



Council Offices, Almada Street
Hamilton, ML3 0AA

Monday, 18 October 2021

Dear Councillor

Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum

The Members listed below are requested to attend a meeting of the above Forum to be held as follows:-

Date: Tuesday, 26 October 2021

Time: 09:30

Venue: By Microsoft Teams,

The business to be considered at the meeting is listed overleaf.

Yours sincerely

Cleland Sneddon
Chief Executive

Members

John Ross (Chair), Alex Allison, Robert Brown, Maureen Chalmers, Gerry Convery, Peter Craig, Maureen Devlin, Joe Fagan, Katy Loudon, Jared Wark

Substitutes

John Anderson, Stephanie Callaghan, Ann Le Blond, Eileen Logan, Monique McAdams, Mark McGeever, Richard Nelson

BUSINESS

1 Declaration of Interests

- 2 **Minutes of Previous Meeting** 3 - 6
Minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum held on 17 August 2021 submitted for approval as a correct record. (Copy attached)

Item(s) for Consideration

- | | | |
|----------|---|---------|
| 3 | Local Government Benchmarking Framework Update
Report dated 20 September 2021 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources). (Copy attached) | 7 - 10 |
| 4 | Audit Scotland Report - Local Government in Scotland Overview 2021
Report dated 18 October 2021 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources). (Copy attached) | 11 - 16 |
| 5 | East Dunbartonshire Council Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) Published by the Accounts Commission
Report dated 29 September 2021 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources). (Copy attached) | 17 - 20 |

Urgent Business

- 6 **Urgent Business**
Any other items of business which the Chair decides are urgent.

For further information, please contact:-

Clerk Name: Stuart McLeod

Clerk Telephone: 01698 454815

Clerk Email: stuart.mcleod@southlanarkshire.gov.uk

PERFORMANCE AND REVIEW SCRUTINY FORUM

2

Minutes of meeting held via Microsoft Teams on 17 August 2021

Chair:

Councillor John Ross

Councillors Present:

Councillor Alex Allison, Councillor Robert Brown, Councillor Maureen Chalmers, Councillor Gerry Convery, Councillor Peter Craig, Councillor Maureen Devlin, Councillor Joe Fagan, Councillor Katy Loudon, Councillor Jared Wark

Attending:

Chief Executive's Service

C Sneddon, Chief Executive

Community and Enterprise Resources

S Clelland, Head of Fleet and Environmental Services; P Elliott, Head of Planning and Economic Development; I Guild, Grounds Manager; C Park, Head of Roads and Transportation Services; G Simpson, Development Adviser

Education Resources

D Dickson, Education Operations Manager

Finance and Corporate Resources

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

Housing and Technical Resources

L Hayes, Performance and Support Adviser

Health and Social Care/Social Work Resources

I Beattie, Head of Health and Social Care (Hamilton and Clydesdale); M Kane, Service Development Manager

South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture Limited

D Booth, General Manager

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 18 May 2021 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

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

3 Annual Performance Spotlights 2020/2021

A report dated 12 July 2021 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on the Annual Performance Spotlights for 2020/2021.

At its meeting on 4 September 2018, the Forum had considered a report which set out plans to review the Annual Performance Report (APR) element of the Council's public performance reporting (PPR) approach. Consequently, a new approach had been developed which replaced the APR document with Annual Performance Spotlights (APS). The APS provided "bite sized" web content performance information for each objective contained in 'Connect', the Council Plan, together with the theme Delivering the Plan and Achieving Best Value. Each APS consisted of:-

- ◆ a case study
- ◆ a selection of infographics
- ◆ links to other related material

The infographics contained in the 2020/2021 APS were attached as Appendix 1 to the report. In response to points raised by the Accounts Commission in the Council's Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) 2019, the 2020/2021 APS had been improved by:-

- ◆ including, for each infographic, trend information with a clear indication as to whether performance had improved and if the target, where applicable, had been met
- ◆ providing a link, directly below the infographic on the website, to supporting data, further reports or more detailed information

A suite of public performance reports, focusing on key areas of Council business, would continue to be prepared to complement the APS. The format of the APS would be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure the documents kept pace with public expectations and with Audit Scotland's requirements in respect of public performance reporting, continuous improvement and Best Value. The APS for 2020/2021 would become live on the Council's website in September 2021, significantly in advance of the statutory deadline of 31 March 2022.

