

Best Value Assurance Report

Renfrewshire Council



ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

Prepared by Audit Scotland
August 2017


The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is the public spending watchdog for local government. We hold councils in Scotland to account and help them improve. We operate impartially and independently of councils and of the Scottish Government, and we meet and report in public.

We expect councils to achieve the highest standards of governance and financial stewardship, and value for money in how they use their resources and provide their services.

Our work includes:

- securing and acting upon the external audit of Scotland's councils and various joint boards and committees
- assessing the performance of councils 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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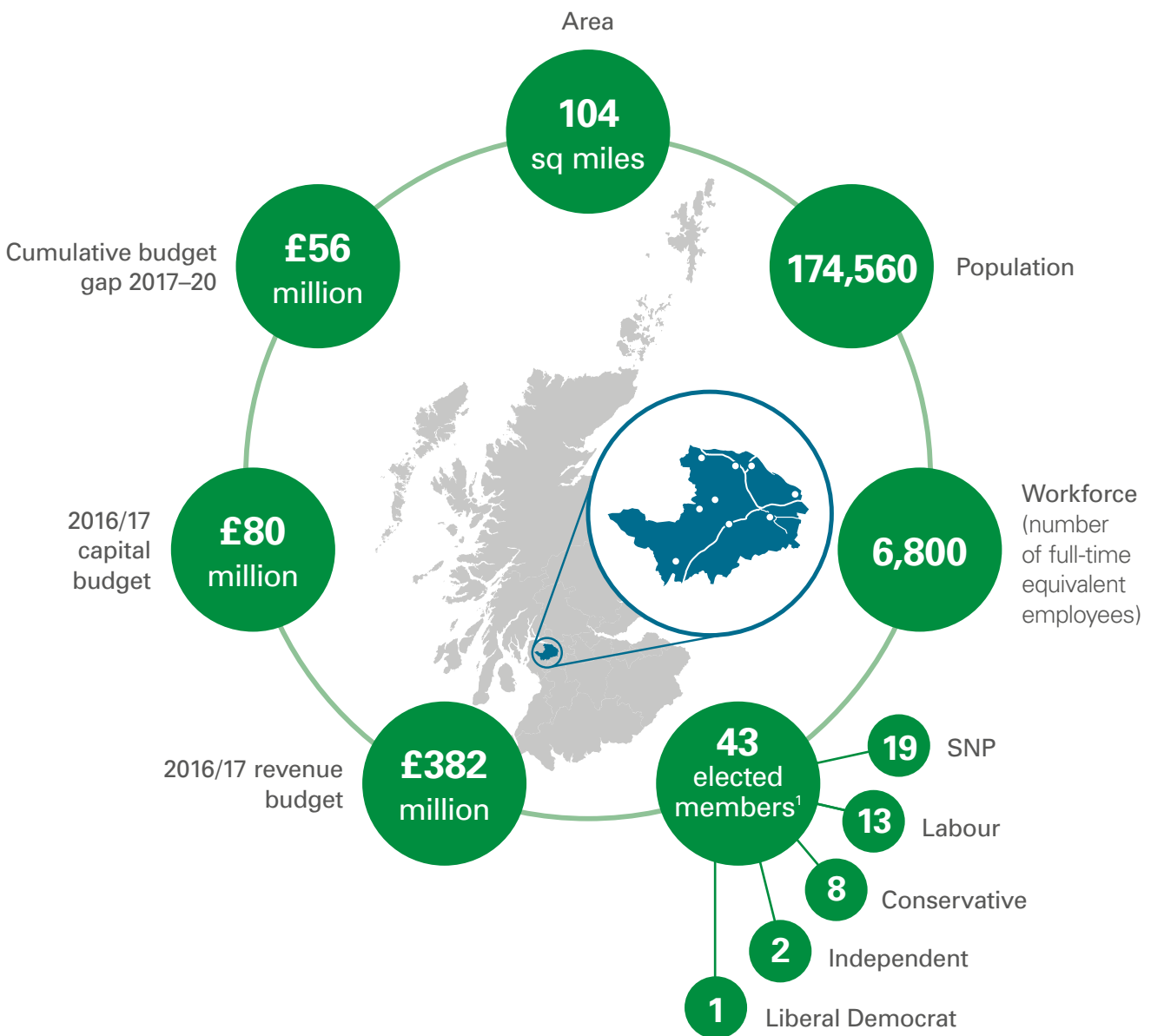
Links

-  PDF download
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Exhibit data

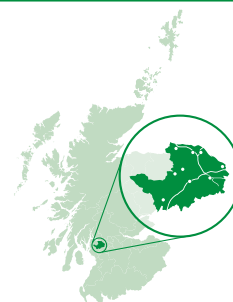
When viewing this report online, you can access background data by clicking on the graph icon. The data file will open in a new window.

Key facts



Note: 1. Following the local elections in May 2017 the council is run by an SNP minority administration. The council's political make-up prior to the 2017 council elections: Labour – 22, SNP – 15, Conservative – 1, Liberal Democrat – 1, Independent – 1.

Commission findings



- 1** The Commission accepts the Controller of Audit's report on the audit of Best Value in Renfrewshire Council. We endorse the recommendations set out by the Controller of Audit in his report and expect the council to act upon them.
- 2** We commend the council on its progress since our previous Best Value audit. We are encouraged by evidence of improving service performance and the council's work with its partners in addressing long-term socio-economic challenges faced by Renfrewshire communities.
- 3** The council has effective financial plans and a record of sound financial management. To address the funding gap challenges that lie ahead these will need to be complemented by a clear workforce strategy, and we emphasise the Controller of Audit's recommendation in this regard.
- 4** We note that the council is reviewing how it engages with its citizens and communities. The Community Empowerment Act places significant expectations on public bodies in this regard, and we encourage the council to build on its experience in consulting with its residents and communities as it takes forward the task of redesigning its services for the future.
- 5** We note with concern the comments in the Controller's report regarding the governance arrangements for Renfrewshire Leisure Limited. We urge the council to look at ways of providing greater transparency and clarity of responsibilities in its relationship with a significant provider of public services.
- 6** We would also urge elected members to take the opportunity to reinforce a collective approach to fulfilling the council's duty of Best Value. Such an approach involves using scrutiny arrangements appropriately to ensure accountability and fostering more constructive political relations for the good of the council area.
- 7** In addition, we expect members to make full use of the training and development opportunities made available to them given the challenges that the council faces.
- 8** We encourage the council to continue its positive direction. In line with our new approach to auditing Best Value, the Controller of Audit will monitor progress through the annual audit and update the Commission accordingly.

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 that forms part of the annual audit of every council. Audit conclusions are reported each year through the Annual Audit Report, addressed to the Controller of Audit and the councillors. In addition, the Controller of Audit will present a Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) to the Accounts Commission at least once during the five-year audit appointment for each council. This is the first BVAR on Renfrewshire Council, under the revised arrangements. The [Appendix](#) summarises the findings from the previous Best Value report on the council.

2. This report seeks to provide the Accounts Commission with assurance on the council's statutory duty to deliver Best Value, with a particular focus on the Commission's Strategic Audit Priorities covering:

- the clarity of council priorities and quality of long-term planning to achieve these
- how effectively councils are evaluating and implementing options for significant changes in delivering services
- how effectively councils are ensuring that members and officers have the right knowledge, skills and time to lead and manage delivery of council priorities
- how effectively councils are involving citizens in decisions about services
- the quality of council public performance reporting to help citizens gauge improvement.

3. We are looking for councils to demonstrate Best Value by showing continuous improvement in how they deliver their priorities. The pace, depth and continuity of improvement are key to how well councils meet their priorities in the future. Throughout the report we show how we have assessed the council's improvement over time and conclusions are reflected in the key messages in the report.

4. Our audit approach is proportionate and risk-based: it reflects the context, risks and performance of the individual council. It also draws on the intelligence from audit and scrutiny work carried out in previous years. In keeping with this approach we carried out some initial work to define the scope of our audit. This included reviewing previous audit and inspection reports, intelligence, council documents, initial meetings with senior officers and reflecting on our wider public sector knowledge and experience. [Exhibit 1 \(page 7\)](#) shows the key areas we focused on for our audit of Renfrewshire Council.

Exhibit 1

Key areas of focus for our audit



The council's vision



Performance and outcomes



Change and improvement plans including:

- the City Deal
- digitalisation of services, such as providing more services online
- difficult decisions and protected services



Process and results of self-evaluation



Financial management and financial planning



Workforce planning



Community and citizen engagement so that people have their voices heard as to how services are planned and provided



Arm's-length external organisations' (ALEOs') governance arrangements



Transformational change and service redesign such as developing new and more effective ways in which to provide local services

Source: Audit Scotland

5. The audit work for this report took place between January and June 2017. Most of the work was concluded prior to the local government elections of May 2017, although we have included some more recent changes. Our audit work included:

- interviewing councillors, senior officers and partner organisations
- observing a range of council and committee meetings
- reviewing documents and performance data
- conducting focus groups with councillors and officers.

6. This report reflects the work done on the key areas of focus noted above. The work covers a number of Best Value characteristics, included in the statutory guidance (2004) but it does not cover them all. Audit work in future years, as part of the annual audit, will include follow-up on the findings from this report as well as more detailed audit work on other Best Value areas, as appropriate.

7. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and assistance provided to the audit team by all councillors and officers contacted during the audit.

Key messages

- 1** The council has a clear and ambitious vision for Renfrewshire to revitalise the area's economy and address poverty and inequality. It recognises that this vision can only be achieved over a long period of time. The council's partners share this vision and the council plan, management structures and performance management arrangements are well aligned with it.
- 2** Since the 2006 Best Value report, Renfrewshire Council has maintained a steady pace of change, supported by effective leadership that has allowed it to improve the way it plans, manages and delivers its business. It has made these improvements while dealing with financial constraints and challenging socio-economic issues such as high levels of economic deprivation, low population growth and an increasing elderly population.
- 3** The council has continued to make progress since the 2006 Best Value report to improve governance arrangements, although there have been difficult working relationships between the main political parties and limited cross-party working. Councillors have not made the most of the training and development opportunities available to them.
- 4** In the past, the operation and performance of the Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board has been weak and has put at risk the overall effectiveness of scrutiny within the council. Following the 2017 local elections, the council has reviewed and revised the remits of its committees and established the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board.
- 5** Since 2006, the council has steadily improved how its services perform. Renfrewshire's overall performance is improving and is comparable to similar councils within its family group. The council has implemented initiatives which have been delivered with partners and are focused on making a difference at a local level.
- 6** The council has effective financial management and a sound medium-term financial strategy. It has built up its reserves over a number of years which are earmarked for specific purposes and aligned to the council's strategic objectives. The level of reserves is significant for the size of council. Like many councils, Renfrewshire faces a significant funding gap in the medium term.

- 7** The council and its partners are good at working with, and involving, communities and will need to continue to work together on joint priorities and to strengthen partnership working. Given the likely funding gaps in future budgets, the council will need to work with people who use council services to inform decisions about how those services will be delivered. This will provide a positive base for them to go further and fully implement the provisions of the Community Empowerment Act.
 - 8** The council has a good record of delivering services differently. It works well with partners and has developed a number of new approaches to how it delivers services. To meet future challenges, it needs to agree a medium- and long-term workforce strategy and implement its organisational development strategy. This will be critical to managing how future services are delivered.
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Part 1

Does the council have clear strategic direction?



The council has a clear and ambitious vision for Renfrewshire that is shared with its partners

Leadership in the council is effective and there is a good working relationship within the Corporate Management Team.

The council operates in a challenging political environment with difficult working relationships between the main political parties and limited cross-party working. Following the elections in May 2017, the council is run by an SNP minority administration. It will be important for councillors to work together to continue to progress the agreed priority objectives.

The council's plans, structures, systems and partnership arrangements share a common purpose that is helping to deliver its vision.

The council has sound governance arrangements for how it conducts business but councillors need to scrutinise and challenge reports more thoroughly. Councillors have not made the most of the training and development opportunities available to them.

In the past, the operation and performance of the Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board was weak and put at risk the overall effectiveness of scrutiny within the council. The council has reviewed the remits of its committees and established the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board.

The council could improve performance reporting arrangements for Renfrewshire Leisure Limited.

