

PERFORMANCE AND REVIEW SCRUTINY FORUM

Minutes of meeting held via Confero and in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Almada Street, Hamilton on 21 March 2023

Chair:

Councillor Joe Fagan

Councillors Present:

Councillor John Anderson, Councillor Gerry Convery (Depute), Councillor Maureen Devlin, Councillor Richard Lockhart, Councillor Katy Loudon, Councillor Davie McLachlan, Councillor John Ross

Councillors' Apologies:

Councillor Maureen Chalmers, Councillor Kirsten Robb

Attending:

Chief Executive's Service

C Sneddon, Chief Executive

Community and Enterprise Resources

A Brown, Head of Enterprise and Sustainable Development; F Carlin, Head of Planning and Regulatory Services; K McGuire, Waste Services Manager; C Park, Head of Roads, Transportation and Fleet Services; G Simpson, Development Adviser

Education Resources

D Dickson, Education Operations Manager

Finance and Corporate Resources

P Manning, Executive Director; M Gordon, Administration Assistant; T Little, Head of Communications and Strategy; S McLeod, Administration Officer; L Marshall, Finance Adviser; N Reid, Improvement and Community Planning Manager

Health and Social Care/Social Work Resources

M Kane, Service Manager (Performance and Support)

Housing and Technical Resources

L Hayes, Performance and Support Adviser

1 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum held on 29 November 2022 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

The Forum decided: that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

Councillor Lockhart joined the meeting during this item of business

3 Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2021/2022 Results and Action Plan

A report dated 23 February 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on the Scottish Local Government Benchmarking (LGBF) results for 2021/2022.

The LGBF compared spend/cost, performance and customer satisfaction results over several years and between similar councils. It comprised a number of performance indicators across a range of services.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council had been forced to suspend or reduce a number of services in order to comply with government advice. In addition, the Council had been required to redirect resources to deliver vital new services to support individuals, communities and businesses. Despite the return of services through the Council's Recovery Plan, there was a COVID-19 legacy in terms of residual impact on some services and a significant build-up of demand, as a result of which, there remained an inevitable impact on performance in some areas.

Information on the Council's LGBF data and results for 2021/2022, together with comparative data for 2020/2021 and 2019/2020, was provided in Appendix 1 to the report. This information also showed whether the Council's performance in 2021/2022 had improved, remained the same or declined compared to the previous year and how the Council's performance compared with the Scottish average.

Although the LGBF results were available for all councils in Scotland and could be used to construct league tables, the Local Government Improvement Service (LGIS) cautioned against this approach and emphasised that the purpose of the data was to open discussion about performance and improvement in the context of specific services whilst taking account of geography, demographics and local council priorities. It was, therefore, important to pay attention to the narrative against each indicator when forming a judgement on what the performance meant in a South Lanarkshire context.

At a local level, each council was required to publish its results at the same time as the publication of the national results by the LGIS. The LGIS would continue to:-

- ◆ review and develop indicators
- ◆ hold benchmarking events where local authorities could share good practice

An officer responded to a member's question on an aspect of the report.

The Forum decided:

- (1) that the importance of viewing LGBF measures in the local context, as detailed in the report, be noted;
- (2) that the results, narrative, actions and family group analysis identified following scrutiny of the results for 2021/2022 be noted; and
- (3) that it be noted that the Council's LGBF results and explanatory narrative for 2021/2022 would be published on the Council's website, to coincide with the publication of the national results by the Local Government Improvement Service.

[Reference: Minutes of 16 August 2022 (Paragraph 3)]

4 Local Government Benchmarking Framework Update on Future Reporting

A report dated 23 February 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted providing an update on engagement with the Local Government Improvement Service (LGIS) and future reporting of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF).

Following the update provided to this Forum at its meeting held on 16 August 2022, further consideration was given to the strategic suite of LGBF indicators which would be included within the reporting arrangements for the Council Plan 'Connect', included in Appendix 1 to the report, and the mapping of the remaining LGBF measures. The outcome of this exercise and the engagement with the LGIS was that:-

- ◆ the annual LGBF report, containing all LGBF indicators, would continue to be submitted to the Forum although the scale of this report would possibly be reduced as other reporting arrangements matured
- ◆ the strategic suite of indicators aligned to Connect outcomes would feature in a new appendix to the Council Plan Quarter 4 update reports, providing an opportunity to assess the Council's performance over time and comparative performance in the context of the Connect priorities
- ◆ further LGBF indicators would feature in the Council's public performance reporting, both in the Annual Performance Spotlights and in the public performance reporting pages on the Council website. These indicators were topic-based and placed the LGBF information in a richer context than was possible in the annual LGBF report

A breakdown of the list of LGBF indicators reported via different routes was provided in Table 1 of the report.

The conclusion of this work provided the Council with a comprehensive approach to LGBF which would see the indicators embedded across its reporting arrangements, with a strategic focus on those which were most relevant to the Council's priorities. The arrangements would also strengthen opportunities to scrutinise the LGBF and enhance the role of the LGBF in the Council's public performance reporting.

An officer responded to a member's question on an aspect of the report.

The Forum decided:

- (1) that the progress made with the LGIS on the Council's use of the LGBF be noted;
- (2) that the proposal to embed LGBF measures within the Council Plan 'Connect' reporting via a new appendix at Quarter 4 be endorsed; and
- (3) that the mapping of remaining LGBF measures across other reporting mechanisms, as detailed in the report, be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 16 August 2022 (Paragraph 4)]

5 Accounts Commission – New Approach to the Audit of Best Value

A report dated 23 February 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on the Accounts Commission's new approach to auditing and reporting on councils' performance against their duty of Best Value.

The publication of the Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) on Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in September 2022, reported to this Forum on 29 November 2022, had concluded the Accounts Commission's programme of Best Value audits which had started in 2018.

The Commission had indicated that the programme of BVARs would not be repeated and that a new approach to the audit of Best Value and community planning would be adopted for the period 2023 to 2027. This new approach had been outlined by the Chair of the Accounts Commission in a letter sent to local authorities in November 2022.

Following the Commission's appointment of a new round of auditors for the next 5 years, all auditors would be required to begin reporting on Best Value from the current financial year. This meant the new approach would first be reported in annual audit reports in autumn 2023 and annually thereafter.

Auditors were required to report progress against previous Best Value audit reports and Commission findings and part of the new approach was a requirement for the Controller of Audit to report on every council across the audit appointment round, covering the period October 2023 to August 2027.

Unlike the previous approach where Best Value Assurance Reports were based on a separate piece of audit work, the new approach would consist of brief Controller of Audit reports accompanied by, and reflecting on, published annual audit reports. As with the current approach, the Controller of Audit reports would be considered by the Commission in public and reported publicly.

The following councils would be included in the first year of Controller of Audit reports starting from October 2023:-

- ◆ Clackmannanshire Council
- ◆ Dumfries and Galloway Council
- ◆ Dundee City Council
- ◆ Falkirk Council
- ◆ Moray Council
- ◆ Orkney Islands Council
- ◆ South Ayrshire Council
- ◆ West Dunbartonshire Council

The councils had been selected on the basis that a mix of council types would be covered each year including a split of urban/rural/island authorities, as well as variation in size and geographical spread. In addition, priority had been given to early reporting on those councils where BVARs and/or local Best Value follow-up work had identified that progress needed to be made more quickly.

As with the BVAR process, officers would review the published audit reports on the councils in the first tranche of the new approach to learn any lessons for this Council. Reports on any significant findings and key messages would be submitted to the Forum for information.

The Forum decided: that the report be noted.

6 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.