Officers responded to members' questions on various aspects of the report.

On a point raised regarding the target of delivering 1,000 additional affordable homes by the end of 2021, officers undertook to provide the information requested to the members.

The Forum decided: that the report and the content of the Annual Performance Spotlights 2020/2021 be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 29 September 2020 (Paragraph 5)]

4 Council Plan Connect 2017 to 2022 - Quarter 4 Progress Report 2020/2021

A report dated 24 June 2021 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on the progress of 'Connect', the Council Plan 2017 to 2022, at the Quarter 4 Stage of 2020/2021.

'Connect' detailed the Council's vision, values, ambitions and objectives to be delivered in the 5 year period of the Plan. Progress made on key objectives was summarised in the report. Of the 98 measures nominated for reporting against the Plan:-

- ◆ 5 projects had been completed
- ◆ 71 had met their timescale or target as per expectations
- ◆ 14 had minor slippage against timescale or minor shortfall against target
- ◆ 1 had major slippage against timescale or major shortfall against target
- ◆ 7 were contextual or would be reported on at a later stage

A summary of the key achievements against each of the 4 'Connect' priorities was contained in the report and the 'Connect' Performance Report for Quarter 4, 2020/2021, covering the period to the end of March 2021, was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

To aid scrutiny, a further analysis had been introduced, with any measures that had changed Red/Amber/Green (RAG) status between Quarters 2 and 4 being highlighted and an explanation provided for the change of status. Of the 98 measures, 29 (30%) had changed status between Quarters 2 and 4. A summary of those measures was attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

There had been an inevitable impact on some areas of the Council's performance due to the COVID-19 pandemic and reference to the impact of the virus and the Council's response was made throughout the Quarter 4 Progress Report 2020/2021.

Officers responded to members' questions on various aspects of the report.

On points raised regarding the coverage of the Council's household waste recycling scheme, officers undertook to provide the information requested to the members.

The Forum decided:

- (1) that the Connect Quarter 4 Progress Report 2020/2021, summarised in the report and attached as Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- (2) that the summary of the Council's key achievements against each of the 4 'Connect' priorities, for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, be noted; and
- (3) that the additional scrutiny of changes in RAG status between Quarter 2 and Quarter 4, summarised in the report and attached as Appendix 2 to the report, be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 2 March 2021 (Paragraph 4)]

Councillor Chalmers left the meeting during this item of business

5 The City of Aberdeen Council Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) Published by the Accounts Commission

A report dated 24 June 2021 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on the Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) that had been published by the Accounts Commission since the previous meeting of the Forum.

The report provided details of the key themes and recommendations included in the BVAR in relation to The City of Aberdeen Council which had been published on 24 June 2021.

The Forum decided: that the report be noted.

6 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

Report

Report to:	Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum
Date of Meeting:	26 October 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Local Government Benchmarking Framework Update
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ provide the Forum with an update on discussions with the Local Government Improvement Service (LGIS) and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) Board regarding the Benchmarking Framework and its use

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the engagement with the Local Government Improvement Service and the LGBF Board to discuss issues around the LGBF be noted;
- (2) that it be noted that further work on the Council's use of the LGBF would be undertaken, as outlined in paragraph 4.7; and
- (3) that an update on this work with recommendations for the reporting of the next round of LGBF be submitted to the Forum in January 2022.

3. Background

3.1. The latest LGBF results were presented to the Forum on 18 May 2021. As in previous years, the results prompted wide-ranging questions and queries regarding specific indicators.

3.2. The Forum noted a number of issues which have been raised at the Forum several times over the last few years, relating to the use of the Scottish Household Survey, the ranking of indicators, and the need to consider each indicator within the South Lanarkshire context.

3.3. This report updates the Forum on discussions with the LGBF Board and the Local Government Improvement Service about these issues and how the Council's use of the framework can be developed going forward.

4. Background

4.1. The report on the LGBF to the Forum on 18 May 2021 contained a section which covered some of the issues which had been raised about the LGBF as a whole at previous meetings of the Forum. Specifically:-

- ◆ Local policy decisions can impact on the LGBF results and interpretation of the data. This is particularly true for cost indicators in the LGBF suite, where lower costs are generally equated with good performance. In these instances, where

the Council has opted to invest resources (e.g., in roads maintenance or in the school estate), costs will appear higher than the Scottish average or for comparable councils, and performance may be assessed as 'worse'.

