetings in June 2020 have been live-streamed on the council's YouTube channel.

**46.** The council does not record these meetings for future viewing. It has considered whether it should record and publish its meetings on two occasions, the most recent in June 2021. However, these proposals were rejected by elected members because of limited interest from the public, cost and the additional staff resources needed to provide this service.

### **The council has an effective training programme to support elected members**

**47.** The council has a training programme to support elected members to perform their role effectively. This includes a comprehensive induction programme for new elected members, ad hoc training provided by each strategic service and member seminars.

**48.** The council has previously attempted to sign up all elected members to individual personal development plans, but uptake was limited. However, officers continue to discuss with elected members proposals for developing and scheduling personal development activities, such as annual refreshers on the

elected members code of conduct, and on updates to any important legal or policy developments.

**49.** As all Council and committee meetings have been held online since the start of the pandemic, members' training has also been delivered online in an e-learning environment during this time. The council's democratic services team has provided members with virtual sessions on governance and scrutiny, as well as on the more basic housekeeping procedures for accessing and using online meeting tools. The team also held sessions for Conveners, covering the additional challenges of chairing a virtual meeting and how officer support would be provided. Multiple dates and times were offered to maximise the number of attendees.

**50.** As there is no sign of a return to office working in the immediate future, further virtual training sessions are planned, including an update on the elected members' code of conduct and a session on the impact of Covid-19 and the UK's withdrawal from the EU on the council's commercial contracts.

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# Part 2 – How well is the council performing?

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Service performance is strong and has been improving in most services. The people of East Dunbartonshire are more satisfied with council services than in other areas of Scotland.

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Education services are performing particularly well and have done so for a number of years even in the council's most deprived areas. Economic development and some aspects of the housing service require the most improvement.

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The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on services since March 2020. The council adapted services to ensure that they were delivered to those with greatest need throughout the pandemic.

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The council has a comprehensive performance management framework, with local outcomes measures reported regularly to elected members.

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The annual public performance report provides a good overview of council performance, and how it contributes to the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

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The impact of Covid-19 on service performance in all Scottish councils will become clearer when 2020/21 performance information is published.

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**The council adapted services to ensure that they were delivered to those with greatest need throughout the Covid-19 pandemic**

51. The Accounts Commission's [Local government in Scotland Overview 2021](#), describes how the Covid-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on all aspects of society, including the economy, jobs and people's physical and

mental health. Councils have been at the centre of the response to the pandemic, supporting communities through these difficult times.

**52.** The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the services provided by the council since March 2020. Since then, the council has continued to deliver services where it has been possible to do so through homeworking and online and telephone services. An alternative provision for the children of key workers and for vulnerable children in East Dunbartonshire, put in place by Education Services and East Dunbartonshire HSCP, has continued to provide essential care and protection services. All other frontline council services moved to emergency service delivery only.

**53.** The way in which a number of services are provided has now changed, staff have been redeployed and the digitalisation of services has enabled service delivery to continue. The council has reflected the changes in each service in its BIPs for 2021–2024, which include a separate section on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on service delivery and priorities.

### **The council has a comprehensive performance management framework, local outcomes measures are regularly reported to elected members**

**54.** The council has a comprehensive performance management framework. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, performance information was reported quarterly to members as part of the HGIOS reports. These reports were presented to the relevant strategic service committee. They include reports of progress against performance targets linked to the LOIP priorities. The reports are used to identify areas of good practice and help drive action where improvement is needed. Performance targets set out in each BIP are reviewed annually to ensure that they are challenging and driving continuous improvement in service delivery.

**55.** As a result of the pandemic, during 2020/21 the quarterly HGIOS reports on service performance were replaced by fortnightly service updates to elected members. These are comprehensive, narrative Deputy Chief Executive service updates, which are published on the council’s website. The 2019/20 annual HGIOS reports for each service were reported six months later than usual in December 2020. The 2020/21 annual HGIOS reports for each strategic service group were presented to the Council in June 2021.

**56.** The council now plans to review its strategic planning and performance framework in the light of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic to consider the lessons learned and evolving opportunities to support future improvement; see paragraph 185.

### **The annual HGIOS reports show that the council was on track to achieve many of its performance targets but that Covid-19 has had a detrimental impact on its performance**

**57.** The 2019/20 annual HGIOS reports from December 2020 show that the council was on track to achieve 60 per cent of its prioritised performance indicators, a further 18 per cent were within 5 per cent of target and 22 per cent

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**HGIOS reports include the following sections:**

- Local delivery story.
  - Progress of prioritised performance indicators (including absence management).
  - Progress on BIPs’ areas for improvement.
  - Progress of financial targets.
  - Stakeholder engagement activity.
  - Plans, policies, programmes and strategies.
  - Improvement activities.
  - Current delivery focus.
-

were off target. The reports comment that some indicators, such as those relating to leisure activities, were starting to see the impact of Covid-19.

**58.** The annual HGIOS report for 2020/21 was presented to the Council meeting on 17 June 2021. Progress against the council's 112 prioritised performance indicators is reported, and the results are shown in Exhibit 7. Of the 101 indicators that could be reported on, 48 per cent are on target, 12 per cent are within 5 per cent of target and 40 per cent are off target.

## Exhibit 7

### Performance information for 2020/21

Strategic service group	On target	2–5% off target	Off target	Data not available *
Place, Neighbourhood and Corporate Assets				
Comprises the following strategic service groups:				
• Assets and Facilities	4		2	2
• Housing	2	2	4	1
• Land Planning and Development (including economic development)	3		6	1
• Neighbourhood Services	2		3	
• Place and Community Planning	1			3
• Roads and Environment	4	1	2	
• East Dunbartonshire Leisure and Culture Trust	1		5	
Education, People and Business				
Comprises the following strategic service groups:				
• Education	8	2	3	2
• Finance and Audit	2	2	3	
• Legal and Democratic Services	3	1	4	2
• Organisational Transformation	4		5	
• Customer and Business Support Services	6		3	
• Health and Social Care Partnership	8	4	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>11</b>

Source: How Good Is Our Service reports 2020/21

\* Data for the indicators in this column are not available because of the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions during 2020/21. These indicators include the percentage of children taking up free school meals, number of targeted underage sales test purchasing visits, percentage of environmental health high-risk food safety inspections, average achievement in reading for pupils at third/fourth level Curriculum for Excellence in secondary schools, average achievement in maths for pupils at third/fourth level Curriculum for Excellence in secondary schools and the number of data protection spot checks carried out.

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**59.** The HGIOS reports explain why the indicators in [Exhibit 7](#) are off target, as achieving indicators has been affected since March 2020 by Covid-19. This provides information for scrutinising progress in the delivery of the BIP for each strategic service group. The following are examples:

- **Attendance at leisure centres:** 33,572 achieved against a target of 1,000,800, as all leisure centres were closed for most of the year due to Covid-19. The impact on the leisure trust is discussed at paragraph 98.
- **Number of new start businesses supported by local authority-funded business support activities (including the business gateway) and other partners:** 112 achieved against a target of 280. There was a significant drop in the number of clients willing to set up businesses in the current business climate as a result of Covid-19.

### **The council uses the Local Government Benchmarking Framework to evaluate its performance. Reports should show a link to BIPs for those indicators where performance is not improving in priority services**

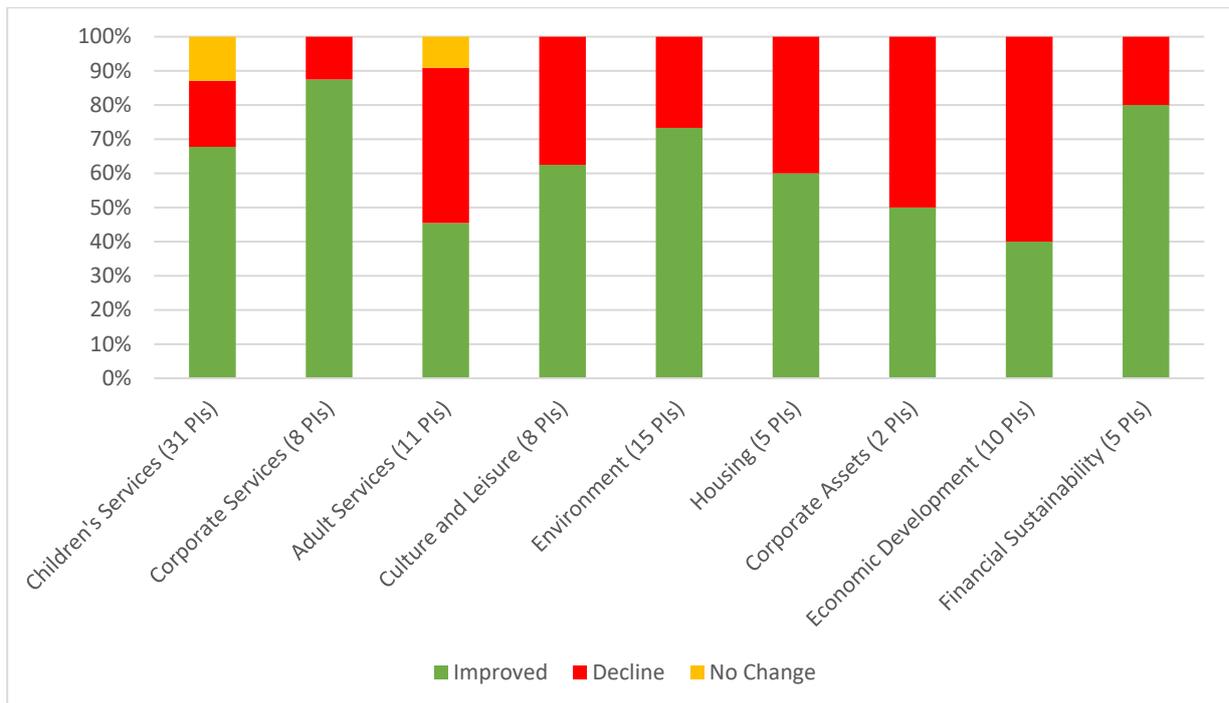
**60.** The council uses the [Local Government Benchmarking Framework](#) (LGBF) data to analyse and report on its performance. Officers provided an initial analysis report on the 2019/20 LGBF data published by the Improvement Service to elected members in February 2021 and a covering technical note in March 2021. A further report was discussed with elected members on 17 June 2021, when the full suite of Improvement Service data was published. Officers told the Council meeting on 17 June 2021 that they will provide a report to a future meeting explaining what improvement actions are planned against these indicators. This should be linked to the BIPs.

**61.** The council's Chief Finance Officer is the lead for the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy directors of finance group on LGBF matters and attends LGBF board meetings to advise on financial matters on behalf of the group.

### **The LGBF shows that service performance is strong and has improved in the majority of services over time**

**62.** The council's review of 2019/20 LGBF data highlights that performance has improved in 65 per cent of the council's performance indicators over the longer term since 2014/15, 5 per cent have stayed the same and 30 per cent have declined. See [Exhibit 8](#) for an analysis of these results across council services.