The council has a clear and ambitious vision that is shared by community planning partners

8. Renfrewshire's Council Plan (2014-17) sets out a clear, ambitious vision that reflects a good understanding of the area and local needs. The plan is structured around three themes of place, people and council supported by ten priorities. The vision is reflected in all council plans including annual Service Improvement Plans (SIPs) ([Exhibit 2, page 11](#)). The Corporate Management Team (CMT) monitors progress quarterly and reports to the council's leadership board every six months. The council has effective systems and structures that help it deliver its vision. Leadership in the council is effective and there is a good working relationship within the CMT. The council's partners, such as the police, NHS and fire service, share the council's vision and priorities and have a common understanding of its ambitions and activity and how these services will be delivered.

Exhibit 2

Renfrewshire Council's vision and priorities

Renfrewshire Council and its partners have a clearly identified vision with plans and strategies in place to deliver the outcomes identified under the priorities.

Council Plan 2014-17 vision: A fair and inclusive place where all our people, communities and businesses thrive	Community plan vision: Working together to make Renfrewshire a fairer, more inclusive place where all our people, communities and businesses thrive
 Overarching priorities	 Overarching priorities
<p>Better Future: Place</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Driving physical and economic regeneration 2. Building on our culture and heritage 3. Protecting the public 4. Creating a sustainable Renfrewshire <p>Better Future: People</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Reducing the level and impact of poverty 6. Raising attainment and closing the attainment gap 7. Supporting and sustaining people into employment 8. Improving care, health and wellbeing <p>Better Future: Council</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Supporting our employees 10. Continuing to be a well run council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs and the economy • Children and young people • Community care, health and wellbeing • A safer and stronger Renfrewshire • A greener Renfrewshire • Empowering communities.
 Supporting plans and strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paisley Town Centre Action Plan • Glasgow and Clyde Valley City Deal • Strategic Housing Investment Plan • Invest in Business – the council's business development programme • Local Development plan • Paisley Town Centre Heritage Asset Strategy • Renfrewshire Tourism Framework • Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership, Strategic Plan • City Region Economic Strategy • Renfrewshire Economic Framework • Tackling Poverty Strategy 2015-17 • Waste Strategy 2016-18 • The Digital Strategy 2016-19 • Invest in Renfrewshire Employability Programmes • Council's Organisational Development Strategy 2016-19 • Corporate Asset Strategy • Corporate Procurement Strategy 2016-17 to 2017-18 • Children's Services Partnership Plan • Community Justice Plans • Service Improvement Plans • Corporate Marketing and Communication Plan 	

Note: Outcomes are the changes as a result of the intended work that is done to support the vision and priorities.

Source: Audit Scotland and Renfrewshire Council

9. In July 2017, the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport announced that Paisley has been shortlisted to host UK City of Culture 2021. Paisley is bidding for the title as part of its ambitions to use the town's cultural and heritage assets to transform its economy and reduce inequalities. The council and its partners have identified that winning the UK City of Culture 2021 title will have significant economic benefits for Paisley and the wider Renfrewshire area. The bid is overseen by the Paisley 2021 Partnership Board, which draws together the resources and commitment of partners from civic, cultural, educational, business and community backgrounds. The board will submit a second stage bid to the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in September 2017, with the winner announced at the end of the year.

10. A programme of social, cultural and economic regeneration is being progressed, supported by community engagement and partnership working. The council has allocated funding of £1 million which local community groups and organisations can bid for to support cultural events and development work.

11. In 2014, Renfrewshire's Tackling Poverty Commission was set up to:

- assess the nature, causes and impact of child poverty in Renfrewshire
- make recommendations for introducing a strategic approach for Renfrewshire Community Planning Partnership.

12. The Commission was the first of its kind in Scotland. It proposed a series of recommendations to be delivered in partnership and focused on making a difference at a local level.

13. Following the Commissions' recommendations, Renfrewshire Community Planning Partnership developed a Strategy and Action Plan for Renfrewshire. The Tackling Poverty Programme is an ambitious partnership programme which seeks to change the lives of those living in poverty in Renfrewshire. Tackling poverty is a priority for Renfrewshire Council and it agreed a £6 million investment, with a supporting action plan ([Case study 1, page 13](#)).

14. The £1.13 billion Glasgow City Region City Deal is an agreement between the UK Government, the Scottish Government and eight local authorities across the Glasgow City Region. Renfrewshire is to benefit from three of the biggest infrastructure investments: the Airport Access Project, the Clyde Waterfront and Renfrew Riverside Project and the Glasgow Airport Investment Area. Together it is anticipated that these projects will transform local and regional transport links providing better access and resulting in job opportunities through business growth and inward investment.

Case study 1



The Tackling Poverty Programme

In 2014, Renfrewshire's Tackling Poverty Commission was set up to assess the nature, causes and impact of child poverty in Renfrewshire. The Commission was the first of its kind in Scotland and it proposed several recommendations focusing on making a difference at a local level.

Tackling poverty is a key priority for Renfrewshire Council and it agreed a £6 million investment programme, with a supporting action plan. The council has allocated a further £1.5 million in the 2017/18 budget.

'We want a Renfrewshire where no child lives in poverty'

Highlights from the programme's one year on evaluation, Our Journey So Far, include:

- Renfrewshire Council becoming an accredited Living Wage provider
- reductions in youth unemployment, anti-social behaviour and sanction rates at local job centres
- creating a Sports Coach Academy paid traineeship programme for 16-21 year olds who are not in further education, employment or training
- launching the School Day Fund which gives schools a budget to cover expenses such as the cost of school uniforms, trips and equipment for pupils from low-income households
- joint working between the Literacy Development Programme and Strathclyde University to provide extensive professional development to teachers
- providing Street Stuff, which provides activities for children and young people, with two new buses and expanding it to new locations
- Families First being used as national best practice. Families First is a free, confidential advice and information service for families.

The larger Tackling Poverty Programmes are externally assessed. The most notable of these is the Families First project which has a budget of £1 million and was evaluated by Glasgow University in 2015. The evaluation reported on the success of the first stage of the programme and the findings were very positive. The feedback received from some individuals outlined that the programme had a profound impact on their lives and the results could be seen almost immediately.

The Tackling Poverty Programmes involve working closely with local communities. The council works with third sector organisations, such as charities and voluntary groups, to enable officers to talk directly to recipients of Tackling Poverty Programmes. For example, one consultation involved asking people what differences they could see the projects making to the areas they lived in and asked individuals how they would like the council to report progress back to the community. The council also produces information about the programme in various formats to raise awareness and make information easier for people to access. One example of this has been joint working with a local youth arts group, Create Paisley, to co-produce videos about the programme and share successes with the wider community.

Source: Audit Scotland and Renfrewshire Council

Renfrewshire faces a number of challenges

15. Renfrewshire is the tenth largest Scottish council in terms of population but one of the smallest in terms of area (24 out of 32). It faces a number of challenges and has plans in place to address these through the priorities outlined within the council plan including:

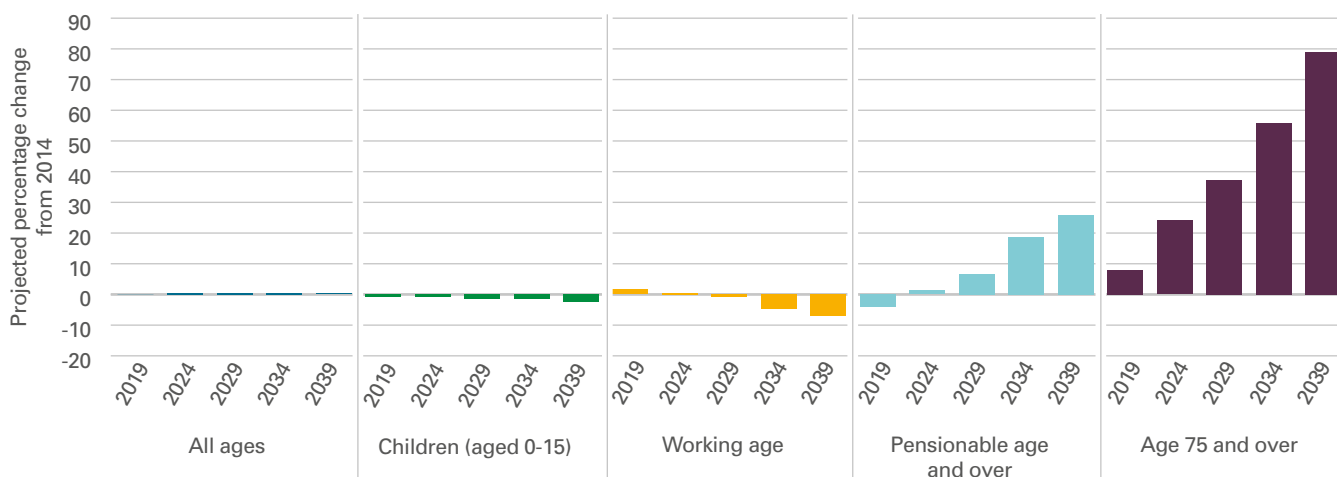
- **a relatively static population** – council priorities to address this include driving physical and economic regeneration and creating a sustainable Renfrewshire
- **high levels of economic deprivation** – council priorities to address this include driving physical and economic regeneration, reducing the level and impact of poverty, raising attainment levels and supporting and sustaining people into employment
- **poor health outcomes** – council priorities to address this include improving care, health and wellbeing.

16. A key focus for the council and its community planning partners is encouraging more people to come and live in Renfrewshire. It is estimated the population will remain relatively static over the period to 2039 compared to an increase of nearly seven per cent across the whole of Scotland. The number of people of working age in Renfrewshire is expected to fall by seven per cent and the number of children by almost three per cent. This compares with increases for both these age groups at a national scale. The number of people living in Renfrewshire of pensionable age is expected to increase by over a quarter, with those older than 75 years set to increase by 79 per cent by 2039 (**Exhibit 3**). These population changes have future implications for the area. These include a lack of local workforce making the area less attractive to some businesses. They also include the challenge of meeting the demand for services such as health and social care, for example care for people at home, at a time when demand is likely to increase.

Exhibit 3

Projected population changes in Renfrewshire by age group until 2039

The numbers of children and people of working age living in Renfrewshire are expected to fall over the next 20 years, while the number of pensioners and those aged 75+ is expected to increase significantly.




Source: *Projected percentage change in population (2014-based), by age structure and Scottish area, selected years*, National Records of Scotland

17. Reducing inequalities within Renfrewshire is another aspiration for the council and is reflected under **People** within the council plan with a focus on reducing poverty, raising attainment, helping people into permanent employment and improving care, health and wellbeing. The main inequalities are:

- male life expectancy in Ferguslie is 68.9 years while in Bishopton, it is 83.7 years
- there were 604 child protection concerns in Ferguslie in 2015/16, while there were 68 in Bishopton
- the average tariff score for S4 pupils in Ferguslie was 131 and 218 in Bishopton.

The council has a history of a challenging political environment with difficult working relationships between councillors

18. The Accounts Commission's report [*How councils work: Roles and working relationships: are you getting it right?*](#)  August 2010, noted that in successful councils, there are '...professional and constructive relationships between councillors'.

19. In Renfrewshire Council working relationships between officers and councillors are good, respectful and constructive. However, the council operates in a challenging political environment and there have been difficult working relationships between the main political parties. As in other councils, relationships between political groups are under increased pressure from the need to take tough decisions on future spending and how best to deliver services.

20. Council meetings have been highly politicised at times and increasingly conducted through motions and amendments to normal business. While this has not prevented the council conducting its business or progressing its agreed priorities and objectives it can distract from constructively scrutinising how services are performing and from delivering outcomes.

21. The duty of Best Value falls on the council, not the administration. Cross-party working, which has taken place in the past, has been limited. To continue to progress the council priorities it is essential that:

- the council creates a culture and structure that helps to develop shared values among all councillors
- councillors demonstrate these in the way they conduct council business.

22. This will provide stability and continuity in delivering the council priorities in the longer term. Furthermore, the council should ensure that its values and culture support scrutiny and particularly constructive challenge. This is important to good governance, in particular to ensuring all councillors play their role in accountable decision-making, policy-making and scrutiny.

The council has sound governance arrangements in place for how it conducts business but there has been a lack of scrutiny and challenge at policy boards

23. This audit was carried out prior to the local government elections of May 2017 and describes the arrangements at that time.