- ◆ A number of satisfaction measures within the LGBF are derived from the Scottish Household Survey (SHS). There are important limitations to this data – for example the number sampled is very small relative to the population and survey respondents are asked how satisfied they are with services even if they have not used the service in question. The Council's own surveys of service users invariably rate the services more highly than the SHS.
- ◆ The figures within the LGBF are the result of a wide range of service provision models and data collection processes carried out in each of Scotland's 32 councils. While the LGBF endeavours to achieve high standards of completeness and consistency, there are inevitably differences between councils and between indicators in terms of what is counted and how it translates into LGBF performance.

4.2. In view of the discussions at the Forum and the fact that points had been raised in successive years, officers of the Council sought to raise these issues at an appropriate level with those responsible for the LGBF.

4.3. A meeting was held on 22 June 2021 with Kenneth Lawrie, Chair of the LGBF Board and Emily Lynch, LGBF Project Manager with the Local Government Improvement Service. The Council was represented by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) and the Head of Communications and Strategy.

4.4. The meeting was constructive and covered a number of key points:-

- ◆ The LGBF Board are keen to hear from councils about how they are using the LGBF and especially any suggestions they may have for how the framework could be improved or made more accessible/relevant;
- ◆ A focus of the LGBF Board is to evolve the framework to ensure it reflects the challenges and opportunities arising from Covid and to support recovery efforts.
- ◆ With this, the Board wish to support the growing maturity and increasing flexibility with which councils use the framework. It is recognised that not all measures are of equal importance to each authority, and councils should *draw on* the framework suite of measures to reflect what matters to them and what is of value to their own performance approach, reflecting their own local strategic priorities and identified improvement areas.
- ◆ With this there is a recognition that the LGBF is a significant body of work and that using the framework to drive improvement – which is the key purpose – can present challenges.

4.5. At the meeting it was felt that there is potential for the Council to work with the Local Government Improvement Service to review how it uses the LGBF and, in particular, to refine the selection of indicators which are used to better reflect the Council's priorities and support scrutiny of progress in priority areas.

4.6. This work would benefit the Council by accessing LGIS expertise in LGBF and how it is used elsewhere to facilitate discussions with a view to developing a robust approach going forward. The LGIS would play the role of critical friend, expert advisor and facilitator to assist the Council and Resources to refine their use of LGBF within the context of service improvement activities.

4.7. Several strands of potential further work have also been explored with the LGIS as follows:-

- ◆ Using the LGBF strategically to inform priorities for the new Council Plan. This would see the LGIS contribute to an exercise to look at how the LGBF can illuminate issues for the Council. Using tools available such as trends over time and analysing themes which emerge from analysis of national data, the LGIS can facilitate discussions on where the Council may seek to direct improvement activity over the life of the new Council Plan. These discussions can also make use of insights from the Community Planning Outcomes Profile tool which has been developed to support Community Planning Partnerships to meet their duties under the Community Empowerment Act.
- ◆ Identifying a basket of indicators to draw from the LGBF to use alongside other data and intelligence to support monitoring and reporting activity against the strategic plan.
- ◆ Thematic discussions. The LGIS produces an overview report for Scotland as a whole which opens up insights at a thematic level. Drawing upon the data that has been generated for the LGBF over the last decade, the LGIS can produce bespoke analysis which places South Lanarkshire Council data within these larger themes and national trends, offering insight into the Council's relative performance and stimulating discussion about priorities for change.
- ◆ Service-level discussions. Focusing on specific indicators or indicator-groups, the LGIS can help engage with services on drivers of performance and the factors underlying the metrics in the LGBF. These discussions would draw on the wealth of information available through family group discussions as well as detailed knowledge of practices in other councils.
- ◆ There is also scope for review of how LGBF is used within change and improvement initiatives, such as service review processes and budget-setting/efficiency discussions.
- ◆ Using the LGBF to develop a dashboard which provides management with access to real-time data against key strategic priorities.

4.8. The Forum is asked to note that further engagement will be undertaken with the LGIS on these topics, linking in with the engagement and deliberative processes involved in the new Council Plan and Community Plan; and paving the way for a new approach to LGBF analysis and reporting for the next round of LGBF data, due for publication in early 2022.