## Exhibit 8 – The extent of improvement in LGBF service indicators since 2014/15



**63.** More recently, since 2018/19, 52 per cent of indicators have improved, 13 per cent have not changed and 35 per cent have declined. The service performance for education (included in children's services) is discussed further at paragraph 69, adult services at paragraph 175, housing at paragraph 76 and economic development at paragraph 73.

**64.** The council's ranked performance when benchmarked against other Scottish councils has improved. The number of LGBF indicators in the top two quartiles has increased from 58 per cent in 2017/18 to 61 per cent in 2019/20. At the same time the council has reduced the number of indicators in the bottom quartile from 17 per cent in 2017/18 to 8 per cent in 2019/20 (eight indicators). The indicators in the bottom quartile are spread across services and are as follows:

- Percentage of adults supported at home who agree that they are supported to live as independently as possible.
- Net cost of waste collection.
- Gross rent arrears as at 31 March each year as a percentage of rent due for the reporting year.
- Average number of days taken to complete non-emergency repairs.
- Number of business gateway start-ups per 10,000 population.
- Proportion of people earning less than the living wage.
- Percentage of procurement spent on local enterprises.

- The gross cost of ‘children looked after’ in residential services per child per week.

65. As noted earlier, officers are to provide a report to a future meeting explaining what actions are planned to improve performance in these indicators.

### The council’s performance against its family group of peers is strong and improving. Fifty nine per cent of the council’s LGBF indicators were in the top half of the group in 2019/20

66. The council’s review of LGBF data includes a comparison of its performance with the Scottish average but not a comparison of performance against its LGBF family groups. These are groups of councils facing similar challenges based on population density and level of deprivation.

67. The 2019/20 Annual Audit Report includes a recommendation that the council should compare its performance with that of its LGBF family groups to identify councils that it could learn from. Officers have confirmed that, while they will use family groups as part of benchmarking analysis in future, elected members prefer for the council’s performance to be reported against that of all Scottish councils.

68. Our own analysis of the council’s performance against its family group of peers for the 2019/20 indicators (see [Exhibit 9](#)) shows that the council’s performance is strong. It is in the top half of its family group for 51 (59 per cent) of the 87 LGBF indicators. This is an improvement on 2018/19, when 55 per cent of indicators were in the top half.

## Exhibit 9

Overall, the council was in the top half of its family group in 59 per cent of the indicators in 2019/20

LGBF service area	Number of LGBF indicators	Performance in top half of family group**	
		Number	(%)
Culture and Leisure	8	3	37
Environmental	15	8	53
Housing	5	2	40
Property	2	1	50
Economic Development	10	3	30
Social Work (includes health and social care indicators)	11	8	73
Corporate Services	8	5	63
Children	23*	18	79
Financial Sustainability	5	3	60
<b>All LGBF indicators</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>59</b>

\* In 2019/20 the data for eight children's indicators was not published as they were either biennial indicators or the data was not collected due to the impact of Covid-19.

\*\* - The LGBF family group for Children, Social Work and Housing indicators comprises Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, City of Edinburgh, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Orkney Islands, Perth & Kinross and Shetland Islands councils. For all other indicators, the LGBF family group comprises Aberdeen City, City of Edinburgh, Dundee City, East Dunbartonshire, Glasgow City, Falkirk, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire councils

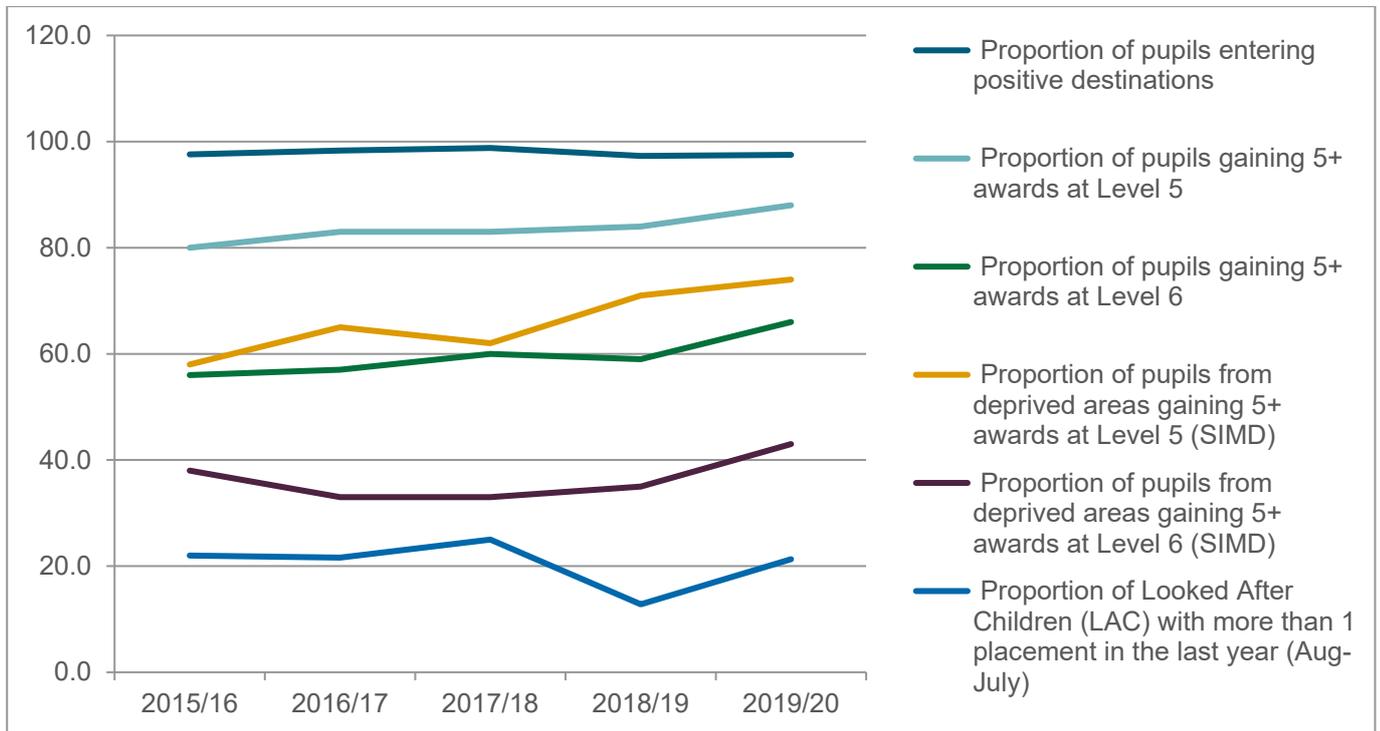
Source: Audit Scotland

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## **Education services have been performing particularly well over a number of years even in the council's most deprived areas**

**69.** The council's Education Service has consistently performed particularly well. It makes a key contribution to LOIP priorities and outperforms the Scottish average.

**70.** In the year 2019/20, most of the council's LGBF Children's Services indicators were in the top two quartiles of performance. The council is ranked the highest in Scotland for five of the Children's Services indicators, including the percentage of pupils gaining five or more awards at level 5, the percentage of pupils living in the 20 per cent most deprived areas gaining five or more awards at both level 5 and level 6 and the percentage of funded early years provision that is graded good/better. The council is also ranked the second highest in Scotland for the percentage of pupils gaining five or more awards at level 6. [Exhibit 10](#) shows the trends in the council's performance against a number of key education indicators since 2015/16.

**Exhibit 10****Selected LGBF Children’s Services indicators, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Source: Local Government Benchmarking Framework, Improvement Service 2021

**71.** The March 2021 report [Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#) shows that East Dunbartonshire is one of 13 councils reporting improved performance against four key senior phase educational attainment indicators over time. The report shows that in 2018/19 East Dunbartonshire Council had the smallest gap in Scotland between most deprived and least deprived pupils in percentage of school leavers achieving five or more awards at level 5.

**72.** The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted education in schools in Scotland since March 2020. This is widening the poverty-related attainment gap across Scotland. The impact of this will become clearer over time and will be reported in future years.

### **Performance in some economic development indicators is not as strong as in other councils**

**73.** A LOIP priority is for East Dunbartonshire to have a sustainable and resilient economy. This is a particular challenge in East Dunbartonshire whose geography is a mix of small urban settlements and rural areas, where it is difficult to attract investment.

**74.** Our analysis of the council’s performance against its family group of peers for the 2019/20 LGBF indicators ([Exhibit 9](#)), highlighted that the council’s performance was in the bottom half of its family group for seven (70 percent) of the ten Economic Development Service indicators, with three indicators in the

bottom quartile. The council is ranked 28th for the number of business gateway start-ups per 10,000 population, 25th for the percentage of procurement spent in local enterprises and 25th for the proportion of people earning less than the living wage.

**75.** The 2021–2024 BIP for the Land Planning and Development Service includes some plans for improvement in the area of economic development. This includes implementing the council's economic recovery plan to help local economic recovery and resilience, including delivering the grants programme. The first draft of the Economic Recovery Plan was produced in August 2020 and revised again at the beginning of 2021. The plan identifies the impacts on and key issues for East Dunbartonshire's economy and sets out the actions the council and community planning partners are doing to address them.

### Some housing services have been identified for improvement

**76.** The council has 3,576 council houses. As part of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan, the council, with its partners, is planning to build 350 new homes (over three years) and increase the number of properties bought on the open market.

**77.** The Scottish Housing Regulator's (SHR) 2019/20 Landlord Report for East Dunbartonshire Council provided a summary of the council's performance against the Scottish Social Housing Charter's standards and outcomes. The council's performance against the charter's standards and outcomes during 2019/20 was poor, compared with the Scottish average ([Exhibit 11](#)). The 2021–2024 BIP for the Housing service includes improvement projects on the turnaround of empty properties, reducing rent arrears and homeless services.

## Exhibit 11

East Dunbartonshire Council's overall performance against the Scottish Social Housing Charter's standards and outcomes during 2019/20 was poor, compared with the Scottish average

	East Dunbartonshire Council	Scottish average
<b>Tenant satisfaction</b>		
Proportion satisfied with overall service provided (%)	82.0	89.2
Proportion who felt landlord was good at keeping them informed (%)	87.3	92.0
Proportion satisfied with opportunities to participate in landlord's decision-making (%)	87.5	87.2
<b>Quality and maintenance of homes</b>		
Proportion of homes that meet Scottish Housing Quality Standard (%)	95.1	94.4
Average time to complete emergency repairs (hours)	4.2	3.6
Average time to complete non-emergency repairs (days)	14.3	6.4

Proportion of reactive repairs completed 'right first time' (%)	78.6	92.4
Proportion of tenants who were satisfied with repairs or maintenance carried out (%)	91.0	91.3
<b>Neighbourhoods</b>		
Proportion of antisocial behaviour cases resolved within locally agreed target (%)	83.3	94.1
<b>Value for money</b>		
Current and past rent collected during the year as a proportion of total rent due in year (%)	98.6	99.3
Uncollected rent due because homes were empty (%)	1.0	1.2
Time taken to re-let homes (days)	57.2	31.8

Source: [Scottish Housing Regulator's 2019/20 Landlord Report for East Dunbartonshire Council](#)

**78.** The tenant satisfaction levels are disappointing, as the landlord report shows that the council's average weekly rents were 29 per cent lower than the Scottish average. The 2021–2024 BIP for the Housing service confirms that, as part of its stakeholder engagement, it will review the feedback from the tenant satisfaction surveys to identify areas for improvement.