24. The council has sound governance arrangements in place. It conducts its main business through the council meeting, Leadership Board, a number of policy boards and the Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board. All boards have members from the different political parties in proportion to the council's political make-up. The conveners of all policy boards are members of the administration.

25. The council has five local area committees whose aim is to involve and consult local communities. The committees are used as an opportunity for local communities to hear from the council and its community planning partners. They also have budgets to fund local initiatives and support local projects.

26. The council regularly reviews its governance arrangements to take account of changes to the way that services operate and of new partnership arrangements such as the integrated Health and Social Care Joint Board.

27. The council webcasts its main council meetings and all agenda papers and minutes are on the council's website and made available in the public gallery and its reception. Our review of minutes and observation of meetings found that there was limited scrutiny and challenge with many reports being noted rather than being actively considered.

28. The council has recently taken steps to improve weaknesses in how its former Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board operated and performed. Internal and external audit are important elements of the system of accountability in any public body. In councils, audits help councillors scrutinise how services are performing. Until May 2017 the Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board acted as the council's audit committee. Its work focused largely on petitions from members of the public, with a lack of focus on scrutinising and considering audit reports.

29. While we recognise that petitions provide an important means of connecting the community and council, combining this with audit and scrutiny has not been effective.

30. In March 2017, the council's internal audit function received an external assessment report conducted by West Lothian Council: Audit, Risk and Counter Fraud Unit. A number of recommendations were made including the following:


- More detailed information should be provided to the board, particularly where the Chief Auditor concludes that the assurance level is limited.
- Reporting details of the specific outstanding recommendations to the board, particularly those ranked 'A', the highest category of importance.

31. The convener of the previous Audit Scrutiny and Petitions Board was a member of the administration. This arrangement had been in place for several years despite being reported in previous Audit Scotland annual audit reports as an area of non-compliance. Good practice recommends that the convener should be from the opposition or, in some instances, independent of the council.

32. Following the 2017 elections, the council has reviewed its committees' remits. It established an Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board and operates a separate petitions committee. This Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board is chaired by an opposition councillor from the Conservative Group.

The council could improve performance reporting arrangements for Renfrewshire Leisure Limited


33. The council has a controlling interest in one ALEO, Renfrewshire Leisure Limited (RLL). In 2014 Renfrewshire Leisure became a company limited by guarantee with the council as the sole member. In 2015 cultural services were transferred from the council to Renfrewshire Leisure.

34. One consequence of using more complex structures involving ALEOs in delivering services is that the public may be less clear about who is responsible for services. Maintaining transparency by having arrangements in place that are easy for people to get access to and understand is a key objective in good governance. This is detailed in the Accounts Commission's [How councils work: Arm's-length external organisations \(ALEOs\): are you getting it right?](#)  report.

35. It is good practice that councils should monitor how ALEOs perform against both financial and service expectations. The council's service level agreement, setting out the level of services it expects from RLL, is not publicly available. The performance report to the Leadership Board in November 2016 did not provide enough performance information to confirm that RLL was achieving the targets set in the service level agreement.

36. Renfrewshire Council should be more transparent in the information that is publicly available about its support for RLL. The Annual Business Plan for RLL is an exempt paper which is considered at the Leadership Board. An exempt paper means the press and public are excluded, preventing public debate or challenge.

37. Two councillors of the Leadership Board are also RLL members and it is not clear how the council and its Leadership Board perform their scrutiny responsibilities effectively.

38. The Accounts Commission's [ALEOs: are you getting it right?](#)  report identifies an example of good practice from a council that 'no officer should hold a trustee or directorship position with any of the ALEOs the council engages with.' This was based on the potential for conflicts of interest to arise between an officer's responsibilities to the council as an employer and that officer's responsibilities and personal liability when appointed to an outside body. Renfrewshire Council has appointed the Head of Corporate Finance and the Director of Development and Housing Services as board members of RLL.

39. The Chief Executive of RLL is currently leading on the delivery of all leisure capital programmes for the council and is seconded to the council two days a week to manage and sign off these projects.

40. The council should review its governance arrangements to ensure they provide for a relationship with RLL that is clear, independent, and more easily understood by the public.

Councillors have not made the most of the training and development opportunities available to them

41. Councillors must ensure they have the skills and knowledge to perform their role. In Renfrewshire Council, attendance overall at training sessions for councillors has been poor. Immediately after the elections in 2012, there was good attendance at welcome and induction sessions for new councillors. Attendance was good at a training session on policing and community planning but poor at other sessions. For example, a session run by the Standards Commission had only one attendee and three councillors attended a session run by the Improvement Service. Most other sessions had fewer than ten attendees (fewer than a quarter of councillors).

42. During 2015/16, there were 20 events on the councillors' training register. The highest attended was the session on self-directed support with 14 attendees. There were 13 attendees at a session on the Syrian Refugee Crisis and 12 for a session on the regeneration of Paisley Museum. No councillors attended the session on revisions to the guidance on the Code of Conduct.

43. Following the local government election in May 2017, the council has a comprehensive training and induction programme prepared for new councillors. A range of introductory meetings and training events have been set up on various topics including the following:

- Orientation for new members including sessions on 'getting connected' with information and communications technology, introduction to communications, marketing and media protocols and social media, a strategic overview of the council, standards and ethics and councillors' roles and responsibilities.
- Event opportunities for all councillors include sessions on meeting council partners, equalities and an introduction to services. They also cover details of City Deal public consultation events that are taking place.
- Events and opportunities for board members. These are for councillors appointed to specific policy boards and for members of joint boards and outside bodies.

Part 2

How well is the council performing?



Renfrewshire's overall performance is improving and is comparable to similar councils within its family group

The council has performed well against local and national indicators and outcomes are continuing to improve steadily for people in Renfrewshire.

The council's services have received positive inspection reports from Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate.

The council has implemented a number of initiatives with partners which are focused on making a difference at a local level.

The council regularly monitors and reports progress against planned actions and has a range of ways to report performance to the public.

Renfrewshire Council's overall performance has improved in recent years

44. Renfrewshire Council's performance improved slightly between 2011/12 and 2015/16. In 2015/16, just under half (48 per cent) of its performance indicators were in the upper two quartiles. The council also reduced the number of indicators that were in the bottom quartile between 2011/12 and 2015/16 ([Exhibit 4, page 20](#)).

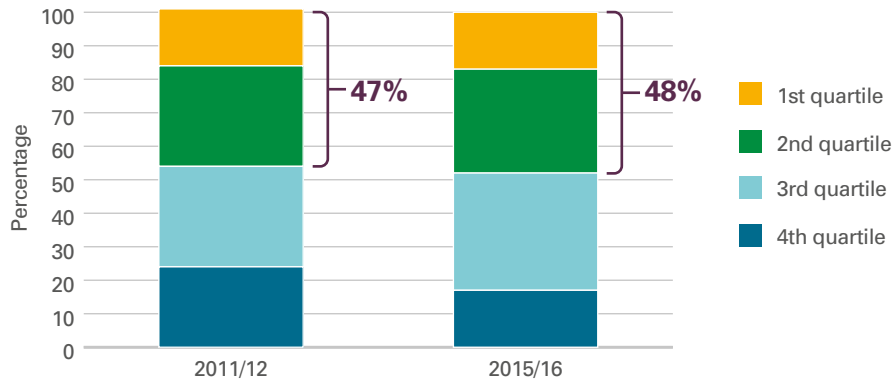
45. The Accounts Commission's recent report, [Local government in Scotland: Performance and challenges 2017](#)  noted that councils' performance over the last five years has been maintained or improved. Renfrewshire Council's performance mirrors this trend, showing improvements across the majority of the indicators ([Exhibit 5, page 21](#)).

46. The *Local Government Benchmarking Framework* allows councils to compare themselves to the Scottish average. It also groups councils with similar profiles into family groups based on factors such as population density and levels of deprivation. This allows similar councils to compare and benchmark performance. Compared with the Scottish average for 2015/16, Renfrewshire Council performs close to the average for the majority of selected indicators ([Exhibit 6, page 22](#)). Relative to its family group, Renfrewshire tends to sit in the middle ground for performance. In comparison with Scotland as a whole, there has been a mixed picture in terms of the rate of relative improvement between 2010/11 and 2015/16 ([Exhibit 6](#)).

Exhibit 4

Comparing Renfrewshire Council's performance over time

The percentage of Renfrewshire Council's comparable performance indicators in the top two quartiles improved slightly from 47 per cent in 2011/12 to 48 per cent in 2015/16.



Note: Measuring council performance involves considering the range of how all councils are performing, from lowest to highest for each indicator. From this it is possible to see how one council compares to all councils. Relative performance against other councils is divided into four equal bands, or quartiles. The first quartile contains the best-performing councils for that indicator and the fourth quartile includes the poorest-performing councils.

Source: Audit Scotland; and *Local Government Benchmarking Framework*, Improvement Service, 2015/16



Recent inspection reports by scrutiny bodies have been positive about the council

47. Education Scotland carried out a validated self-evaluation of the council's Education Psychology Service in July 2016. It concluded that the leadership and organisational structure of Children's Services provided a clear vision for change and that councillors provided effective support and challenge.¹

48. Education Scotland carried out ten primary school inspections between March 2013 and June 2016. All reported positively. Over the same period, two positive secondary school inspections took place. One special school inspected in February 2014 has had a follow-up inspection and Education Scotland is monitoring its performance as it merges with others to create a new campus. Since August 2014 to date, eight early years settings, such as nurseries, have been inspected. Almost all have been positive with one setting having a further inspection.

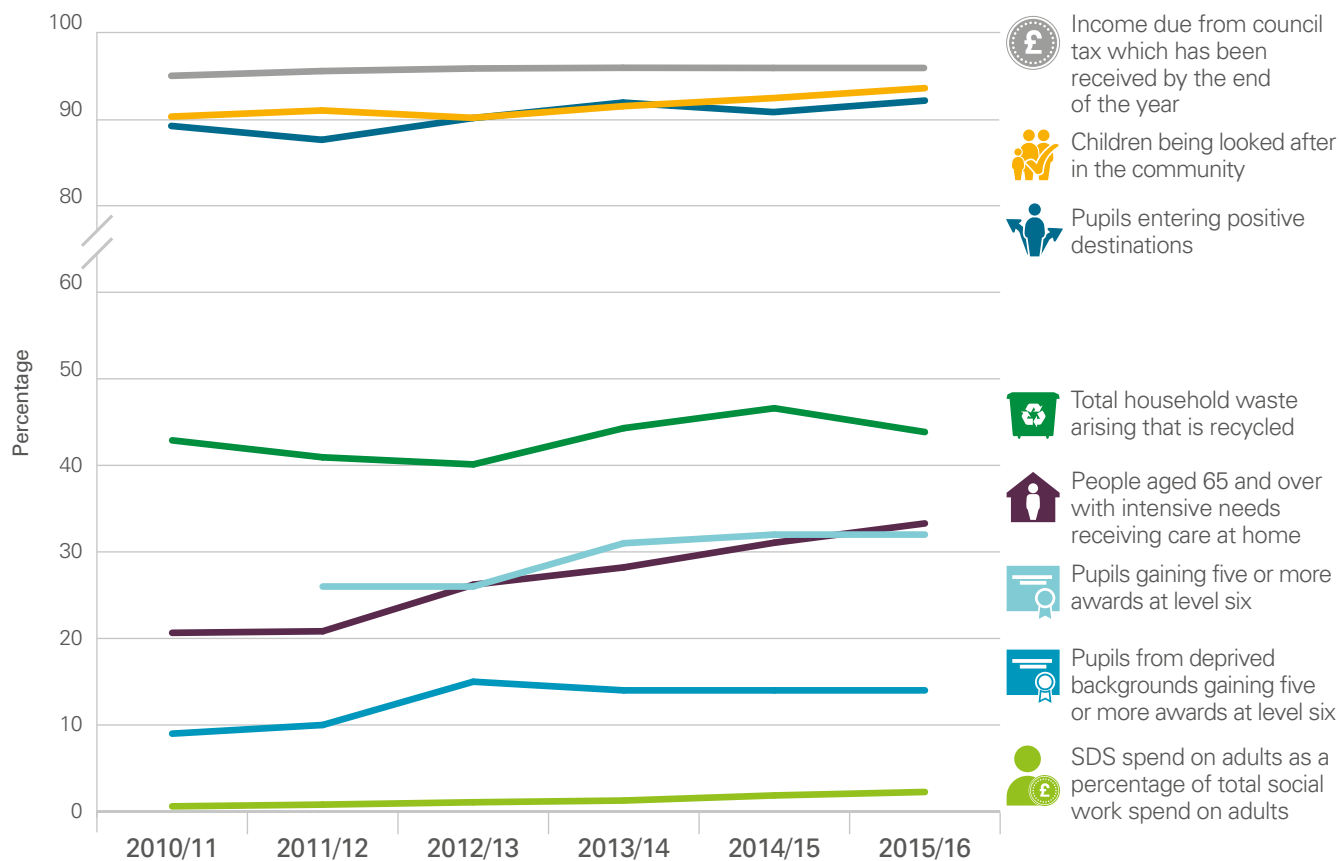
49. In December 2015, the Care Inspectorate published a joint inspection with Education Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland, of services for children and young people in Renfrewshire. The report highlighted that performance in improving outcomes for children and young people was very good. Community planning partners were improving trends by:

- identifying problems in areas such as youth offending, house fires and road accidents involving children
- taking actions to lessen the impact of potential problems or prevent them altogether. It highlighted the council's Street Stuff programme ([Case study 1, page 13](#)) as a means of improving outcomes for children and young people by involving them activities in areas where low-level offending and anti-social behaviour were common.²

Exhibit 5

Renfrewshire Council's performance against selected indicators, 2010/11 to 2015/16

Renfrewshire Council's performance has improved in the majority of these indicators over the last five years.