4.9. An update on the outcome of this work will be reported to the Forum at its next meeting in January 2022.

5. Employee Implications

5.1. There are no direct employee implications.

6. Financial Implications

6.1. There are no direct financial implications.

7. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

7.1. There are no direct climate change, sustainability and natural environment implications arising from this report.

8. Other Implications

8.1. Considering the detail of the report and identifying actions as appropriate contribute towards effective risk management.

9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 9.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no impact assessment is required.
- 9.2. There is no requirement for consultation on the content of the report.

Paul Manning

Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

20 September 2021

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

- Accountable, effective, efficient and transparent
- Ambitious, self aware and improving

Previous References

- Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum - 18 May 2021

List of Background Papers

- None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

Tom Little, Head of Communications and Strategy

Ext: 4904 (Tel: 01698.454904)

E-mail: Tom.Little@southlanarkshire.gov.uk

Report

4

Report to:	Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum
Date of Meeting:	26 October 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Audit Scotland Report: Local Government in Scotland Overview 2021
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ provide the Forum with a summary of the Audit Scotland Report 'Local Government in Scotland: Overview 2021' published in May 2021

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the key messages and recommendations be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. In May 2021 Audit Scotland published the above report on behalf of the Accounts Commission. This 'overview' report is prepared each year and covers key areas of current and future activity relative to local government and an opinion on how these are or should be managed.
- 3.2. The report notes that the Covid-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented set of issues and challenges for councils, their partners and for communities. The shape of the recovery and renewal curve is not yet clear, nor are many of the longer-term impacts on the economy, communities, and public services.
- 3.3. The latest Local Government Overview (LGO) is the first in a series of reports that will reflect on the evolving and long-term nature of the impact of Covid-19. The 2021 report considers the initial response of councils while future reporting will give a more detailed analysis of the impact and lessons learned from the pandemic.
- 3.4. This report provides a summary of the Local Government in Scotland Overview document, which can be read in full here: [Local government in Scotland Overview 2021 | Audit Scotland \(audit-scotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/local-government-in-scotland-overview-2021).

4. Report Content and Key Messages

4.1. The report considers the impact of the pandemic across 3 themes:-

- ♦ **Communities and people.** Community wellbeing and the role of communities in responding to the crisis.

- ◆ **Service delivery and partnership working.** The adaption of service provision and working with partners.
- ◆ **Service case study focusing on planning.** The financial impact of responding to Covid-19, use of resources and changes to governance arrangements.

The key messages and lessons learned are considered in turn below.

5. Communities and People

5.1. Key messages:-

- ◆ The Covid-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on all aspects of society, including the economy, jobs, and the physical and mental health of the public. The negative impacts have been greater for those already experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, and existing inequalities have intensified.
- ◆ Councils have been at the centre of the response to the pandemic, supporting communities through these difficult times. They responded quickly and put their initial focus on maintaining service delivery and protecting communities.
- ◆ Relationships with communities have been vital. Councils and communities have worked well together to manage local responses to Covid-19. These included supporting initiatives to promote wellbeing and support people who were shielding and facilitating community support hubs.
- ◆ Existing partnerships that were stronger before the pandemic made a smoother transition into the response phase, as there were fewer barriers. Moreover, some communities were able to offer a faster and more targeted response and deliver some vital services as a result of having fewer formal decision-making structures.

5.2. Lessons learned:-

- ◆ The impact of Covid-19 has been extremely detrimental for many of Scotland's most vulnerable people and communities. The impact will be long-lasting and will significantly increase inequalities. Recovering from the pandemic will require tackling inequalities to be a priority.
- ◆ As councils may look to embed longer-term changes to service provision as seen during the pandemic, it is important that they are adaptable in their approach, to ensure that services are reaching communities in the right way. Councils need to understand the needs of those experiencing digital exclusion and put a strategy in place to ensure equal access to services for all citizens and communities.
- ◆ Action taken by communities has been vital in supporting councils and their partners to deliver an emergency response. Partnerships that were well-established before the pandemic had a smoother transition into the response phase and acted more quickly than others. The importance of strengthening relationships with communities has been apparent.
- ◆ Greater flexibility in decision-making structures has been an effective tool for communities, empowering them while allowing the council to operate more efficiently. Giving communities more scope to use initiatives like this will be important in the future but must be balanced with the return of robust governance arrangements and continued openness and transparency in decision-making.