**79.** While the proportion of homes that meet Scottish Housing Quality Standard in Exhibit 11 exceeds the Scottish average, the SHR is continuing to engage with the council on the quality of its houses and in particular the management of gas safety checks. The [SHR engagement plan](#) for the council for the period 31 March 2021 to 31 March 2022 also shows that SHR will engage with the council on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on outcomes for homeless people and how it is working with its registered social landlord partners to provide accommodation.

### **An investigation relating to allegations within social work services at the council is nearing conclusion**

**80.** An investigation relating to allegations on the treatment of staff within social work services at the council is nearing conclusion. The auditors will report on the findings as appropriate.

### **The people of East Dunbartonshire are more satisfied with most of their council services than the Scottish average**

**81.** The LGBF includes customer satisfaction data that is derived from the Scottish Household Survey. The LGBF 2019/20 initial analysis report by officers highlights that service satisfaction has generally gone down across Scotland. [Exhibit 12](#) shows that East Dunbartonshire Council is in the top two quartiles for 6 of the 11 indicators and above the Scottish average for 8 of the 11 indicators. The percentage of adults supported at home who agree that they are supported to live as independently as possible is the one indicator in the lowest quartile.

**Exhibit 12****East Dunbartonshire Council's performance against service satisfaction LGBF indicators**

Indicator	Satisfaction level (%)	Scottish average (%)	Ranking out of 32 Scottish local authorities	Quartile
Adults satisfied with local schools	78.3	71.8	6th	1st
Adults supported at home who agree that their services and support had an impact in improving or maintaining their quality of life	85.8	80	5th	1st
Adults supported at home who agree that they are supported to live as independently as possible	77.8	80.8	27th	4th
Adults supported at home who agree that they had a say in how their help, care or support was provided	73.6	75.4	23rd	3rd
Carers who feel supported to continue in their caring role	37.6	34.3	5th	1st
Adults satisfied with libraries	77.4	72.4	10th	2nd
Adults satisfied with parks and open spaces	83.9	83.5	17th	3rd
Adults satisfied with museums and galleries	57.5	69.3	23rd	3rd
Adults satisfied with leisure facilities	72.9	70.1	12th	2nd
Adults satisfied with refuse collection	84.4	74.3	6th	1st
Adults satisfied with street cleansing	63.3	62.6	18th	3rd

Source: Local Government Benchmarking Framework, Improvement Service 2021

**82.** In addition to using the LGBF satisfaction indicators, the council routinely undertakes customer satisfaction surveys at a local level as part of its

performance management framework. Summary results are reported in the quarterly HGIOS reports. For example, the 2020/21 year-end HGIOS performance report for the Assets and Facilities Service highlights that, in relation to property maintenance, of the 935 customer satisfaction surveys completed in 2020/21, 93 per cent of tenants said they were very or fairly satisfied with the service provided, an increase of 2 per cent from 2019/20.

**83.** The council now uses a multi-channel approach for delivering services to customers through face-to-face, phone and digital/online access. Officers have said that a service-wide review of all customer service performance measures is planned to reflect the new ways of delivering services; see paragraph 186.

### **The public performance report provides a good overview of council performance and how it contributes to achieving the LOIP's priorities**

**84.** The council's 2019/20 Public Performance Report (published in March 2021) provides a good overview of council performance across all service areas within each of the six local outcomes. It includes the council's own performance indicators that contribute to each LOIP local outcome for the years 2017/18 to 2019/20 and, where available, the Scottish average. In addition, local examples and case studies provide evidence to support progress for each local outcome and guiding principle in the LOIP. An example is the Care and Repair Service which supports the council's elderly residents who want to live independently (LOIP Local Outcome 6). A 'handyman' service is available for residents aged over 65 and those aged over 60 with a disability or long-term illness, who are homeowners or private tenants. Minor jobs are done in their homes by council workers to avoid the worry for residents of having to engage tradespeople themselves. There is no charge for labour or travel costs; residents pay only for the cost of any materials.

### **The council's website provides lots of information on its performance, but the format could be improved to make it easier to understand and it needs to be kept up to date**

**85.** The council uses the [performance and governance](#) section of its website to report performance to the public and includes the following information:

- The most recent annual Public Performance Report for 2019/20 (with links to the two previous years' reports).
- A link to the LOIP for 2017–2027.
- A link to the BIPs.
- A link to the HGIOS performance reports (annual and quarterly); since March 2020 regular service updates have also been published.
- An explanation of the LGBF and a link to a separate section of the council's website containing reports analysing the council's

performance using the annual LGBF data issued by the Improvement Service.

**86.** While performance information is easily available on the website, because of the number of links to the sources of performance information, some of it may not be easy for stakeholders to follow. The website could be improved by introducing a dashboard showing a graphical representation of the direction of travel for each indicator (both LGBF and council specific) and the trend in performance over the last few years. The Corporate Performance Improvement Action Plan 2021/22 was presented to the council meeting in June 2021. It includes a commitment to enhance the performance section of the council's website, allowing for more user-friendly access to performance information and increasing the scope to cover wider areas of the strategic planning and performance framework.

**87.** Our review of the various links to performance information listed above found that the LGBF section contains some out-of-date information that needs to be updated and kept up to date.

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# Part 3 – Is the council using its resources effectively?

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**Financial management is effective, with a budget-setting process focused on the council's priorities. The council has consistently delivered services within budget.**

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**The financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been significant, and the impact will be enduring, but the council is well placed to meet the future financial challenges.**

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**The 2021/22 budget is focused on the council's continued response to Covid-19 pressures and looking towards the recovery phase.**

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**A funding gap of £23 million is projected by the end of 2023/24. The council's medium-term financial plan will now need to be updated to consider the implications of Covid-19.**

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**The council's long-term capital plan sets out an ambitious capital investment programme, but Covid-19 restrictions could delay the projects' completion.**

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**The council's progress with its digital strategy enabled it to adapt services in response to Covid-19. It plans to capitalise on this progress in a revised digital strategy.**

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**The council's workforce strategy shows that the council is applying a good practice approach to workforce planning. Individual service workforce plans are in place and include demographic profiles and action plans.**

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## **The council has a well-established budget-setting process that supports elected members to develop and scrutinise savings plans and understand the impact of proposed service changes**

**88.** The council's budget is aligned to its strategic service structure and reflects its overarching objectives. The Council has agreed a consistent set of principles with Officers applying these consistently throughout the budget-setting process. During this process, officers provide briefings and training for elected members. The Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer, and finance staff also work with members from all political groups to answer their queries and assist them to develop budget and savings proposals that reflect the council's priorities.

**89.** In previous years, finance staff discussed with elected members, possible savings options. Elected members would then decide which options to take forward to be developed into full business cases. Details of these business cases were presented to members as part of the budget-setting process. No business cases were prepared for 2021/22, as resources were prioritised for the Covid-19 response.

## **The annual budget-setting process is informed by a public consultation exercise**

**90.** As part of the budget-setting process for 2020/21, the council ran a budget consultation process, '20/20 Vision', between August and October 2019. As a result of this, a number of priority areas were agreed with the local community and were used to inform the 2020/21 budget. The consultation process included a number of drop-in sessions across the area, and a 20/20 vision budget engagement document and survey were available on the council's website and as printed copies. The council also engaged with community councils and the youth council as part of this exercise.

**91.** The council published all responses to the survey as part of its report on the Budget Engagement Outcomes & Financial Strategy Update which was presented to the Council in November 2019. A total of 412 survey responses were received, of which 98 (24 per cent) were from council employees.

**92.** As part of the 2020/21 budget-setting process, executive officers prepared business cases to be considered by elected members as part of the annual budget and for potential inclusion in the transformation programme. When these can be implemented without significant intervention and business change, they are known as 'management actions' and delegated to executive officers to implement the required changes. Longer-term, strategic or more

significant operational changes are included in the transformation programme for the council's agreement.

**93.** These business cases include equality impact assessments, which detail the actions the council will take to monitor and mitigate any risks identified as part of this process. However, these impact assessments were not completed as part of the 2021/22 budget exercise, as the council did not propose any budget savings and instead planned to use reserves to fund the financial gap.

**94.** There was no public consultation completed for the 2021/22 budget due to Covid-19 restrictions. The 2021/22 budget is seen as a 'holding budget' that is still reacting to changes resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

**95.** The council has confirmed that a review of the Prioritising our Services, Prioritising our Resources programme will be undertaken for the 2022/23 budget through a revised budget consultation process. In a similar approach to the 20/20 Vision budget consultation process, officers plan to run the programme from late August to October 2021, with a view to reporting its findings to the Council in December 2021. The key objectives of this programme will be:

- to raise awareness of the continuing financial challenge facing local government
- to highlight the council's current priorities and commitments
- to understand residents views and needs in the light of Covid-19
- to identify the views and priorities of East Dunbartonshire residents on future budget decisions.

**96.** The outcome of this engagement exercise will inform any revisions to strategic priorities and the budget planning process for 2022/23 and beyond. Details of the budget consultation process were presented to the Council in June 2021.

### **Financial management is effective. The council has consistently delivered services within budget. Its services are sustainable in the foreseeable future**

**97.** The council has consistently delivered services in line with its total budget. In February 2020, before the Covid-19 outbreak, the Council approved the 2020/21 budget; this was subsequently revised to include estimated Covid-19 costs. The revised budget totalled £285.1 million. The actual outturn was a net expenditure of £265.0 million. The significant contributions to the £20 million underspending were:

- underspending on education of £2.8 million; of this £1.8 million relates to employee costs with the balance representing unspent Covid-19 funding
- reduced debt charges of £2.5 million, because of delays in the capital programme (see paragraph 123)
- Covid-19 funding for 2021/22 services of £7.3 million for the council and £5.3 million for the HSCP.

**98.** East Dunbartonshire Leisure and Culture Trust (EDLCT), provides services on behalf of the council and is included as a 100 per cent subsidiary in its accounts. As a result of the closure of facilities caused by Covid-19, EDLCT has experienced a significant drop in its income and reported a loss of £4.7 million for 2020/21. The council has provided letters of comfort to EDLCT to ensure its sustainability during the course of the year. During the lockdown periods some EDLCT staff worked on other services, including setting up a personal protective equipment distribution centre at Kirkintilloch Leisure Centre and establishing three vaccination centres at two other leisure centres and Kirkintilloch Town Hall. The council is now working with EDLCT on its Covid-19 recovery, and plans are reflected in its 2021–2024 BIP.

**99.** The council provided additional funding in 2020/21 to EDLCT for vaccination costs (£0.3 million) and loss of income (£0.7 million). This was in addition to the £0.5 million that was passed to EDLCT as part of the budget-setting process for 2020/21.