Notes:

1. Data is not available for all indicators for 2010/11 to 2015/16.
2. Renfrewshire social work services for children continue to have more looked-after children than the Scottish average. The level of deprivation is one of the reasons for this. One of the council's objectives in the Community Plan is to reduce the overall numbers of looked-after children and reduce the number of children who are looked after in a residential unit.
3. The total number of children being looked after in the community refers to the total number of children in the care of their local authority. This includes: children within residential care facilities; children within a community setting; and children who are 'looked after' but remain within their home.
4. We have not included measures of public satisfaction or cost indicators in this analysis.

Source: Audit Scotland; and *Local Government Benchmarking Framework*, Improvement Service, 2015/16



50. Street Stuff, along with other initiatives in Children's Services, has contributed to a 75 per cent reduction in youth-related antisocial behaviour across Renfrewshire in the five years since the project was established in 2009.

51. In recent years, however, incidents of youth disorder appear to have increased. Renfrewshire Member Officer Group says this is due to improvements in the gathering and recording of data and dealing with complaints of this type. It attributes this improvement to Renfrewshire's Community Safety Partnership, and in particular the Community Safety Service, Wardens and the Youth Team.

52. To respond more effectively, the team adapted its shift pattern and now operates at hours where youth disorder has been identified as a problem. This approach together with improved sharing and dissemination of information has helped to identify more incidents and offenders. Reported antisocial behaviour for 2016/17 has decreased by 65 per cent, compared to 2009/10.

Exhibit 6

Renfrewshire Council's performance relative to the Scottish average and family group¹, 2015/16

Indicator	Renfrewshire	Scotland	Family group ²	% point change (2010/11-2015/16)	
Percentage of pupils gaining 5+ awards at Level 6 or higher ³	32%	33%	Performance ranges from 26% to 37%	Renfrewshire 6% Scotland 7% Family group ranges: 5% to 13%	
Family group based on levels of deprivation	Percentage of pupils from deprived areas gaining 5+ awards at Level 6 or higher ³	14%	15%	Performance ranges from 10% to 21 %	Renfrewshire 5% Scotland 5% Family group ranges: 1% to 11%
	SDS spend on adults 18+ as a percentage of total social work spend on adults 18+ ⁴	2%	7%	Performance ranges from 1% to 5%	Renfrewshire 2% Scotland 5% Family group ranges: 0% to 4%
	Percentage of people 65+ with intensive needs receiving care at home	33%	35%	Performance ranges from 23% to 48%	Renfrewshire 13% Scotland 3% Family group ranges: -8% to 13%
	Children being looked after in the community	94%	90%	Performance ranges from 87% to 94%	Renfrewshire 4% Scotland -1% Family group range: -4% to 4%
	Pupils entering positive destinations	92%	93%	Performance ranges from 90% to 95%	Renfrewshire 3% Scotland 4% Family group ranges: 1% to 7%
	Family group based on population density	Percentage of income due from council tax received by the end of the year	96%	96%	Performance ranges from 94% to 98%
The percentage of total household waste that is recycled		44%	44%	Performance ranges from 44% to 59%	Renfrewshire 1% Scotland 6% Family group ranges: -2% to 23%

Notes:

1. Renfrewshire is in one family group for children, social care and housing indicators. These groupings are based on deprivation. Groupings for indicators based on environmental, culture and leisure, corporate and economic development differ as they are based on population density.
2. Family group based on deprivation – Renfrewshire, Falkirk, Fife, South Lanarkshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Clackmannanshire, West Lothian and South Ayrshire. Family group based on population density – Renfrewshire, Angus, East Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, Clackmannanshire, West Lothian, Inverclyde and Midlothian.
3. 2011/12 to 2015/16.
4. Self-directed support (SDS) enables individuals to buy health and social care services, such as services to enable them to remain in their own homes.

Source: Audit Scotland; and *Local Government Benchmarking Framework*, Improvement Service, 2015/16.

The council regularly monitors and reports progress against strategies and plans to councillors

53. Progress against the council plan is reported to the Leadership Board every six months. There are SIPs for all key service areas. They contain detailed action plans which link to the priorities in the council plan. They are also closely linked to other relevant plans, including Renfrewshire's Community Plan and Local Outcome Improvement Plan. Progress against SIP indicators is reported to relevant policy boards every six months. These are the forums where councillors can challenge how services are performing. However, as noted at [paragraph 27](#), in practice the level of scrutiny and challenge at policy boards is often limited.

The council reports performance to the public in a range of ways

54. The council reports information on its performance through its website. It also prepares an annual performance report, *It's all about you*, based on its statutory performance indicators. The council recently sought feedback on its performance reporting to the public. As a result, the council has refreshed how it presents this, to make it easier to find and read. It is also available in multiple languages and formats.

55. *It's all about you* focuses on a select number of indicators which it considers the public most wants to know about. The council reports performance against the full set of 68 indicators in the *Local Government Benchmarking Framework* to the Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board. While this more detailed information is in the public domain through board reports and service improvement outturn reports, it is not easy for people to find.

56. The council should consider how it can make details of its performance as well as other public reports including *It's all about you* easier for people to find, through better signposting on its website.

57. The council produces the *Renfrewshire* magazine which goes out four times a year to over 80,000 households. This generally features an article containing information about service performance and achievements. The latest report notes that 70 per cent of customers are satisfied with the services the council provides.

The council has involved the community in prioritising and planning its services

58. The council regularly asks for local communities' views on a range of issues. It routinely uses its public services panel to seek opinions on how council services perform. It also has five local area committees whose business arrangements are designed to consult and inform the public about local services.

59. The council provides the opportunity for citizens to give their views to the council to try and change things through its petitions process. Petitions allow people to raise concerns with the council either as individuals or on behalf of an organisation.

60. The council keeps in touch with its 21 community councils on a regular basis. Its housing service uses a wide range of ways to involve and inform tenants and residents about how the service is performing. The council also has links with local communities through its partnership arrangements and works closely with Engage Renfrewshire ([Part 4](#)).

- 61.** Children's Services in Renfrewshire have adopted an approach of prevention, described as, 'stop a problem before it develops' and early intervention, described as, 'getting in at the first sight of a problem with the right service'.
- 62.** The approach was developed following a review of policy and statutory responsibilities, the effectiveness of a range of services and approaches and using the information from almost 13,000 children and young people who took part in a wellbeing survey ([Case study 2, page 25](#)).
- 63.** The council plans to develop further the way it engages with local people. It is carrying out a survey of the most effective ways for people to give their views and work with the council. In doing so the council should consider how it can work with partners to streamline and coordinate how they seek the views and work closely with the local communities that they all have in common.
- 64.** The council has policy and procedures in place for responding to aspects of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. It has agreed procedures for dealing with asset transfer requests and participation requests.
- 65.** There have been occasions when the council could have done more to consult and involve local communities in decisions about service delivery. For example, the council's initial decision to close household waste disposal centres was not informed by consultation with users. When this decision was overturned there was recognition that the changes were having a greater impact on usage than anticipated. In 2012/13, the council's decision to close Elderslie and Johnstone swimming facilities led to nine petitions, one of which requested public consultation. The council should continue to review how it consults with service users to inform decisions on future service delivery.

Case study 2



Renfrewshire's Child Wellbeing Survey – improving outcomes for children

The Achieving Step Change (ASC) programme, established in Renfrewshire in 2010, is funded by the Big Lottery and matched by funding from the council. The programme's main aim is to ensure that Renfrewshire's plans for children's services focus on improving outcomes for children and incorporates their views in the process.

The ASC programme achieved extensive engagement with children by using an online questionnaire (the Wellbeing Survey). The questionnaire was developed in partnership with the Dartington Social Research Unit, a charity focused on improving children's lives.

All children aged 9–17 years old in Renfrewshire and in education were invited to complete the questionnaire between September and November 2011. Out of around 15,000 children invited to take part almost 13,000 replied. A sample of 500 parents with children under the age of eight was also carried out. Dartington Social Research Unit analysed the data from the surveys and shared this with the council's Corporate Management Team and senior officers from a range of partners at a four-day workshop.

The output from the workshop influenced the content of the council's Integrated Children's Services Plan for 2013-16. The main issues to be addressed were:

- maintaining the strong health and development of the majority of children
- supporting children in their local communities and with their families, where safe and appropriate
- improving behaviour, physical health and emotional wellbeing
- improving the developmental outcomes for children entering primary school.

The ASC project team secured external funding of over £1 million to develop a range of evidence-based programmes to help improve outcomes for children. The programmes and their impact include:

- **Triple P – Positive Parenting Programme** helps parents develop the skills they need to support their children as they grow up. Since it was launched in 2011 almost 2,000 parents have taken part. Feedback received has reported high levels of satisfaction, using positive parenting practices, more confident parenting, a reduction in stress levels and a positive impact on children's behaviour.
- **Incredible Years** is a programme to target disruptive behaviour problems. To date 15 groups have run in ten centres with almost 300 parents taking part in the programme and over 60 per cent completing the 18-week course. Feedback confirms lower levels of aggression by their children, better child-to-child as well as child-to-parent relationships and increased problem-solving ability.
- **Family Nurse Partnership (FNP)** is a prenatal and infancy nurse home visiting programme for young first time mothers (under the age of 19). The FNP service is in the early stages in Renfrewshire, however there are signs of positive impact. There have been 72 young women who have taken part and are showing positive approaches to being a parent with increased likelihood of breast-feeding and a reduction in the number who are smoking.
- **Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)** is a social and emotional learning programme for primary school children. The project aims to improve cooperation, sharing skills, peer relations, mental health and reduce aggression, the impact of mental health problems, anxiety, depression and bullying. The council is working with Barnardo's, who obtained Big Lottery Funding to implement the programme in ten schools with full training, resource and support at no cost. The initial feedback is that the programme is having a positive impact on the young people taking part. Barnardo's, working with the Programme developer, has reviewed the PATHS delivery across the United Kingdom. An award of model school was made to eight schools across the UK. Three of these schools are in Renfrewshire.

Case study 2 (continued)

- **Functional Family Therapy (FFT)** aims to improve outcomes for young people aged between 11 and 18 years old. Renfrewshire is the first local authority in Scotland to provide FFT. So far over 100 families have taken part and have confirmed that there has been a positive change in behaviours. In Renfrewshire, one of the aims of FFT was to help young people avoid being accommodated by the local authority. Twenty-five young people deemed to be at high risk of being accommodated have been supported to remain at home. Over the last two years this has saved approximately £1.5 million in accommodation costs. FFT is evaluated by the Programme developers and the Renfrewshire service has been evaluated as the best performing FFT team in Europe.
- **Families and Schools Together (FAST)** programme makes use of supportive relationships between and within families, the child's school and the local community and is delivered on a group basis for a number of families in a primary school. The first FAST programme in Glencoats primary school in Renfrewshire was attended by 23 families with 20 taking part in at least six sessions. The retention rate was 87 per cent which is above the target rate of 80 per cent. The evaluation found a positive impact for the children, their parents, the school and the wider community. Glencoats has embarked on their second programme with ten other schools in Renfrewshire now involved in the delivery of FAST.
- **Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery (CEDAR)** is a 12-week programme for children aged 4-16 years old affected by domestic abuse. Children attend 12 group sessions and a mothers' group runs alongside this to provide support as they help their children recover from domestic abuse. Since it started six CEDAR groups have been delivered and have made a positive change for almost all of the participants with over 80 per cent of participants reporting positive changes and 94 per cent of children reporting they now know how to keep safe and talk to their mother about their feelings.