**100.** The detailed scrutiny of the council's financial performance is delegated to the Policy and Resources Committee, which receives regular revenue and capital monitoring reports. The reports forecast the outturn position for the year and include good explanations for significant variations from budget. They allow both elected members and officers to effectively scrutinise the council's finances.

**101.** Revenue budget monitoring reports include an appendix that shows the progress in achieving the targets of efficiency savings programmes, some of which are included in the council's transformation programme. Following audit recommendations, since 2019/20 the reports show whether a saving is included in the transformation programme and also whether it has been achieved or is expected to be achieved. However, when we reviewed the 2019/20 transformation programme update reports presented to elected members, we were unable to match the savings in this report to the efficiency savings appendix in the revenue budget monitoring reports.

## The longer-term financial position is more uncertain because of Covid-19. However, the council is well prepared to face future financial challenges

**102.** The 2020/21 outturn report discussed with elected members on 28 June 2021 explains that the council has received £24.4 million of extra funding during the year to cover Covid-19 costs. Service costs relating to Covid-19 included in the accounts totalled £10.1 million (including HSCP costs of £2.3 million), and £14.3 million is unspent. This balance is held in the general fund balances to fund future service costs relating to Covid-19. The council explains in the financial outturn report that the increased reserves from this funding should be viewed with caution. Much of this funding was received late in the year. It is earmarked to meet the costs of specific Covid-19 initiatives, or it is needed in the medium term for the council's recovery phase as it resets its priorities.

**103.** The approved original 2020/21 budget identified a funding gap. As a result, £6.8 million of efficiency savings was agreed, with the remaining funding gap of £1.8 million to be met from general fund reserves. The council achieved total savings of £5.6 million in 2020/21, £4.4 million from management efficiencies and £1.2 million from budget reduction and income generation plans.

**104.** The extent of efficiency savings achieved by the council over recent years is shown in [Exhibit 13](#). Despite not all planned savings being achieved, over time the council's general fund reserves have increased; see paragraph 111. In 2020/21 the council did not need to use reserves to fund the efficiency gap because of the additional Covid-19 funding received.

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### Exhibit 13

#### Efficiency savings achieved

Year	Budgeted savings (£ million)	Savings achieved (£ million)	Savings achieved (%)
2020/21	6.8	5.6	82
2019/20	5.2	3.8	73
2018/19	14.2	10.7	75
2017/18	11.5	9.1	79
2016/17	10.0	5.6	56

Source: East Dunbartonshire Council Annual Accounts

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**105.** The 2018/19 Year End Transformation Programme Performance Report was discussed with the Policy and Resources Committee in September 2019. For example, it reported on the completed property management review. This was part of a wider Assets and Facilities Service review covering property management, facilities management and assets and estates management. A key part of the review was changes to work shift patterns that facilitates increased productivity and improves supervision of capital work and reduces pressure in key areas such as repairs. Reductions of £0.4 million have now been built into budgets to reflect the cost savings arising from this review. Unfortunately, the impact of Covid-19 resulted in increased costs, as approximately 140 cleaners had to be employed to enable schools to open safely. The estimated savings were therefore not achieved but the changes arising from the review will increase efficiency in future.

**106.** As a result of Covid-19, progress with the 2019/20 transformation programme (including 23 projects with a value of £2.2 million) was delayed, and an update was not reported after February 2020. According to the 2019/20 year-end budget outturn report, £0.7 million of the savings achieved were attributable to the transformation programme. The June 2021 Organisational Transformation HGIOS report shows that 85 per cent of the projects in the current team plans were completed on schedule, but the report gives no detail on individual projects. The 2021/22 budget is driven by the need to continue to respond to Covid-19 pressures.

**107.** In February 2021, the council approved the Prioritising Our Services, Prioritising Our Resources: General Fund Revenue Budget 2021/22 report. The budget totals £268 million to be spent on services, an increase of £16 million compared with the previous year. The budget was based on a freeze on council tax. The council has decided against implementing savings plans for 2021/22, as it feels that it could impair the council's response to the longer-term challenges posed in the post-pandemic environment.

**108.** The 2021/22 budget used the previous year's budget as a baseline and included uplifts for known increases, but there were no significant changes in policy or council activities, as the council is still in the reactive phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. The council reflected the freeze on council tax levels and there were no increases applied on any council fees and charges. Provision was made for anticipated Covid-19 costs.

**109.** The projected financial gap of £7.4 million will be funded from reserves, the application of financial flexibilities and a refreshed transformation programme. In future, the council will assess the impact of Covid-19 on its service delivery and cost base and build this into its medium-term financial planning model.

**110.** The council has reserves to see it through this challenging period but recognises that using reserves to meet budget gaps is not sustainable in the longer term.

### The council's uncommitted general fund balance has increased. This is due to rescheduling loans fund repayments in earlier years and Covid-19 funding

**111.** At 31 March 2021, non-earmarked or uncommitted reserves were £18.0 million. The council identified £5.3 million of this as a contingency reserve to meet unforeseen costs. This represented around 2 per cent of the £285.5 million net cost of services. Uncommitted general fund balances of 2 per cent are the level considered prudent by the council's Chief Finance Officer and set out in the council's reserve strategy. In recent years, reserves have increased due to rescheduling loans fund repayments, leading to reduced costs of £6.5 million in both 2018/19 and 2019/20 and Covid-19 funding to cover future services (see Exhibit 14).

#### Exhibit 14

The council's total general fund balance

Reserve	31 March 2018 (£ million)	31 March 2019 (£ million)	31 March 2020 (£ million)	31 March 2021 (£ million)
General fund earmarked	11.2	18.5	17.8	18.0
General fund non-earmarked	5.9	5.4	5.7	17.0
Housing revenue account	3.8	4.8	6.5	8.9
Vehicle repair and renewal fund	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6
Capital fund	6.2	6.0	6.0	6.3
Central energy efficiency fund	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2
<b>Total usable reserves</b>	<b>27.8</b>	<b>35.4</b>	<b>36.7</b>	<b>51.0</b>

Source: East Dunbartonshire Council Annual Accounts

### The council has a medium-term financial plan. The council recognises that this needs to be updated to reflect the implications of Covid-19

**112.** The Accounts Commission's April 2018 report, Local government in Scotland: Performance and challenges 2017,

highlights the importance of medium- to long-term financial planning, given the continuing pressures that councils will face in the future.

**113.** The council's medium-term financial plan covers the period up to 2023/24 and is supported by a long-term financial strategy. This is reviewed on an annual basis and includes an assessment of the risk cause, planned control measures, likelihood, impact and strategy. The implications of the UK's withdrawal from the EU are considered in the council's medium-term financial model.

**114.** The first medium-term financial plan, approved in November 2018, forecast funding gaps of £10.1 million in 2021/22, £6.3 million in 2022/23 and £5.3 million in 2023/24, totalling £21.7 million over these three financial years.

**115.** The council's medium-term financial model was summarised in the 'Prioritising Our Services, Prioritising Our Resources: General Fund Revenue Budget 2020/21' report approved by the Council in February 2020. This shows a funding gap of £5.7 million. In future, the council will assess the impact of Covid-19 on its service delivery and cost base and build this into its medium-term financial planning model.

**116.** As well as its medium-term financial plan, the council has a long-term financial risk management strategy, but it has yet to develop a long-term financial plan.

**117.** A paper presented to the Council meeting on 17 June 2021, 'Prioritising our Services, Prioritising our Resources 2021/22 & 2022/23 – Financial Planning during a Pandemic', reflects on the way the council has adapted its financial planning process during the Covid-19 pandemic and details how the lessons learned over this period will be used to inform the council's future planning and longer-term strategy. It also sets out the council's path as it moves from the Covid-19 response to the recovery phase.

### **The council's long-term capital plan sets out an ambitious capital investment programme, but there is a risk that Covid-19 restrictions may delay projects**

**118.** The council's capital investment plan is a core part of its overarching Prioritising our Services, Prioritising our Resources programme. It is a rolling ten-year capital plan that is aligned with the council's Capital Investment Plan and Treasury Management Strategy. The anticipated capital funding available for each of the next ten years is set out along with the expected sources of this funding and any related borrowing costs and the profile of borrowing repayments.

**119.** The plan is also linked to the council's existing Corporate Asset Management Plan and individual service asset management plans

(including the Schools Estate). These plans will be refreshed during 2021 and presented to a meeting of the Council in February 2022.

**120.** The council's General Services Capital Investment Plan 2021–2031 was approved in February 2021. The £373 million programme of work shows that £176 million (47 per cent) of spending is projected to be incurred in the next two financial years, including significant projects such as £36 million for Boclair Academy, £32 million for a new additional support needs school and £38 million for the Allander Leisure Centre and Kelvinbank Day Care Centre replacement.

**121.** The council's Housing Capital Plan covers a five-year period and includes planned expenditure of £134 million. Of this, £86 million relates to new build housing, a further £20 million is for the corporate housing programme and the remaining £29 million is for housing repair works.

### **There has been substantial slippage in the capital programme due to the impact of Covid-19**

**122.** In recent years the council has completed a number of large capital projects including St Nicholas' Primary School, Mavis Valley transfer station, Bishopbriggs relief road and Kirkintilloch Town Hall.

**123.** In previous years slippage has been reported in the completion of the capital plans (35 per cent in 2018/19). The position improved in 2019/20 with underspending on the capital programmes of £2 million (4 per cent) of the total capital budget. Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the 2020/21 general services capital plan. In 2020/21 capital spending was £29.8 million compared with an initial budget of £38.1 million, which was subsequently revised downwards.

**124.** Although construction work has been able to resume in line with Covid-19 restrictions, any further restrictions applied in future could significantly affect the council's ability to complete its long-term capital plan within the planned timescales, for both general services and housing. While work on Boclair Academy and the Allander Leisure Centre has accelerated recently, there is a risk that projects will be completed later than planned. The main areas of slippage relate to the early years centres (£7.2 million) and roads and footway works (£3.7 million). These projects will be rescheduled to 2021/22.

**125.** Housing capital expenditure totalled £10.8 million against a budget of £24.4 million. The main areas of slippage include £3 million on the former Lairdsland Primary School site and £3.4 million for off-the-shelf and open-market purchase.

**126.** The capital plans represent a significant and ambitious level of investment by the council. Significant additional borrowing is planned (£13.3 million over three years), which, alongside developers' contributions and capital grants, will finance the 2021/22 General Services Capital Plan. The council has demonstrated its affordability:

the increase in debt charges is to be financed from the treasury management reserve and using in-year capital receipts from the capital fund.

**127.** The 2019/20 Annual Audit Report shows that, using a measure of gross and net external debt as a proportion of annual revenue, East Dunbartonshire Council was in the lowest third compared with other Scottish councils. Gross external debt was £280.6 million and net external debt £258.5 million at 31 March 2020 (net external debt is total external debt less short-term investments).

### **The council is applying a good practice approach to workforce planning**

**128.** Since the last Best Value report the council has made significant improvements in its workforce planning arrangements. The council's workforce strategy demonstrates that it is applying a good practice approach to workforce planning, as reflected in the 2013 report [Scotland's public sector workforce](#). The strategy includes a four-phase approach, which the council used to develop its three-year workforce and skill profile for 2018–2021 relating to succession planning, cluster analysis, scenario planning, and planning and implementation.

**129.** A Workforce Strategy Action Plan is included in the updated workforce strategy for 2018–2021. Before Covid-19, quarterly progress reports were being presented to the Council. The last update report on the strategy and associated action plan was presented in June 2019. That report highlighted that planning was under way to review phases 1 to 4 of the model, with council services taking into account the outcomes of service reviews, succession planning, talent management and skills development. The report also gave details of the work undertaken by officers on the potential impact of withdrawal from the EU on the council's workforce.

**130.** Individual service workforce plans have been developed and are reviewed as part of the strategy. The plans apply the workforce planning principles of the right people in the right place at the right time. They contain an analysis of the workforce in terms of demographics and roles. The action plan for each strategic service group provides a list of areas of future demand or forecast need and for each of these the potential impact on the workforce, a risk assessment and the actions being taken by the council. The plans are live documents and are subject to ongoing review.

**131.** The council has no plans to reduce staff numbers; savings are being pursued through service improvements and maximising the use of the workforce. The service reviews have combined detailed workforce profiling with alternative service delivery options to identify current skills needs and workforce plans.

**132.** A revised iteration of the workforce strategy was planned for approval by the Council in June 2020, along with the results of a planned employee survey. Covid-19 has delayed these. In the meantime, workforce planning has continued, and many staff have been redeployed to priority tasks during the pandemic. Officers feel that this has worked well. As a result, the council is waiting to see how services will be delivered when the pandemic is over before revisiting the workforce strategy and workforce plans.

### **Risk management arrangements have been updated in response to the pandemic, but the corporate risk register now needs to be updated**

**133.** The council has restructured the officers responsible for risk management as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It has transferred oversight from the Audit and Risk Manager to the executive officer for Customer and Digital Services. This is to allow a more considered response to significant service and business continuity issues.

**134.** The council chose not to have a separate Covid-19 risk register. This decision was based on the fast pace required to address the issues of the pandemic as they arise rather than the longer-term view of risk management. To maximise the pace of response to the issues arising from Covid-19, officers at senior management team meetings frequently discuss the risks arising and what action the council should take to respond to them.

**135.** Members were kept up to date with how the risks of the pandemic were being mitigated and managed through frequent technical notes and service updates. These detail the operational actions taken by officers to deal with the challenges of the pandemic and any changes in service level provision required.

**136.** As part of the corporate risk strategy, the risk register should be reviewed and updated regularly. The last time the updated risk register was presented to elected members was June 2019. While elected members are regularly provided with updates to the Covid-19 response in the form of technical notes and ad hoc reports, the corporate risk register should now be updated to reflect the current risks facing the council in the Covid-19 recovery phase.

### **The council's progress with its digital strategy enabled it to adapt service delivery in response to Covid-19. It plans to capitalise on this progress with a revised digital strategy**

**137.** The council has made progress in implementing its digital strategy, which was approved in March 2019. In March 2020, the rapid switch from office to homeworking due to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in reprioritising tasks. The council was well positioned to make the switch, as most staff already had access to

portable computing devices and many had experience of working from home as part of the council's Smart Working project.

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## Case study 1

### Smart working 2020: Remaining connected and productive

Since March 2020 the majority of council employees have been fully deployed, providing and supporting the delivery of a full range of emergency and essential services to the community. These services have been delivered through face-to-face activities, via telephone, email or online and through the delivery of essential support functions enabling front line service provision to continue. In services where staff can work from home, they continue to do so using smart working technology, which is in place across most service areas.

As an interim measure, the council used its Cisco-based telephony package and successfully implemented the Cisco Webex virtual meeting solution. In June 2020 Microsoft Teams was initially deployed to 240 priority users. Although this removed most Webex users, some Webex licences were retained and used for Council and committee meetings. A second phase of deployment of Microsoft Teams was undertaken in July 2020: approximately 1,300 users were given access to Teams in batches of 300 to maintain a responsive technical and functional support service throughout the deployment. Support for users was available through the ICT service desk for technical issues or a dedicated mailbox for more functional issues and questions. Frequently asked questions, guidance notes, videos and online one-to-one training were also provided.

Under the schools replacement programme for devices, the council already had a stock of computers due to go schools. Because of the pandemic, this programme was revised and the council delivered over 530 laptops and over 100 mobile Wi-Fi devices to pupils across East Dunbartonshire to help with home learning. The council worked closely with head teachers to identify where these devices were needed most to ensure that pupils were not disadvantaged because they could not access online learning opportunities.

Source: Audit Scotland

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**138.** The council now plans to review its digital strategy and capitalise on this progress and make the most of technology in the future. It is working with [East Renfrewshire Council](#) to deploy Internet of Things devices in the roads service and other council service areas. The Internet of Things describes the network of physical objects ('things'), that are embedded with sensors, software and other technologies for the purpose of connecting and exchanging data with other devices and systems over the internet.

**139.** The council's review of its digital strategy will reflect new Scottish Government strategies including 'A changing nation: How Scotland will thrive in a digital world', 'Unlocking the potential of artificial intelligence' and 'Cyber Resilient Scotland: Strategic Framework'.

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# Part 4 – Is the council working well with its partners?

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**The council works effectively with its partners across sectors and with communities. This has been crucial in delivering services to those most in need during the Covid-19 pandemic.**

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**The Community Planning Partnership works well, and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan provides a clear strategic direction for the partners.**

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**The council uses a place based approach to develop and deliver services in communities requiring support – reducing inequalities is a focus.**

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**The council consults widely and encourages citizen participation, particularly in areas with place plans. Covid-19 has presented an opportunity to reassess priorities and further strengthen community engagement across all services.**

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**The council has good working relationships with the Health and Social Care Partnership, but the Integration Joint Board faces significant financial risks unless it transforms the way services are delivered.**

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**The council is committed to partnership working and has positive relationships across the public, business and third sectors**

**140.** East Dunbartonshire Council has a well-established vision of working in partnership to achieve the best outcomes for its citizens. The council has good working relationships with a range of partners, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the third sector, business partners and community representatives. It has one arm's length external organisation (ALEO) – the East Dunbartonshire Leisure and Culture Trust. Collaborative working

ranges from informal engagement to structured partnership forums such as public protection and economic partnerships. Partnership working has been further strengthened during the response to Covid-19 and will also be a focus during the recovery period.

**141.** Throughout the pandemic the Chief Executive has continued to meet on a regular basis with his counterparts in other councils through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), SOLACE, the West of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership and the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Local Resilience Partnership (LRP), which also has oversight of other resilience matters, including departure from the EU. In addition to formal LRP meetings, the chief executives of the six local authorities involved and the Chief Executive of NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde and the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Director of Public Health have been meeting on a regular basis throughout the pandemic.

### **The council is a member of the Glasgow City Region and the City Deal infrastructure programme**

**142.** In August 2014, the UK Government and Scottish Government jointly announced the first city region deal in Scotland for the Glasgow region. Under the deal, the eight councils in the Glasgow City Region agreed to work together to manage an infrastructure investment programme. The £1.1 billion deal is funded by both the Scottish and UK Governments with the partner councils. There is a £34 million City Deal project in the council area, of which £30 million will be provided by the City Deal programme and the remaining £4 million by the council. This funds the Bishopbriggs relief road, a masterplan for the Westerhill area, regeneration of Bishopbriggs town centre and improvement of the A83 route corridor. The council is represented on all the city region groups and leads on the land use and sustainability portfolio.

### **The council has some shared services and co-production arrangements in place**

**143.** The council has a shared ICT service with West Dunbartonshire Council, and a Joint Management Committee for Mugdock Country Park, in partnership with Stirling Council. East Dunbartonshire Council Community Protection Services operate from Kirkintilloch police office in a co-production arrangement. This includes daily joint tasking and planning meetings to ensure that areas of common interest, such as antisocial behaviour, are tackled jointly and in the most effective way. The co-production arrangement also makes it easier to run large-scale initiatives on topics such as firework safety, bogus caller awareness and festive safety campaigns. This way of working made it easier to respond rapidly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Community planning partners have a shared vision for East Dunbartonshire, and partnership working has been further strengthened during the Covid-19 pandemic

**144.** The council is one of five statutory partners in the East Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership (CPP). Partners work closely both at a strategic level and on an operational level (see [Exhibit 15](#)). The CPP's priorities are set out in the LOIP 2017–2027 (see [Exhibit 4](#), Part 1). Partners have also aligned their own strategic plans with the LOIP outcomes.

**145.** Board membership consists of senior officers from each of East Dunbartonshire's statutory agencies, representatives from other services operating in the area and elected members of the council. The community planning executive group includes lead officers from partner organisations. It meets quarterly and reports to the CPP board. Covid-19 affected the partners' ability to attend scheduled meetings and neither the CPP board nor the executive group met formally in 2020. Despite this, CPP members worked together to successfully deliver services and support to the community. Partners worked more closely and liaised more regularly but outwith the formal CPP structures. Alternative governance arrangements were put in place, with regular reporting to the council's senior management team on the Covid-19 response.

**146.** There are also six thematic groups, each delegated with responsibility for achieving the outcome associated with its theme. Each thematic group is responsible for its own strategy and action plan. Thematic groups consist of representatives from national, regional and local organisations who are involved in providing services relevant to the theme. Much of the day-to-day partnership working is completed through these sub-groups. The six local outcome delivery groups continued to meet and progress work during the pandemic. Some work continued as planned, but much of the work planned and resources were rapidly adapted to respond to the emergency. For example, council officers were deployed to take on contact tracing roles in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's Test and Protect programme, and partners worked together to provide support to the most vulnerable (Case study 2).



**147.** The Covid-19 response required ongoing and regular liaison with Police Scotland through the established co-production arrangement, including Covid-19 restrictions and enforcement. The third sector interface, East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action (EDVA), and other organisations such as Citizens Advice Scotland and Women’s Aid were also core to the local joint response, holding formal weekly meetings throughout the pandemic. Formal CPP board and executive group meetings are due to start again in September 2021.

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## Case study 2

### Humanitarian assistance during Covid-19

By the end of March 2020, three distinct but mutually supportive services had developed in East Dunbartonshire:

- **The Shopping and Prescription Assistance Service.** This was mainly aimed at people who had to self-isolate and needed help with shopping and prescriptions but were otherwise able to pay for their shopping. EDVA arranged with local supermarkets to pay for shopping in advance, and the money was recouped from individuals.
- **Shielding support.** People who were shielding were supported by staff from East Dunbartonshire Council and the National Shielding Line to access weekly food parcels.
- **The Humanitarian Assistance Service.** The council established this service to provide weekly food parcels for people who were assessed as vulnerable and not in a position to pay for shopping but who were not shielding.

The partners worked together to ensure that these three services interlinked. For example, people contacting the Shopping and Prescription Assistance Service who were unable to pay for shopping were referred to the Humanitarian Assistance Service or the local foodbank. When there was a delay between people registering as shielding and receiving parcels, they were supported by the Shopping and Prescription Assistance Service. People who were shielding could also request prescription deliveries from the Shopping and Prescription Assistance Service.