Dartington Social Research Unit has drawn on lessons learned from Renfrewshire to develop the survey and extend it to other areas. Four other councils in Scotland have undertaken surveys: Angus, Dundee, North Ayrshire and Perth and Kinross. Renfrewshire is working with these councils and Dartington Social Research Unit to ensure that learning is shared to improve services and that children are involved effectively.

In 2016, Renfrewshire was the first local authority in the UK to repeat the children's wellbeing survey, inviting 11,800 children and young people aged 9–16 years old and in education to participate. Just under 10,500 children and young people responded. The council and its Community Planning Partnership are using the survey data to develop the priorities for agencies delivering services for children, young people and their families.

Renfrewshire Children's Services is delivering a comprehensive range of events, including workshops for school leaders, community planning partners, the voluntary sector and, most importantly, children and young people to explore the data from the survey. The output from these will help to develop the next Renfrewshire Children's Services Plan.

Source: Renfrewshire Council

Part 3

Is the council using its resources effectively?



Renfrewshire Council has effective financial planning and management arrangements in place. Budgets are clearly linked to strategic priorities

The council faces a significant funding gap in the medium term. It is developing the next phase of its Better Council Change Programme to deliver the savings required.

The council has a history of delivering within budget which it has achieved through debt smoothing and workforce reductions resulting from the Better Council Change Programme. The council has high levels of reserves and low levels of long-term debt. A large proportion of reserves are earmarked for specific purposes and aligned to the council's strategic objectives.

The council recognises that in order to manage future budget pressures it will need to make significant changes in how it delivers services.

No detailed medium- or long-term strategic workforce plan is in place. The council approved a new three-year organisational development strategy in 2015 but is still in the early stages of implementing it. The council recognises that it needs to develop better workforce planning; this will be critical to managing future service changes.

The council manages its finances effectively

66. The council has well-established processes for setting and monitoring budgets. Budgets are developed by the Director of Finance and Resources and set by the council at its statutory meeting. Each directorate produces income and expenditure estimates based on the SIPs. SIPs outline the activities of each directorate and how these support the priorities and delivery of the council plan. This creates a clear link between budget-setting and the council's objectives.

67. The council has underspent against its revenue budget, covering day-to-day spending, over the last four years ([Exhibit 7, page 28](#)). The underspends have arisen owing to effective budget management and higher levels of council tax collection over these periods.

68. The council agreed its revenue budget for 2016/17 in March 2016 and it forecast a breakeven position. The latest budget monitoring report at 7 June forecasts a slight year-end underspend of £4,000.

Exhibit 7

Underspend and variance to planned underspend



The council has underspent against its revenue budget for the last four years.

Year	Total under/ (over) spend (£m)	Planned under/ (over) spend (£m)	Variance to plan (£m)	Underspend % of net expenditure
2012/13	5.5	0.7	4.8 Favourable	1.4%
2013/14	2.0	1.1	0.9 Favourable	0.5%
2014/15	5.9	5.1	0.8 Favourable	1.6%
2015/16	2.5	0.6	1.9 Favourable	0.7%

Notes:

1. The budgeted underspend represents the figure that the council had set as its proposed position at the end of the financial year.
2. The variance to plan figure represents the additional underspend over and above what the council had anticipated when it originally set its budget.

Source: Audited financial statements

The council has a high level of usable reserves

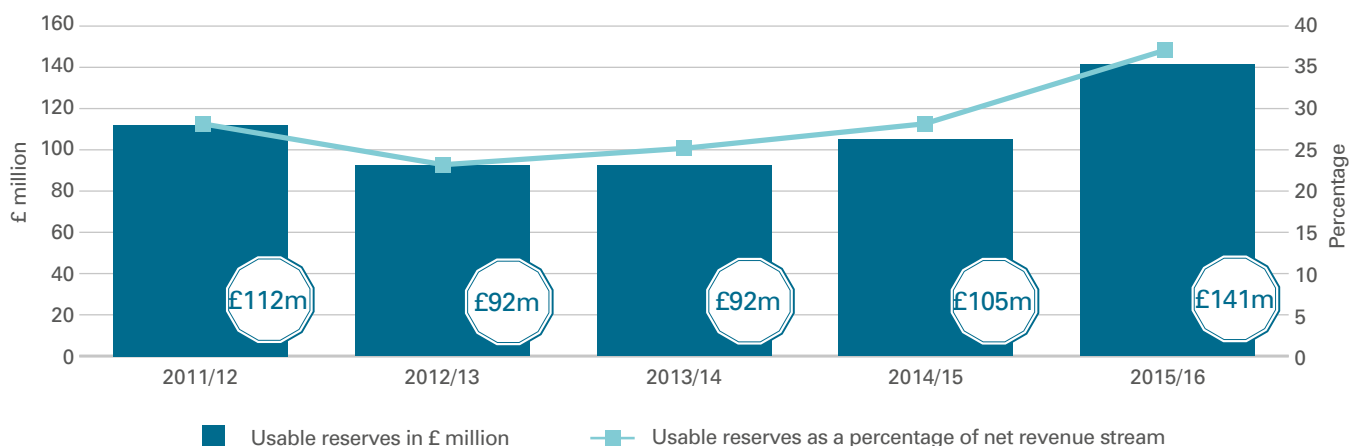
69. The council has made effective use of reserves to support its medium-term financial planning objectives and in managing its capital and revenue spending commitments.

70. The council's level of usable reserves as a percentage of net revenue has increased from 28 per cent in 2011/12 to 37 per cent in 2015/16 ([Exhibit 8](#)), the highest percentage in Scotland. Between 2011/12 and 2015/16 usable reserves have increased by almost £30 million to £141 million ([Exhibit 9, page 29](#)). The largest increases have been in the last two years. In 2014/15, the usable reserves increased by £13 million and in 2015/16 by £36 million. In 2015/16, the council had the second highest level of usable reserves, relative to its size, of all mainland councils.

Exhibit 8

Usable reserves as a percentage of net revenue

The level of usable reserves has increased significantly since 2011/12.



Source: Audited financial statements

Exhibit 9

Usable reserves

Description	31 March 2016 £ million	31 March 2015 £ million
General Fund	61.378	58.854
Housing Revenue Reserve	10.239	10.645
Revenue Statutory Funds	2.855	2.853
Capital Receipts Reserve	4.116	3.760
Capital Statutory Funds	62.788	29.006
Total usable reserves	141.376	105.118

Source: Renfrewshire Council 2015/16 financial statements

71. The main increase in reserves in 2015/16 is due to a £34 million transfer from the General Fund and Housing Revenue account to the Capital Statutory Funds. This transfer is significantly higher than for any other mainland council.

72. Of the £141 million total reserves in 2015/16 ([Exhibit 9](#)), around £130 million are Statutory Reserves or have been ring-fenced for future spending plans. The General Fund balance includes ring-fenced elements totalling £54 million. This includes the Waste Management Strategy Fund (£7 million), Paisley Town Centre Heritage Asset Strategy Fund (£8 million), Service Modernisation and Reform Fund (£6 million) and Tackling Poverty Fund (£4 million).

73. Some of the General Fund reserves have been in place for a number of years while others are relatively new and result from recent developments such as the City Deal. From the available information it is difficult to distinguish whether the council will use some of these reserves for capital or revenue expenditure.

74. The council's reserve strategy in the Medium to Longer Term Financial Strategy requires it to maintain a minimum unallocated General Fund reserve as a protection against unexpected costs or reductions in income. The reserves strategy requires it to maintain unallocated usable reserves at around two per cent of net expenditure. The level of unallocated reserves has historically been one per cent to two per cent of net expenditure with a minimum level of £7 million. In 2015/16 the level of unallocated reserves was £7.013 million which was 1.9 per cent of net expenditure.

Investing in assets has been a strategic priority

75. The council has invested significantly in its capital infrastructure. Since 2013/14 capital expenditure has totalled over £185 million.

76. The council approved its Corporate Asset Strategy 2015-18 in August 2015. The strategy sets a high-level framework for managing the council's assets. The strategy links to the council plan, community plan, Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) and the Better Council Change Programme (BCCP). The SOA is an agreement between community planning partnerships and the Scottish

Government setting out local improvement and priorities. The strategy aligns the council's asset management to its savings programme.

77. The strategy outlines the council's main investment programmes which include the following:

- Schools estate programme covering school buildings and land: spend of £29 million for 2016/17, and proposed investment of £15.6 million for 2017/18 and £4.5 million for 2018/19.
- Street lighting investment strategy: investment of £9.8 million in 2016/17.
- City Deal: spend of £7 million in 2016/17 and proposed investment of £9.3 million in 2017/18 and a further £33.2 million in 2018/19.
- Paisley Town Centre regeneration: proposed investment of £41 million.
- Completion of a £138 million housing investment delivery plan for the Scottish Housing Quality Standard programme to bring council houses up to the required standard.

The council has a low level of borrowing

78. At 31 March 2016 the council's total long-term borrowing was £255 million, including long-term liabilities relating to a schools public private partnership (PPP) finance lease of £80 million. The council's overall borrowing (excluding PPP) consists of loans of £169 million from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), which provides loans to local authorities and market loans of £55 million.

79. The council has a policy to limit variable rate borrowing to a maximum 25 per cent of all borrowing. In 2015/16, 76 per cent of the council's debt was at a fixed rate. During 2015/16 the council operated within the prudential indicators for the year as set out in its Treasury Policy Statement.

80. Exhibit 10 (page 31) shows the level of long-term borrowing and external debt over the last five years. There has been an overall decrease in borrowing since 2011/12. The council has achieved this through its Debt Smoothing Strategy, to minimise the cost of servicing debt, which is part of the BCCP. The council has proportionally lower levels of long-term borrowing in comparison to other councils. Long-term debt and other long-term liabilities as a percentage of net revenue has shown an overall decrease over the last five years and is the fifth lowest in Scotland (excluding Orkney and Shetland).

The council has developed savings plans

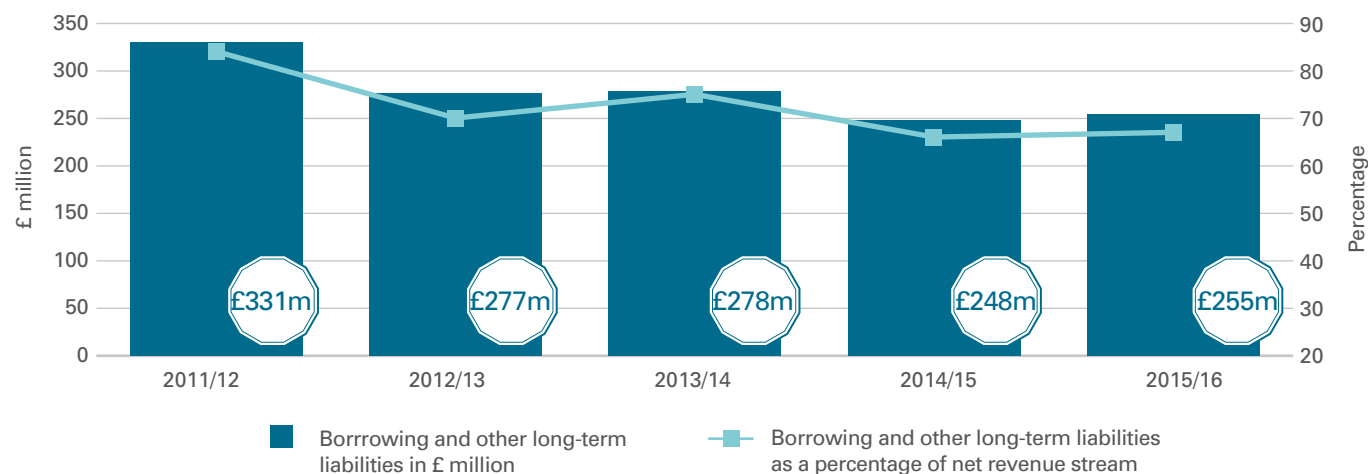
81. The council has a strong focus on financial planning and ensuring its financial position remains strong over the medium and longer term. The annual budgets produced are detailed and set out pressures and demands that could affect future finances.