Staff were in contact on a day-to-day basis, and senior officers from East Dunbartonshire Council, the HSCP and EDVA met twice weekly to monitor the local situation, respond to developments and increase or decrease provision of assistance as and when necessary.

Source: Audit Scotland

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## The council uses a place based approach to develop and deliver services in communities requiring support

**148.** The Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015 required CPPs to identify areas with the poorest outcomes and to publish locality plans to improve outcomes for those communities. The council has a well-

established place based approach to developing and delivering services in its areas of highest deprivation and need. East Dunbartonshire CPP has published Place Plans for Lennoxton, Hillhead and Hairstones, Twechar and Auchinairn. These were identified as the four communities where people experience relatively poorer outcomes when compared either nationally or with the rest of East Dunbartonshire. In Auchinairn, council officers worked with the community on the newly built Auchinairn Community and Early Years Centre (Case study 6) in creating the place plan.

**149.** The plans were developed alongside the LOIP and reflect the particular needs and aspirations of the communities in areas of life such as health and wellbeing, local economy and environment. The place plans also highlight why these communities were identified, the improvement actions to be carried out and how their success will be measured. Community development workers have continued to support community groups throughout the pandemic, in particular in place areas – often in conjunction with third sector and HSCP partners. All place plans will continue to evolve and be reviewed.

**150.** During the pandemic, officers worked with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and third sector colleagues to deliver the Scottish Government Connecting Scotland project, tackling digital exclusion of people on low incomes who were at greatest risk of isolation due to coronavirus. Two place areas, Twechar and Hillhead, received funding from the Supporting Communities Fund to provide local third sector support to individuals.

### **The CPP has reported progress against the LOIP throughout the pandemic, but the 2019/20 annual public report has been delayed**

**151.** There is a programme of progress reporting to the CPP on each local outcome delivery area, including a rolling programme of reports from the thematic groups to the executive group every 18 months. During the pandemic, the usual reporting arrangements were suspended. However, LOIP local outcome leads have been reporting to the council's senior management team on a more frequent basis throughout this period. Before the pandemic, some thematic groups were reviewing their performance indicators. The work was not completed at that time and will be resumed in tandem with revising the LOIP and other strategic documents. Accountable partner leads have been identified for each target and outcome in the place plans and these will also be reviewed.

### **The CPP annual performance report does not give a clear summary of progress against identified LOIP performance indicators**

**152.** In addition to the council performance reports (Part 2), and the reporting described above, the CPP publishes annual updates on the

LOIP. The latest report, a 2018/19 update on the LOIP 2017–2027, was published in October 2019. This showed the key achievements in 2018/19 for each of the council's local outcomes and provided a number of case studies. However, the report does not provide a summary of progress against the 35 outcome performance indicators set out in the LOIP. The 2019/20 update has been delayed by Covid-19, as the CPP has not met since October 2019. It is now expected to report by the end of 2021.

**153.** The council and its partners acknowledge that the way its performance against outcomes is communicated to the public could be further improved and this will be considered as part of the LOIP review.

### **The council and its partners are committed to meaningful engagement with communities**

**154.** Co-production and engagement with communities is one of the guiding principles in the LOIP. Since 2018, an annual consultation and engagement plan has been collated from the BIPs and published on the council's website. The consultation page also includes live consultations and an archive of those concluded. The council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy (2021-2024) is aligned to the national standards for community engagement and links to the council's BIPs.

**155.** Council services are required to follow council-wide principles and specific stages of planning for consulting and engaging with communities. The communications and engagement team provides guidance and advice on this work. Two community development workers provide community outreach expertise. They primarily work in place areas to build capacity and support people to engage with the council and other services. (Case studies 3 and 4)

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### **Case study 3 Hillhead Summer Sessions**

The council and community planning partners ran regular family summer sessions in Hillhead to work with the community to tackle the root causes of poverty. Several activities were available, such as cooking lessons and sports sessions, and information about learning at the local college was also provided. During the sessions, people attending became more confident in engaging with staff and it provided an opportunity to discuss local issues that mattered to them. For example, they discussed why clothing grants were not used, and the council is changing its policy on how this support is accessed.

Source: Audit Scotland

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## Case study 4

### Auchinairn Community Hub

In 2015, the CPP team developed a series of workshops to engage with local people in the community of Auchinairn. Engagement with the community included a series of workshops, discussion with partners, a self-evaluation event, a mapping session, a family fun day, and a health and wellbeing event. The workshops captured local people's vision of a new community facility and explored the types of provision they were looking for. Further engagement continued throughout 2016/17 to support local voluntary groups and encourage local residents to get involved in the planning and design of a new community facility that would become Auchinairn Community and Early Years Centre. In 2018, many of the voluntary groups moved into the new building. Facilities available at the community centre include a large hall that can be split into two smaller spaces, three community meeting rooms, a cafe, a community garden a nursery and a play area. This project was considered vital to increase the community's capacity to engage with decision-makers. Consultation continued throughout 2018 to develop community-led themes that informed the Auchinairn Place Plan. Engagement with the community group is ongoing to ensure that the council and its partners can respond to the community's needs. Challenges include achieving regular engagement from local people. This has been increasingly difficult during the pandemic, but community workers have adapted their ways of engaging, for example using phone calls, emails and video conferencing.

Source: Audit Scotland

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**156.** As a result of Covid-19, front line services and face-to-face meetings have been postponed for some time, and online engagement with service users has become essential. The council and its partners recognise the importance of engaging in different ways, including digital communication alongside more inclusive approaches when face-to-face contact and council events are permitted.

**157.** Despite the council's commitment to community engagement, the results of the 2019 Scottish Household Survey show that, out of 260 respondents from the East Dunbartonshire Council area, only 12 per cent felt that they could influence decisions in their area (compared with 18 per cent nationally). Thirty-one per cent said that they wanted to be more involved in decision-making (compared with 30 per cent nationally).

**158.** The council is working to improve engagement with a wider range of people in the community. For example, older people, who may not have access to more used platforms such as social media, are prevalent in of East Dunbartonshire's population. It is also considering reintroducing a Citizens Panel or a similar engagement model to involve a range of communities. The community engagement team is looking at good practice in other areas as a benchmark (e.g. East Ayrshire and Perth and Kinross Councils) to inform future plans.

**159.** The HSCP has an established public, service users and carers representative group. In July 2020, the group gathered feedback from local people about their experiences with GPs and primary care. This led to it

producing short films to answer some of the recurring questions identified. This was supported by social media campaigns aiming to target members of the public with specific health and wellbeing information

**160.** The council has established a Youth Council and there are plans for representatives from this group to sit on the CPP board and on the Education Committee in the future. The council is gathering young people's views about how the pandemic has impacted them through the Young Scot website. The East Dunbartonshire Youth Council will use the results to influence services at the council.

**161.** Covid-19 has delayed the implementation of a new consultation platform on the council's website. It intends to use the 'We asked, you said, we did' format in the future to improve reporting on outcomes.

### **Local projects are targeted at addressing inequalities across different communities**

**162.** The Accounts Commission's report [Local government in Scotland: Overview 2021](#) says that Covid-19 has laid bare and exacerbated existing inequalities in areas such as health, work, income, housing and education across Scotland's communities. The multiple impacts of these inequalities have affected the most vulnerable, minority groups and women. Fairness and equality is a cross-cutting Best Value theme that should be integral to all council activities.

**163.** The LOIP's guiding principles include fair and equitable services and planning to deliver services that account for the different needs of population groups. The council routinely uses equality impact assessments when required. Completed assessments are provided to elected members when they are considering decisions. The council appointed an equalities officer shortly before the start of the pandemic. They have been working with services across the council to create equality outcomes with measurable actions for the next Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming report to be published later in 2021. Examples of how the council is addressing inequalities are given in case studies 5 and 6.

**164.** The council is also considering how the proposed new legislative framework for human rights in Scotland will affect its work, including how to adopt human rights-based budgeting approaches in future. The director of finance is working with representatives from Glasgow City, Highland and West Dunbartonshire Councils to consider these issues on behalf of COSLA's Directors of Finance Executive Group. In future, the council intends to review current processes against the Scottish Human Rights Commission's PANEL principles (Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Equality, Empowerment and Legality).

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## Case study 5

### Self-directed support: considering human rights in practice

Self-directed support is designed to ensure that people are given a range of options for how their social care is delivered, empowering them to decide how much ongoing control of and responsibility for their own support arrangements they want. The council has considered people's right to choice, dignity and control when setting its budget for 2021/22. People who choose to control their own budgets are offered the average rate among the council's current suppliers, rather than a rate aligned to the lowest cost provider. This is expected to incur additional costs of more than £100,000, but it promotes choice and reduces the need for people to top up their allocation when their preferred choice costs more than the former, lower, rate.

Source: Audit Scotland

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## Case study 6

### Snack and Play to reduce child poverty

The council's Child Poverty Action Plan outlines its commitment to eradicate child poverty with early and preventative interventions to ensure that children have the best start. The Snack and Play programme gives children an opportunity to attend a local primary school during school holidays free of charge for play, sports and craft activities and a hot lunch. Children who receive free school meals and those identified as vulnerable are prioritised – the remaining places are open to all.

The programme is delivered by the council's Education Department in partnership with EDLCT. The programme was piloted in 2017/18 and, as a result of its success, it has now been expanded and is permanently established as part of the council's revenue budget.

The Covid-19 pandemic has underlined the need to provide for children affected by poverty and those who are vulnerable. During this period, the programme was targeted at vulnerable children and key workers' children during the Easter and summer school holidays and provided across the Council area.

The programme will continue to target those children who are in need of support over the holiday periods. It will be evaluated to inform improvements and to ensure that it provides targeted support in line with the council's Child Poverty Action Plan.

Source: Audit Scotland.

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## The council and its partners are planning to revise the LOIP and its related plans in response to Covid-19. Community engagement and consultation will underpin the review

**165.** As part of developing the current LOIP, stakeholders provided feedback on the draft LOIP. Feedback could be provided through the council's website or in person at locations throughout East Dunbartonshire where council officers were available to answer questions and provide paper copies of the survey.

**166.** The council and its partners now plan to revise the LOIP and locality plans to reflect the impact of the pandemic. The LOIP development process and consultation will begin in September 2021 and is expected to report to the full council in early December 2021. This will include face-to-face consultation wherever possible, including roadshows, community group meetings and school visits. There will also be some online consultation and continuous engagement with the CPP. The thematic plans for each outcome and the place plans will also be revised following feedback from stakeholders on the LOIP priorities.

### **The council has made progress in implementing the requirements of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015**

**167.** The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 gives people more influence over how their council and its partners plan services. It provides formal routes for people to become more involved, including participatory budgeting, participation requests and community asset transfers. The Act also aims to tackle poverty and inequalities across communities by targeting resources to those most in need. The council and its partners have embraced the requirements of the Act and built upon existing arrangements to encourage further community-based activity. The council has engaged with individual communities to understand local needs, aspirations and ambitions. In some areas, this has been challenging, but the focus has remained on delivering a plan based on local needs.

**168.** The council has not received any formal participation requests. Any informal approaches have been directed to the CPP officers, who offer advice on the best ways to engage with the council and provide support where required. The council is preparing a participation request policy to further support people to become more involved in community planning.

**169.** The Act makes it easier for communities to take ownership of, or responsibility for, land and buildings belonging to the council through community asset transfers. The council has a history of supporting community groups to manage and own facilities, for example long-term rentals of community halls. East Dunbartonshire Council published a community asset transfer policy in 2018 in response to the requirements of the Act. It sets out clearly the process for making a request for an asset transfer, assisting community groups and assessing community benefits. The council's asset register is publicly available on the council's website to help community groups identify assets. Despite this, since the introduction of the Community Empowerment Act, no asset transfers have been completed. The council has received 11 enquiries and one formal request, which is currently being progressed.

### **The council is developing its approach to participatory budgeting**

**170.** Participatory budgeting is a way of giving local people a greater say in how the council spends some of its money. The council is committed to spending 1

per cent of its budget on community choices by December 2021. It has already supported a number of small projects:

- The Community Fund linked to the Glasgow 2018 European Championships in which communities voted to choose which projects to fund; 21 out of 28 projects were approved for funding.
- In 2017, Twechar Community Action Group worked with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust to carry out a household survey and hold an open day so that residents could vote for their favourite projects to share in £25,000 funding. Surveys were returned from 84 households, representing the views of 252 people, and 110 people attended the voting event. The funding supported projects such as wood craft, cycling skills for families and music courses. This led to greater community participation in the area as a result of increased awareness of existing projects and accessible activities.
- The East Dunbartonshire Grants Advisory Committee assesses grant applications made to the Community Grants Scheme run by the council. Small grants in the region of £3,000 are awarded by the committee. £110,229 was awarded in 2020/21 for online learning tools, Covid safety equipment, outdoor learning, mental health awareness and essential food and care packages.

**171.** The council intends to further develop its understanding of and approach to participatory budgeting. All place plans include specific actions to involve local people and groups in making choices on how budgets can be spent in line with the aims of participatory budgeting.

**172.** The council has a dedicated capital plan for place and community planning, with £47.4 million allocated over the next ten years, including £1.9 million specifically for place- and area-based priorities. For 2020/21, the capital budget for place and community planning equated to 28 per cent of planned capital spending. The council has built a community facility in Auchinairn (Case study 6), at the cost of £4.5 million, which equated to 2.2 per cent of the total ten-year capital plan at that time.

### **There is a risk that the health and social care services delivered in partnership with the IJB are not financially sustainable. The way that services are delivered needs to change**

**173.** The East Dunbartonshire Integration Joint Board (IJB), known as East Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnership, is a key partner in delivering health and social care services in the area. In 2019/20 the IJB's auditor reported that the lack of reserves, combined with a trend of overspending, represented a significant financial sustainability risk for the IJB. The board reported a surplus of £12.0 million for 2020/21, due to some late funding being directed to IJBs from the Scottish Government, which is expected to be used in 2021/22. Despite this, concern remains around the affordability of

the services provided by the IJB if services are not delivered in a different way in the future.

**174.** East Dunbartonshire's population is expected to grow by a further 3.8 per cent by 2028, with the highest population increase expected to be seen in those aged 75 and over (paragraph 11). This will have a significant impact on the demand for the services provided by the IJB. In 2019/20, the £1.1 million deficit included a £2.8 million overspend in older people's services, which illustrates the level of demand from this demographic.

**175.** The council's review of LGBF indicators over time in [Exhibit 8](#), shows improved performance in a number of areas, including reducing hospital readmissions, the number of days people spend in hospital when they are ready to be discharged, the proportion of care services graded good or better and an increase in people aged 65 or over with intensive needs receiving care at home.

**176.** The LGBF indicators also show a decline in some care services: the percentages of carers who feel supported to continue in their caring roles, of adults supported at home who agree that they had a say in how their care or support was provided and of those who agree that they are supported to live as independently as possible have declined. The performance on these indicators is discussed in the HSCP's 2021–2024 BIP.

**177.** The council feels that the data on these national indicators are not as representative of local performance as those gathered by the council. For example, the HSCP HGIOS annual report for 2020/21 shows that 95% of service users are satisfied with their involvement in the design of their care packages. These data reflect local surveys carried out by the council. The council feels that these local data cover more individuals and are more focused than the data reflected in the LGBF indicators. Nevertheless, the council plans further analysis of the national figures. The percentage of service users satisfied with their involvement in the design of their care packages remains a priority indicator being monitored through the HGIOS reports.

**178.** A joint inspection of the IJB by Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate in July 2019 concluded that there was an adequate strategic plan and communication in place and that its key performance indicators were good. The report also noted adequate leadership and a direction that promotes partnership approaches. It is important that the council continues to work with partners to build on the progress made and ensure that the IJB can demonstrate how it will deliver good-quality sustainable health and social care services in future.

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# Part 5 – Is the council demonstrating continuous improvement?

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The council has demonstrated a good pace of improvement since earlier Best Value audits.

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The council demonstrates awareness of where it needs to improve. It recognises that the pace of improvement needs to be maintained as services adapt to the Covid-19 recovery phase.

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The council plans to review its strategic planning and performance framework in the light of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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The council has processes in place to seek and report on stakeholder feedback. It has reported on the action being taken in response to complaints received.

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Throughout the pandemic the council has been engaging with staff and providing them with support. An all-staff survey is planned in September 2021. The results of this survey will be used to inform action plans to improve levels of employee engagement.

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## The LOIP includes Best Value and a commitment to continuous improvement in its guiding principles

**179.** It is good to see that a [guiding principle of the 2017–2027 LOIP](#) is Best Value. Partners have said, ‘We will endeavour to maintain an appropriate balance between the quality of the performance of our functions, the cost of that performance, and the cost to people of any service provided. In maintaining that balance, the Partnership shall have regard to safety, efficiency, effectiveness and economy.’

**180.** The LOIP goes on to describe what Best Value means for its partners and the requirement to show clearly how they will ‘ensure continuous improvement across all activities and deliver improved performance and outcomes’. As discussed earlier, the council demonstrates its commitment to improving its performance against the LOIP outcomes through the BIPs.

### **The council has demonstrated a good pace of improvement since previous Best Value audits**

**181.** A timeline of the council’s previous Best Value reports is shown in Appendix 1. A 2016 report on the council made a number of improvement recommendations. In the [Best Value Follow-Up Audit 2017 \(November 2017\)](#), the Accounts Commission reported that it was encouraged by the council’s positive response to the findings of the previous Best Value audit. It encouraged the council to keep up the momentum and continue to demonstrate effective leadership in taking improvements forward and delivering the transformation needed for the challenges that lie ahead.

**182.** Since then, Best Value Follow-Up work has been integrated with the annual audit, and reported in the [2016/17](#), [2017/18](#), [2018/19](#) and [2019/20](#) Annual Audit Reports. The council has kept up the momentum and demonstrated continuous improvement in the areas identified in previous Best Value reports. [Exhibit 16](#) (page 64) compares the improvement actions from the 2017 follow-up report with our findings in this report.

**183.** We have found that the council has demonstrated a good pace of improvement since earlier Best Value audits. It has demonstrated strong and improved performance in many services up to March 2020. Examples of improvements in its Best Value arrangements are the good practice approach to workforce planning and the improved performance management framework.

### **The council is aware of where it needs to improve**

**184.** The council uses self-assessment to drive improvement. It analyses local performance indicators to identify areas for improvement and includes actions for improvements in the BIPs; see paragraph 20. Some of the actions will need service reviews, which in turn will trigger further specific improvement projects or actions when the review is completed. Progress against these actions is then reported quarterly to members through the HGIOS reports; see paragraph 21. Annual BIP updates also report progress.

### **The council plans to review its strategic planning and corporate performance framework in the light of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic**

**185.** In December 2020, a paper was presented to the Council meeting highlighting the importance of corporate performance, research and benchmarking against comparable councils to inform a proposed review of the council’s strategic planning and performance framework. This paper highlighted the national and local performance requirements, but it also considered the

Covid-19 response, lessons learned and evolving opportunities to support future improvement.

**186.** In June 2021, the Corporate Performance Improvement Action Plan was presented to the Council giving details of planned actions including:

- realigning corporate priorities in response to the post pandemic-landscape
- improving data gathering and reporting to better inform and engage with communities and improve the measurement of outcomes in communities
- increasing the use of benchmarking data.

**187.** The action plan outlines a number of key actions to deliver the council's agreed aspirations including, milestones and timescales for implementation. Progress will be reported to the Council or to the Policy and Resources Committee, in line with corporate performance reporting cycles.

### **The council has processes in place to seek and report on stakeholder feedback**

**188.** The council gathers feedback on services through surveys, focus groups, representative groups and consultations. The BIPs provide details of ongoing and proposed stakeholder consultation and engagement. This includes a description of the activity, the audience, how the engagement will be used to inform planning and service delivery, and the planned start and end dates. The annual HGIOS reports also provide similar stakeholder engagement activity. The feedback gathered by these means is reported to the Council and/or committees and there is a [Consultations – Archive section](#) on the council's website, which provides details of all stakeholder consultation exercises undertaken by the council.

**189.** In June 2021, the latest consultation and engagement strategy for 2021/22 to 2023/24 was presented to the Council. It reflects the impact of Covid-19 on consultation and engagement activity through the national framework for recovery and for the immediate post-pandemic period. It acknowledges the importance of community consultation and engagement plans influencing and shaping future policies and decisions. The importance of reporting back on the outcome of engagement activity to communities is also highlighted.

### **The council's complaints handling performance has been reported to elected members, and biannual reporting is planned**

**190.** The council handles complaints using the model Complaints Handling Procedure for Local Authorities. The council has stated its intention to identify any lessons learned from complaints and feed these into the service improvement plans.

### **Planned improvements to the corporate performance framework include the following sections:**

- Transition to monthly HGIOS reporting.
  - Investigate options for an area-wide satisfaction survey to improve outcome measures.
  - Regular reporting to relevant strategic committees, based on benchmarking of priority areas.
  - Desk-based study of best practice and area-based data to inform service planning.
  - Enhanced performance area on the website for improved public performance reporting.
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**191.** The council's Public Performance Report (PPR) for 2019/20 provides an analysis of the 29 complaints received by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman by subject group. The PPR also provides this information for a number of other Scottish councils (East Renfrewshire Council, North Lanarkshire Council and West Dunbartonshire Council) to allow comparison with East Dunbartonshire Council's results.

**192.** A complaints handling annual report was introduced for 2020/21 and presented to the June 2021 Council meeting. The report outlines the council's performance against the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's complaint indicators. It shows that the council received 395 complaints during the year (compared with 513 during 2019/20). The report provides examples of cases in which the council has made improvements as a result of complaints and more are planned. Biannual reporting to elected members to reflect the work undertaken in response to complaints is planned.