82. It also prepares detailed medium-term plans. These set out the local and national context within which the council operates and how these will affect future finances. It also outlines pressures on Renfrewshire and the strategies the council uses to mitigate these, including the medium-term reserves strategy, to ensure the council is aware of future budget demands.

Exhibit 10

Borrowing and long-term liabilities as a percentage of net revenue

The council has relatively low borrowing and debt compared to other councils.



Source: Audited financial statements

83. The medium-term plans also incorporate scenario planning, which highlights the best and worst case outcomes for the council. The Financial Outlook Report 2017/18 – 2019/20 highlights that savings in the region of £16 million to £27 million a year will be required in the period to 2020. This means the council will need to save around £56 million over the period 2017-20. This is a mid-range estimate. Optimistic and pessimistic scenarios are £46 million and £80 million respectively.

84. In recent years the council has achieved most of its savings through its Debt Smoothing Strategy, staff leaving through voluntary redundancies and early retirements arising from the BCCP ([Part 5](#)).


85. The council recognises that in order to manage future budget pressures it will need to make significant changes in how it delivers services.

The council needs to implement its Organisational Development Strategy

86. The council's Organisational Development Strategy 2016-19 was approved in December 2015 but is only in the early stages of implementation. This strategy sets out how the council will provide the skills and money it needs to develop as an organisation. The strategy focuses specifically on improving how the council will:

- manage and develop its performance
- plan its workforce needs
- ensure its workforce has the right skills, are motivated, feel part of the organisation and are adaptive.

The council needs to develop its approach to strategic workforce planning

87. The Accounts Commission's [*Local government in Scotland: Performance and challenges 2017*](#)  report highlighted the need to plan and manage reductions to council workforces. Failing to do this can affect the skills mix and ability of the organisation to deliver, manage and scrutinise services effectively. The report advises councils to have effective systems in place for managing their workforce and monitoring staffing levels, and that workforce information should be in line with other long-term plans such as financial plans.

88. Between 2010/11 and 2015/16 the council reduced staff numbers by 1,150. This was part of the council's BCCP through voluntary early retirement and voluntary redundancy. The council has also redesigned services, that is, changing how services are provided and integrated. These changes have had a substantial impact on some services with a reduction of 369 staff within Community Resources.

89. The council's previous approach of voluntary redundancy and early retirement was effective in supporting the delivery of change projects to generate the financial savings required, although it has reduced capacity in some services.

90. The council does not have a strategic workforce plan in place. Services are in the early stages of developing workforce plans. At present, these plans are short term and only consider workforce needs for the current year, 2017/18. The council intends these plans to be three-year rolling plans and to embed actions in SIPs. The council recognises that it will need to fully develop this workforce planning approach over a longer term.

Sickness absence rates have increased slightly

91. In 2015/16 teachers' sickness absence was 6.4 days, and 10.4 days for other council employees. This had slightly increased from the previous year when the rates were 6.0 for teachers and 9.9 for other council employees. The figure is above the Scottish average of 6.1 days for teachers and slightly below the Scottish average of 10.6 days for other employees.

The council is reviewing how it communicates with its workforce

92. The council surveys employees every three years. The latest survey was in 2016 and reported to CMT in May 2017. The response rate was ten per cent, a reduction from 2013 when there was a response rate of 23 per cent. The reduction in the response rate was directly attributed to the timescale for completing the survey. The CMT agreed this would be addressed for the next staff survey.

93. From those who responded to the 2017 staff survey the following emerged:

- Almost 73 per cent of employees said they are aware to some extent or fully aware of the council's vision and values. This is slightly down from 2013 when over 75 per cent of employees agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the council's values and vision.
- Only ten per cent of staff felt fully informed about what is happening in the council with almost 50 per cent feeling informed to some extent. Less than

four per cent of respondents were fully aware of the BCCP with almost 50 per cent saying that they were slightly or significantly more aware than the previous year.

94. The council has improved staff understanding of its vision and values and how it communicates with its workforce. It could do more to gather views to ensure staff are on board with the changes the council is making. The council could also do more to inform staff of the progress updates to the BCCP.

95. In October 2016 the council launched the Staff Recognition Awards Scheme, designed to improve teamwork and partnership working. The awards focus on teams and individuals who 'have gone the extra mile to deliver services that make a lasting and positive difference to the lives of local people and stay true to the council's vision'.

96. We held focus groups with staff from across grades and council services. Staff told us:

- they have been and continue to be involved in reviewing and redesigning services at various stages of the process
- there has been a significant improvement in the level of information that senior managers, especially the Chief Executive, make available to staff to help them understand what changes are happening in the council
- there were improved opportunities for young people and career progression
- the council environment is both challenging and rewarding and staff have an increased sense of belonging.

The council has effective arrangements in place for procurement

97. The council has effective arrangements in place for procurement and is performing well in comparison to other councils. The council's procurement team won the 2016/17 Government Opportunities Scotland Excellence in Public Procurement Awards. A 2016 assessment by Scotland Excel scored the council's overall performance at 83 per cent for leadership and governance, development and tendering, contract and purchasing processes. Scotland Excel is Scotland's centre of procurement expertise for local authorities. Its score was the highest of the 16 councils reviewed to date and well above the average of 65 per cent.

98. Scotland Excel rated the council's procurement practices and procedures as 'superior performance', the first council in Scotland to achieve this. The council also won a Government Opportunities (GO) Awards Scotland in 2016 for Procurement Team of the Year – Local Government and highly commended for the Procurement People of Today and Tomorrow Award.

99. The council incorporates community benefit clauses and requirements into all its contracts. This is formalised in the council's Sustainable Procurement Strategy and Community Benefit Strategy. These clauses aim to deliver the following activities:

- Targeted Employment and Training Initiative
- Educational Support Initiative
- Supply Chain Development Activities
- Vocational Training
- Community, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental Initiatives
- Supported Business, Third Sector and Voluntary Sector Initiative
- Equality and Diversity Initiative
- Creating a Sustainable Renfrewshire.

Part 4

Is the council working well with its partners?



The council is working well with its main partners and its communities

The council is working closely with its partners to improve local outcomes with a clear focus on intervening early to identify and address potential problems.

The council and its partners have effective arrangements for sharing information to improve how services are provided within the community.

Close working with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde ensured the council was well prepared for introducing the new integration joint board (IJB). Challenges remain in the areas of budget setting and how services are provided.

The council is an active partner in the Glasgow City Region City Deal and outline business plans have been completed.

The council and its partners are good at working with, and involving, communities. This provides a positive base for them to go further and fully implement the provisions of the Community Empowerment Act.

CPP partners need to continue to work together on joint priorities and to strengthen partnership working. They need to plan their budgets and finances to provide a clearer picture of the overall resources available.

The council works closely with its partners to improve local outcomes and focuses on early intervention

100. The council is part of Renfrewshire's Community Planning Partnership (CPP), and contributes to delivering the Community Plan 2013-23 and the SOA. Community planning is the process by which councils and other public bodies work with local communities, businesses and voluntary groups to plan and deliver better services and improve the lives of people who live in Scotland. Community planning is led by CPPs and there are 32 CPPs covering each council area.

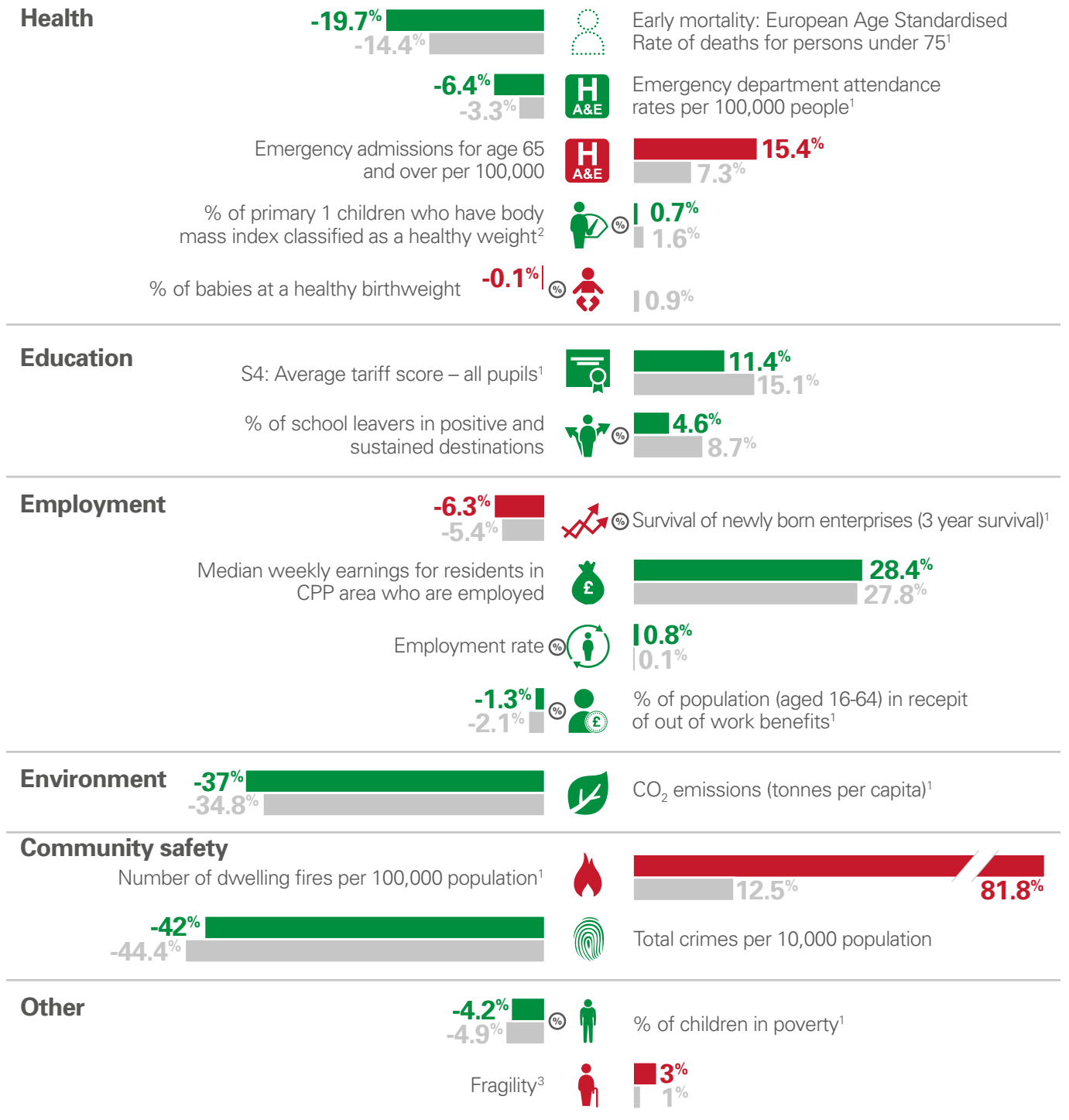
101. The community plan sets out six key themes ([Exhibit 2, page 11](#)). Renfrewshire's CPP board oversees and directs six community planning thematic boards, each of which reflects one of the key themes.

102. Renfrewshire's performance across the indicators tends to mirror national trends and outcomes are generally improving for local people. Despite improvements in a number of areas, Renfrewshire's performance generally remains below the national average ([Exhibit 11, page 36](#)).

Exhibit 11

Change in performance for Renfrewshire outcomes, 2004/05 – 2014/15

Outcomes for Renfrewshire's communities are generally improving, with 11 out of 16 indicators showing improvement.



 Renfrewshire  Scotland

 Percentage point change – raw data is not available therefore absolute changes are shown.

Notes:

1. Imputed and projected data has been calculated using different methodologies for different measures where raw data is not yet available.
2. Primary 1 BMI figures are based on a three-year rolling average.
3. Fragility is a weighted combination of three indicators: depopulation, rural depopulation and old age dependency ratio.

Source: Audit Scotland; and *Community Planning Outcomes Profile*, Improvement Service, 2014/15

103. Exhibit 11 shows:

- The rate of Primary 1 children who have a healthy body mass index weight in Renfrewshire increased by 0.7 percentage points compared to an increase of 1.6 percentage points across Scotland.
- The number of those receiving out of work benefits (aged 16-64) in Renfrewshire decreased by 1.3 percentage points, compared to a national decrease of 2.1 percentage points.
- Child poverty in Renfrewshire decreased by 4.2 percentage points compared to a national decrease of 4.9 percentage points across Scotland.
- Emergency admissions for those aged 65 and over per 100,000 of the population increased by over 15 per cent in Renfrewshire, which is more than double the rate of increase across Scotland (seven per cent).
- Emergency department attendance rates per 100,000 people decreased by 6.4 per cent, compared to a national decrease of 3.3 per cent. Renfrewshire still has a significantly higher proportion of emergency department attendance rates per 100,000 people than the national average.
- Early mortality rates in Renfrewshire decreased by almost 20 per cent, compared to a national decrease of 14 per cent. Renfrewshire still has a higher rate of early mortality compared to the Scottish average.
- S4 average tariff score in Renfrewshire increased by over 11 per cent, compared to a national increase of over 15 per cent.
- Total crimes per 10,000 of the population decreased by 42 per cent in Renfrewshire, compared to a national decrease of over 44 per cent. Despite this improvement, the incidence of crime continues to be higher in Renfrewshire when compared to the national average.

Renfrewshire community planning partners continue to face significant challenges

104. As demonstrated in [Exhibit 11](#), outcomes in Renfrewshire are generally improving. But the area continues to face significant challenges in improving some outcomes relating to its history of economic deprivation and poor health. The CPP's latest progress report to the board in September 2016 highlighted a number of challenges that partners continue to face in addressing deep-rooted inequalities:

- Alcohol-related hospital admissions and drug-related hospital discharges are above the baseline figure and the targets set by the CPP.
- The percentage of children on the Child Protection Register affected by parental substance abuse remains above target. The percentage of babies with a low birth weight and the number of children at 6-8 weeks exclusively breastfed both show slight deterioration since 2011/12.

- The level of obesity in Primary 1 children is higher than the baseline level and the percentage of looked-after young people in positive destinations, such as further study, training or employment, remains slightly below target.
- Estimates show a slight decrease in the resident population of Renfrewshire from the 2011 census figure. Vacant retail space has fallen by 16 per cent between 2012 and 2015/16, which is below the target of 20 per cent.
- Fewer people are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live and the number of complaints about vandalism and youth disorder has increased. However, as noted in [Part 2](#), this may be as a result of the increased ability of Renfrewshire's Community Safety Partnership to gather and record data about, and deal with, complaints.
- The number of public service panel respondents indicating satisfaction with local public services has decreased slightly from 68 per cent to 67 per cent. The number of panel respondents using the Internet to contact local public services decreased from 33 per cent in 2014 to 29 per cent in 2016.
- Renfrewshire CPP remains behind target for increasing the level of household waste recycled, reducing the level of CO₂ emissions from the council's vehicle fleet and reducing the amount of car journeys to schools.

The council and its partners have effective arrangements for sharing information that improves how services are provided

105. We found that partners have effective arrangements in place for sharing information that can lead to improving how services are provided. The Renfrewshire Community Safety Partnership works together to protect vulnerable individuals and tackle persistent offenders, using the skill base of partners. The approach is based on getting the correct professionals involved at an early stage to ensure that a preventative approach is adopted ([Case study 3, page 39](#)).

The council and its partners have developed a good base to formally integrate health and social care although ongoing challenges remain

106. Renfrewshire Integration Joint Board (IJB), which provides health and social care services, has been fully operational since April 2016. The IJB approved its Strategic Plan 2016-19 in March 2016, setting out its objectives and priorities over the three-year period.

107. Renfrewshire was the first council to have an integration scheme in place with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC). Governance arrangements, such as systems for managing, monitoring and scrutinising the IJB's business and finances are well developed. Processes are in place to allow the Chief Officer and the Chief Financial Officer to discuss significant issues with partners and the senior management of partner organisations.

108. At its meeting on 10 March 2017, the IJB approved the 2017/18 council adult social care budget allocation but rejected NHSGGC's proposed 2017/18 health budget allocation on the basis that it did not meet the Scottish Government direction that the level of budget to be allocated is maintained at 2016/17 cash levels. This was in common with the other IJB's within the health board's area.

109. It is anticipated that the public sector in Scotland will continue to face a challenging medium-term financial outlook. This will potentially have significant implications for Renfrewshire IJB's parent organisations and therefore the delegated Health and Adult Social Care budgets.

Case study 3



Renfrewshire Community Safety Partnership: daily tasking

Partnership daily tasking takes place each day within the Community Safety Partnership Hub to review relevant incidents over the previous 24 hours. The information is then given to the most appropriate service to look at an earlier intervention approach to resolve the issue before it worsens. The outcomes of each incident are monitored to identify any patterns of persistent behaviour. This means that resources, including people and money, are deployed based on evidence.

Group members

Community Resources (chair)	Development and Housing Services
Police Scotland	Registered Social Landlords (as appropriate)
Scottish Fire and Rescue	Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership
Adult Services	Third Sector Representatives
Children's Services	Victim Support

The areas of focus that the daily tasking group seeks to exchange and share information about include: child, adult, public and environmental protection, offender management and community safety.

This approach has improved local communities' perception of Renfrewshire as a safe place to live. It has reduced incidents of antisocial behaviour, the number of crimes of violence and complaints of vandalism and youth disorder. In turn, the partnership has revisited and increased the intended improvement targets in its Local Outcome Improvement Plan as follows:

- Increase in people who think Renfrewshire is a safe place to live – current performance 80 per cent (2014/15), Year 3 target revised from 45 per cent to 83 per cent, Year 10 target revised from 66 per cent to 87 per cent.
- Reduction in reported incidents of antisocial behaviour – current performance, 12,177(2014/15), Year 3 target revised from 16,277 to 11,489, Year 10 target revised from 13,404 to 9,575.
- Reduction in the number of crimes of violence – current performance, 255 (2014/15), Year 3 target revised from 375 to 252, Year 10 target revised from 333 to 208.
- Reduction in complaints about vandalism and youth disorder – current performance, 2,627 (2014/15), Year 3 target revised from 2,921 to 2,614, Year 10 target revised from 2,767 to 2,306.

Note: Case study includes combined data from Renfrewshire Police and Renfrewshire Community Safety Partnership and as a result progress against some indicators may vary to those listed in [Part 2](#) which are either council specific or based on Improvement Service outcomes in the *Local Government Benchmarking Framework* and Community Planning Outcomes Profile.

Source: Renfrewshire Council (details from the Daily Tasking Implementation Review and Safer and Stronger Renfrewshire Thematic Board Spotlight Report from May 2016)

The council is working with partners to progress the City Deal projects

110. City Deals provide city regions with the opportunity to deliver infrastructure, innovation and employment projects to improve the economic performance of the city region. The UK and Scottish governments both provide funding with councils contributing additional funding. Renfrewshire Council became part of the £1.13 billion Glasgow City Region City Deal, with seven other councils, in 2014. The council is an equal partner and plays an active role in the governance structure for managing, monitoring and scrutinising the delivery of projects. It is represented on all eight policy portfolios and takes the lead on the Glasgow City Region policy portfolio focusing on enterprise.

111. Three City Deal infrastructure projects are being developed in Renfrewshire, with funding of £274 million. Progress continues to be made on developing the projects and outline business cases (OBCs) are complete for the three projects.

- The **Glasgow Airport Investment Area Project (GAIA)** will improve roads, enabling new business sites to be built near the airport. The project will include improvements to walking and cycling links.
- The **Clyde Waterfront and Renfrew Riverside Project (CWRR)** includes a new opening bridge over the River Clyde between Renfrew and Yoker/ Clydebank, and building the Renfrew North Development Road. Following approval of the OBCs, work will continue on developing the preferred options and progressing through the statutory processes with the aim of starting construction in spring 2018.
- The **Airport Access Project (AAP)**, owing to its importance to the overall Infrastructure Fund Programme, is designated as one of only two 'regional' projects in the programme. The project is being jointly delivered by Renfrewshire Council and Glasgow City Council. The project aims to deliver a new direct rail link between Glasgow Airport and Glasgow Central Station, stopping at Paisley Gilmour Street station. Owing to the technical complexities of this project, the AAP has a significantly longer development process. Construction is currently scheduled to start in 2022 and, the project is expected to be finished and running by 2025.

Community planning arrangements in Renfrewshire encourage involvement by local communities

112. There are many positive examples where the council and its partners have engaged well with service users.

113. Engage Renfrewshire is an important partner for the council and other public bodies, the organisation brings together local community groups, charities and community-based organisations. It helps in establishing links between third sector organisations and communities with the council, NHS and other partners. Its aim is to promote the views of local people. The Chief Executive of Engage Renfrewshire chairs the Renfrewshire Forum for Empowering Communities. This is one of the six community planning thematic boards and has been operating since May 2013. It is made up of senior third sector managers operating in Renfrewshire. The forum receives updates at its meetings from Engage Renfrewshire representatives who sit on each of the thematic boards.

114. Engage Renfrewshire and the Forum for Empowering Communities are leading on the council and its partner's preparation for aspects of the Community Empowerment Act. This act aims to give communities greater influence or control over things that matter to them. As well as the Community Planning Conference, it has held workshops with local community groups and is preparing a localised toolkit to raise awareness of the provisions of the Community Empowerment Act among local community groups.

Partnership working in Renfrewshire is strong and the CPP continues to strengthen the way it works.

115. In December 2016, Renfrewshire CPP Board agreed a new governance structure for managing, monitoring and scrutinising the partnership's business. This takes account of new partnership arrangements such as the IJB. It also reflects other priorities in the area such as partnership working in relation to the Tackling Poverty Programme, the bid for UK City of Culture 2021 and the Glasgow City Region City Deal.

116. CPP partners recognise that an area for improvement is how partners plan budgets and finances to provide a clearer overall picture of the funds available to the CPP. The partnership has taken early action to outline each partner's approach to financial planning and budgeting. This identified similarities and differences in partners' approaches to financial planning. With budgets not known until different times in the year, it is difficult to determine what money and staffing resources are available over the year and to fully understand the resources available to the CPP.

Part 5

Is the council demonstrating continuous improvement?



The council has a good record of service delivery. But officers recognise that the new council will need to substantially review how future services are provided

Since the last Best Value audit, the council has continued to demonstrate a high level of ambition in a challenging political environment.

The council has demonstrated a commitment to develop different ways in which services are delivered but more wide-ranging change and transformation is required.

The council continues to develop how it uses self-evaluation and service reviews to improve how services are delivered.

The council has improved since the last Best Value audit but the political environment remains challenging

117. Renfrewshire Council's Best Value audit timeline is set out in the [Appendix](#). The council has continued to improve the way it manages services since its previous Best Value review in 2006. However, there are ongoing concerns around cross-party working relationships. [Exhibit 12 \(page 43\)](#) highlights some of the main changes.



The Better Council Change Programme has helped deliver savings and redesign how services are provided

118. In February 2014 the council established the Better Council Change Programme (BCCP). The objectives of the programme, outlined at [Exhibit 13 \(page 44\)](#), cover the period 2015/16 to 2017/18. The aim of the programme was to enable the council to become more efficient while continuing to be financially sustainable, that is, providing for its financial needs over the medium to long term. This built on the council's previous initiative, Transforming Renfrewshire, that saw the council achieve savings of £12 million by modernising its customer services, providing more online systems and introducing flexible working for employees.

Exhibit 12

Comparing selected Best Value judgements, 2006 and 2017

The difference in Controller of Audit judgements between 2006 and 2017 shows progress made by Renfrewshire Council.