### **Throughout the pandemic the council has been engaging with staff and providing them with support**

**193.** Since March 2020, the council has been engaging with staff through employee newsletters and [Depute Chief Executive updates](#) (including Covid-19 service updates) on the council's website. For staff without a council email address, the council created an [employee zone](#) on its website, which provides Covid-19 updates.

**194.** There is a telephone number available seven days a week that staff with health or wellbeing issues can call for support and advice from human resources staff. Staff who are shielding or are caring for someone report regularly to their line manager. At the start of the pandemic, line managers made one-to-one telephone calls to individual members of staff who were deemed to be high risk or vulnerable to find out if they needed help or support. Engagement with Healthy Working Lives has continued (through Depute Chief Executive updates newsletters), and staff can be referred to counselling services or occupational health services if required.

**195.** Members of the council's management team visited all schools in East Dunbartonshire on two occasions later in 2020 to meet with teachers, local trade unions officials and all other school staff to discuss any concerns they had in order to address any problems. More visits were planned in early 2021, but these were postponed because of local lockdown restrictions.

**196.** The council has established a project board, 'Smart Working for the Future', with representation from trade unions and staff. The aim is to take the lessons learned from the pandemic and the different ways of delivering services that the council has had to introduce to help staff improve productivity by allowing them as much flexibility as possible in the way they work, for example more or less remote working.

## An all-staff survey is planned in September 2021. The results of the survey will inform action plans to improve levels of employee engagement

**197.** The council conducted an employee survey in autumn 2019 covering areas including leadership, communication and engagement, management, teamwork and wellbeing. The results were due to be discussed with executive officers when Covid-19 interfered with the council's work. Officers now feel that the relevance of the survey findings is diminished and are planning a new survey to start in September 2021 and end in March 2022. The results of this survey will be used to inform council-wide and service-specific action plans to improve levels of employee engagement.

## Trade union representatives believe that earlier engagement on proposed service changes would be constructive. They have commented positively on how the council has responded to staff concerns following the Covid-19 outbreak

**198.** Trade union representatives stated that there is a good level of engagement and communication between management and unions. However, they said that consultation on proposed changes affecting their members would be more useful if it were earlier in the development of proposals, giving them the opportunity to raise concerns or propose alternative solutions.

Representatives were generally satisfied with how management deals with individual staff concerns and complaints and are confident that whistleblowing and disciplinary issues are treated seriously and dealt with in a fair manner.

**199.** All representatives were positive about how the council has responded to Covid-19. Separate weekly meetings are being held between management and representatives of all unions (teaching and non-teaching) to discuss concerns raised by members, including health and safety issues facing front line staff. This process has worked well and proved effective in quickly resolving issues as they arise. Union representatives commented that officers demonstrated a genuine commitment to understanding the issues facing staff and what needed to be done to fix them.

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### Exhibit 16

A comparison of key Best Value judgements from 2017 and 2021 shows that the council has made good progress in all areas

Controller of Audit improvement action 2017	Controller of Audit judgement 2021	View
Leadership of the council's improvement plans needs to improve to address its significant funding gap.	The council has demonstrated that it has strengthened its leadership of the improvement plans. Progress is scrutinised by elected members.	<a href="#">Part 1/Part 2</a>

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Clearer reporting on the benefits of the transformation programme is required.	The council has revised its transformation programme update reports to show, for each project completed, the year to which it relates. The update reports have also been revised to provide more detail on the estimated savings arising from the transformation programme.  However, the transformation programme reports cannot be tied into the year-end budget outturn report for 2019/20.	<a href="#">Part 3</a>
Workforce planning needs to improve.	The council has made significant improvements in relation to its workforce planning arrangements, and the council's updated workforce strategy demonstrates that the council is applying a good practice approach to workforce planning.	<a href="#">Part 3</a>
Information reported to members needs to improve to support scrutiny.	The council has improved its reporting to elected members to support more effective scrutiny.	<a href="#">Part 1</a>
The council's strategic priorities need to be clearly reflected in financial and operational plans.	The council's current priorities are set out in its Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) 2017–2027. The Transformational Change & Budget Reduction Strategy drives the Business and Improvement Plans (BIPs) for each of the council's strategic service groups that are linked to the LOIP. This is now consistent with good practice.	<a href="#">Part 1</a>
Long-term financial plans need to be developed.	Improvements have been made in financial planning. The council has a medium-term financial plan. This now needs to be updated to reflect the implications of Covid-19. The council has a long-term financial strategy, but it does not yet include financial forecasts.	<a href="#">Part 3</a>

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# Recommendations

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**The Local Government Benchmarking Framework reports to elected members should include a link to Business and Improvement Plans for those indicators where performance is identified for improvement.**

Paragraph 60

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**The ‘Performance and Governance’ section of the council’s website should be improved in line with the commitment made in the Corporate Performance Improvement Action Plan 2021/22. The presentation of performance information should be enhanced to make it easier for citizens to see how the council is performing overall.**

Paragraph 86

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**Officers are planning to update the medium-term financial plan to reflect the impact of Covid-19. Once this has been completed, the council should consider developing a long-term financial plan that includes forecasts of its financial position in the years ahead.**

Paragraph 117

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**The corporate risk register should be updated to reflect the council’s risks during the Covid-19 recovery phase. Regular review of the corporate risk register by elected members should be introduced.**

Paragraph 136

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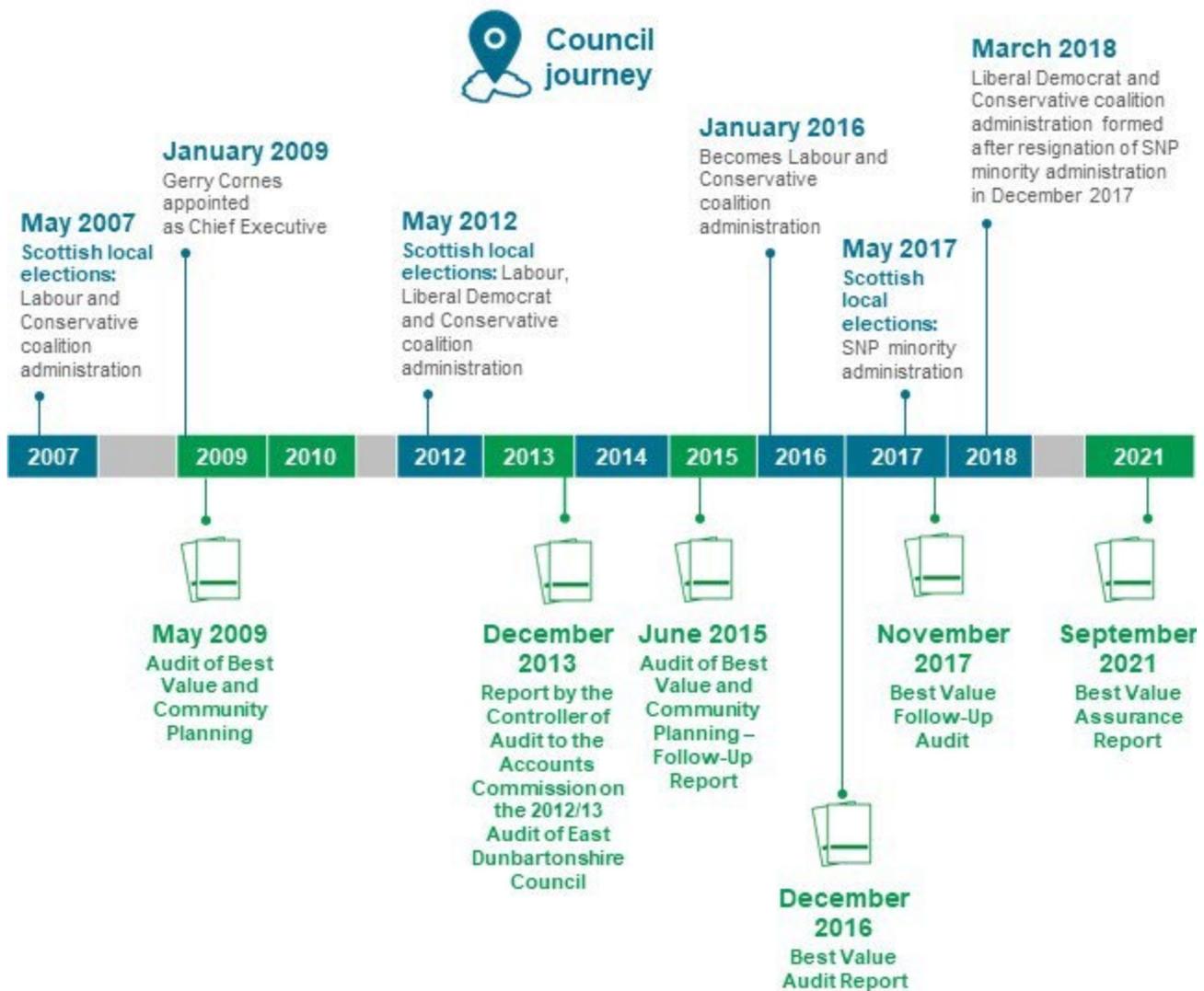
**The council should work with the Community Planning Partnership to revise the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan annual progress reports to include a summary of progress against the outcome performance indicators.**

Paragraph 152

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# Appendix 1

## Best Value audit timeline



### May 2009 – Audit of Best Value and Community Planning

The Accounts Commission found that council services have improved, there was positive leadership, good working relationships and a ‘can do’ attitude. The commission concluded, however, that the council still had more to do to ensure that it could provide the best value for local people.

## **December 2013 – Report by the Controller of Audit to the Accounts Commission on the 2012/13 Audit of East Dunbartonshire Council**

The Accounts Commission discussed the annual audit report findings on Best Value audit work carried out at the council covering asset management, procurement, workforce management and performance information and management. The commission asked for further follow-up work to be reported.

## **June 2015 – Audit of Best Value and Community Planning – Follow-Up Report**

The Accounts Commission found that the council delivers a good standard of services and has made progress in addressing some of the issues raised previously. It recognised the council's commitment to improving but that there was a gap between East Dunbartonshire Council's ambitions and delivering them on the ground.

## **December 2016 – Best Value Audit Report**

The Accounts Commission found that East Dunbartonshire Council had worked to respond to the concerns expressed by the Commission in previous findings. There is better prioritisation of improvement projects and some stronger aspects of workforce planning. Scrutiny of performance by elected members is also improving. But the commission remained concerned that the council does not demonstrate the capability to deliver its ambitious transformation programme and thus its ability to address its significant funding gap.'

## **November 2017 – Best Value Follow-Up Audit**

The Accounts Commission found that East Dunbartonshire Council had responded positively to previous concerns but needed to maintain the momentum.

## **September 2021 – Best Value Assurance Report**

The Controller of Audit will present a Best Value Assurance Report to the Accounts Commission at least once during the five-year audit appointment for each council. This is the first such assurance report on East Dunbartonshire Council. The report seeks to provide the Commission with assurance on the council's statutory duty to deliver Best Value.

# East Dunbartonshire Council

## Best Value Assurance Report

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

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