Controller of Audit judgement  2006	Controller of Audit judgement  2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, the council demonstrates a strong commitment to delivering continuous improvement and is embedding the appropriate corporate systems to support this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council is dealing with the challenges through a shared ownership of a clear and ambitious vision. There is effective alignment of systems and structures with organisational priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elected members and senior officers provide strong and effective leadership in Renfrewshire. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership in the council is effective and there is a good working relationship within the Corporate Management Team and between officers and councillors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This relationship has been critical in bringing greater stability to the historically volatile political culture in the council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council has a challenging political environment with difficult working relationships between the administration and the main opposition party.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council has established a well-integrated strategic planning framework based on the area's broader community planning objectives and the council's arrangements overall represent a firm foundation from which to build improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council's vision demonstrates a high level of ambition. Priorities reflect local need and seek to improve the area. Structures are aligned to support organisational priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council has reviewed its political structures for policy and decision-making twice, first in 2001 with further refinement in 2002. While these arrangements are broadly effective, there remains scope for improvement, particularly around the council's scrutiny arrangement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The operation and performance of the Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board has been weak. The level of scrutiny and challenge at policy boards could be improved.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council is focused on the people it serves and has invested in improving its approach to customer care. It works well with partners at a strategic level but could work better with the voluntary sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council is improving access to its services through increased use of digital solutions. 'MyAccount' provides Renfrewshire citizens with an easy to access online self-service facility. Initial sign-up is encouraging with uptake by 20,000 households (23 per cent) in the first 14 months.

Source: Audit Scotland; and *Renfrewshire Council: The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning*, Accounts Commission, July 2006

Exhibit 13

Better Council Change Programme

The aims of the Better Council Change Programme

- To put our customers and communities at the centre of all we do, forecasting their needs to inform service design with our partners and promoting the concept of a cooperative council.
- To enable our people to have the right skills and leadership to deliver in a challenging, changing work environment.
- To exploit the potential of technology to support better information management, to provide the right information in a timely fashion to employees, citizens and customers, and to help deliver better outcome-based services.
- To ensure that all assets – buildings, land, transport, equipment and technology – are aligned to delivering council priorities.

Source: Renfrewshire Council, February 2014

119. The BCCP and Transforming Renfrewshire has helped the council achieve savings of £117 million since 2011/12 through a number of initiatives including:

- the creation of a Corporate Business Support Service with the aim of providing improved and more efficient use of support staff across all services
- spend to save projects in energy efficiency and ICT systems
- redesigning service delivery to manage cost and demand growth in care provision
- workforce planning changes to create a more flexible workforce within Community Resources.

120. Since 2014/15, the BCCP has been developed on a rolling two-year basis, with phase 1 targeting savings for the period 2015 to 2017 and phase 2 for 2016 to 2018. Phase 1 projects delivered annual recurring (as opposed to one-off) savings of £15.1 million against an original target of £14.4 million by the end of 2016/17. Phase 2 projects are expected to achieve annual recurring savings of £5.5 million by the end of 2017/18.

The council is improving access to its services by using more digital technology to provide access to services

121. The council's Digital Strategy 2016-19 is linked closely to the Tackling Poverty Strategy with the aim of improving outcomes. It focuses on improving access for local citizens to online services to help improve their quality of life and opportunities. The strategy focuses activities reflecting the council's priorities and has four work-streams: digital participation, connectivity, digital public services and economy.

122. The council's Digital Inclusion Strategy aims to deliver additional support to residents with limited access to, or experience of, using digital technologies to ensure that they can get access to online services.

123. The council has improved the range of access it provides to online services. It launched its Customer Portal in March 2016 with the aim of making more online services available through the council website and to increase the volume of customer transactions completed online. The council's 'MyAccount' allows residents to sign up and securely:

- apply for housing benefit and upload proof online
- apply for council tax reduction, discount or exemption
- view their rent and council tax accounts, balances and payments
- update a change in address, household details or circumstances
- set up or change direct debit for council tax
- make a payment
- view a record of requests.

124. An independent assessment of the council's digital accessibility concluded that the council's changes had made improvements. At the time of our audit it had been shortlisted for a Digital Council of the Year Award.

125. Another major improvement area has been the council's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) project. This will replace the council's existing finance, HR, payroll and procurement systems with a single online, fully integrated software application. The project started in July 2016 and it was intended to go live April 2017. There have been some delays in the implementation phase and the revised go live date is November 2017.

The council has used self-evaluation in the past and is looking to further develop its approach

126. Renfrewshire Council has previously used self-evaluation to better understand its business and contribute to developing the corporate improvement plan. Between 2008 and 2015 the council used the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF). This is a self-assessment tool that the council uses to measure:

- how well it is delivering customer service
- how well its staff are performing, if they are well trained and if they are motivated
- if its service planning is effective.

127. The council completed two cycles of self assessment, using PSIF. Thirty-five services carried out self-evaluation in the first cycle and 23 services in the second.

128. Following each cycle services identified areas for improvement which fed into their SIPs. A summary of the main themes from all services were reported to the CMT in January 2015. One area for improvement identified was staff communication. Based on feedback from the focus groups there is a recognition that this has improved significantly. Other areas identified for improvement continue

to feature in the current corporate improvement plan and include workforce planning, particularly in respect of succession planning and capacity building.

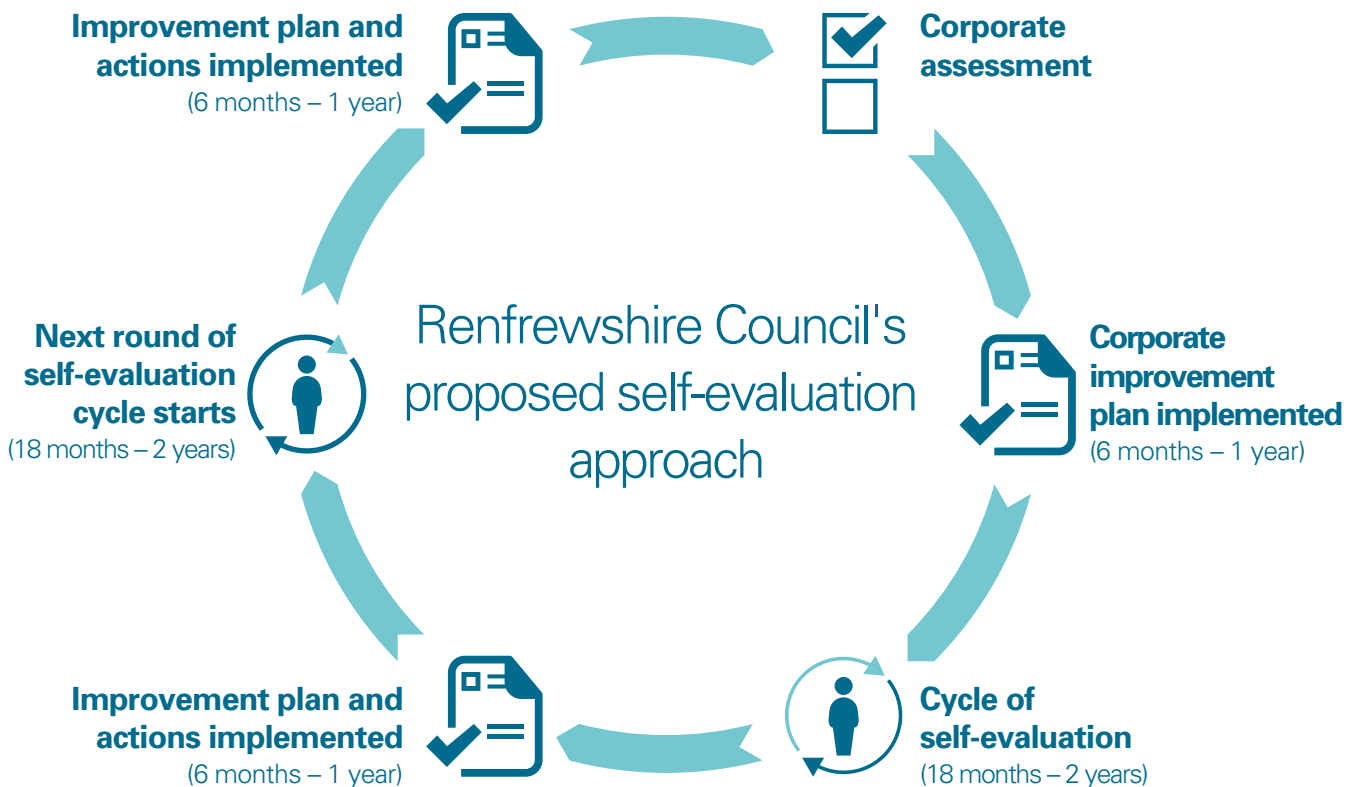
129. As well as PSIF, individual service departments within the council use a range of other self-assessment tools, such as 'How Good is Our School'. Other services, for example criminal justice services and community learning and development services, use self-assessment tools that are supported by other scrutiny bodies through 'validated self-evaluations'.

130. In 2015/16, the council decided not to undertake a PSIF self-assessment exercise for a number of reasons, including the level of restructuring across corporate services, wider policy changes such as health and social care integration and ongoing work on council priorities.

131. The council is re-establishing its approach to self-evaluation as outlined in [Exhibit 14](#).

Exhibit 14

Renfrewshire Council's proposed self-evaluation approach



132. The council piloted a self-evaluation exercise in summer 2016 which has resulted in a Corporate Improvement Plan. This lists 17 areas for improvement that link to the council plan priorities, 'supporting our employees' and 'continuing to be a well-run council'.

133. The council plans to roll out its new approach to self-evaluation across each service department.

The council recognises the need to continue to develop new approaches in the way services are delivered

134. The council has shown a commitment to review and develop different ways in which services are delivered.

135. The council's culture services transferred to RLL in 2015. The aim is that more people will use cultural facilities to help meet the council's social objectives. Other projects the council has developed to make savings include the reduction from three works depots to one.

136. Phase 3 of the BCCP will consider new change projects to help deliver the forecast recurring annual revenue savings requirements for the two-year period 2018/19 and 2019/20. Work is currently under way to develop options to include in the BCCP looking at council functions that affect several services. These will be appraised and shortlisted for developing outline business cases and the CMT will regularly review them to ensure that the options being developed are appropriate to tackle the ongoing financial pressures on the council.

Recommendations



Councillors should improve cross-party working, given the financial challenges that exist and the important decisions that will need to be made in future. [\(paragraph 21\)](#)

Councillors should take advantage of the training and development opportunities that the council provides to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their role effectively. [\(paragraph 41\)](#)

The council should review its governance arrangements to ensure they provide for a relationship with Renfrewshire Leisure Limited (RLL) that is clear, independent, and more easily understood by the public. [\(paragraph 40\)](#)

The council should develop a detailed medium- and long-term workforce strategy and plan and implement its organisational development strategy. Implementing both the workforce and organisational development strategies will be critical to managing how future services are provided. [\(paragraph 90\)](#)

The council is continuing to review how it will achieve the savings required within the medium-term financial strategy. The council should prioritise how services need to be provided in future to meet these savings. [\(paragraph 85\)](#)

Community Planning partners need to plan their budgets and finances together to provide a clearer picture of the overall resources available. [\(paragraph 116\)](#)

The council and its partners need to continue to involve communities and work together on joint priorities and to strengthen partnership working. This will provide a positive base to ensure the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is fully implemented. [\(paragraph 114\)](#)

Next steps

Future audit work

137. The audit of Best Value is a continuous process that forms part of the annual audit of every council. Audit conclusions will be reported each year through the Annual Audit Report. As part of our work in 2017/18 we will follow up the progress the council is making to implement the recommendations outlined above.

138. Our audit work will continue to be shaped by the Shared Risk Assessment. This is a joint approach agreed by Audit Scotland and other scrutiny partners such as Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate, using information about local government to plan scrutiny activity that is proportionate and based on risk. This approach will contribute to the audit intelligence and help us decide about the timing of audits and the focus of audit work at individual councils.

Endnotes



- ◀ 1 *Quality and improvement in Scottish Education 2012-2016*, Education Scotland, May 2017.
- ◀ 2 *Services for children and young people in Renfrewshire*, Report of a joint inspection, Care Inspectorate, 11 December 2015.

Appendix

Best Value audit timeline



July 2006 – Renfrewshire Council: the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning

The council has adopted a modernising agenda to ensure it is in a good position to meet the changing demands on public services. The council has strong and effective leadership. It needs to ensure its political and managerial structures continue to support its business needs.

August 2017 – Best Value Assurance Report: Renfrewshire Council

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 second Best Value Assurance Report to be published reflecting this new approach. The report seeks to provide the Commission with assurance on the council's statutory duty to deliver Best Value, with a particular focus on the Commission's Strategic Audit Priorities.

Best Value Assurance Report

Renfrewshire

Council

This report is available in PDF and RTF formats, along with a podcast summary at:

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