6. Service Delivery and Partnership Working

6.1. Key messages:-

- ◆ Councils were central to the national Covid-19 pandemic response to supporting communities and vulnerable groups, alongside partners in health and social care and voluntary sectors. They responded quickly to the pandemic, placing their initial focus on maintaining essential services and protecting communities.

- ◆ Councils proved agile in adapting service provision, by redirecting resources and using digital technology, which allowed them to rapidly change service delivery arrangements. Council workforces demonstrated versatility by adapting quickly, taking on new roles and working under pressure to maintain key services.
- ◆ Levels of service disruption have varied. Services such as education, social care and culture and leisure were badly affected, while other core services continued on a reduced basis. Services that could be delivered by people working from home were most resilient.
- ◆ The disruption to services had significant negative impacts on vital areas and on some client groups. These included carers who lacked access to respite care, people with learning disabilities who lacked access to important services and wider support, and school children, who experienced significant disruption to their education.
- ◆ Communities experienced significant service disruptions alongside the wider impact of the pandemic. This created further challenges including job losses and increased economic uncertainty, the impact on people's mental health, and increased child protection risks during lockdown.
- ◆ There will be an increased need in future for staff to be agile as services continue to evolve in line with the pandemic and the recovery phases. Councils must also manage the pressures on staff to ensure their people are not put at risk of burnout as the pandemic continues.

6.2. Lessons learned:-

- ◆ Councils must closely monitor the impacts of service changes and disruptions on people and communities. There are growing concerns about the effects of service disruptions on different groups, for example the impacts of moving school education into homes and online on disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people, and of reduced or paused care services on people who rely on them and their carers.
- ◆ Councils must develop targeted responses to tackle both the immediate negative impacts of the pandemic and the long-term inequalities that have been exacerbated. As councils embrace longer-term digital service provision, they must balance the efficiencies digital services bring against the needs of communities and the workforce. Citizens must be at the heart of decisions about the services they rely on.
- ◆ Councils and their staff have been at the centre of unprecedented efforts to protect and support people and communities through the Covid-19 pandemic. Demands on people have been intense, and both council staff and the citizens they serve will need continued targeted support through the move to recovery and renewal. Councils' recovery and renewal efforts must be informed by comprehensive understanding of the issues that affect all those who live and work in their communities, and the positive partnerships built on during their initial response should be a core element in this.
- ◆ The impacts of the pandemic, particularly its unequal impacts on groups in society and the awareness it has raised of issues of fairness and equality, the importance of community and the value of local services are all key to deciding future priorities for public services and what 'building back better' might mean for communities.

7. Resources and Governance

7.1. Key messages:-

- ◆ There were significant changes in council governance structures and processes. At the onset of the crisis, councils suspended or revised their meeting schedules, and adopted different approaches to decision-making. Virtual meetings were established in growing numbers of councils, and all councils now hold remote meetings. There is now less reliance on delegation to officers or emergency committees than in the early stage of the pandemic, but councils must continue to balance the need for urgent decision-making with transparency.
- ◆ Councils continue to face significant financial challenges, and these have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) estimated that the total net financial impact of Covid-19 in 2020/21 would be £767 million. This includes forecast financial pressures of £855 million, with loss of income accounting for around £400 million of this total. The financial pressures have been offset slightly by estimated cost reductions of £88 million from a range of areas such as lower property costs and reduced school meal costs.
- ◆ The Scottish Government has provided substantial additional financial support, but the nature and timing of funding has created further challenges for councils. Funding announced by the Scottish Government by February 2021 is likely to support councils in covering the net financial impact of the pandemic for 2020/21. This additional funding includes a significant element of one-off grant funding, therefore, this may present financial sustainability risks for some councils in future years.
- ◆ Furthermore, funding announcements have been frequent but not regular, and in some cases specific conditions are attached. This has created an additional administrative burden for the Scottish Government and councils arising from awarding and accepting grants and completing the related reporting requirements.
- ◆ The differential impact of Covid-19 on some groups and communities has implications for the Scottish Government's approach to the distribution of funding, which comes on top of difficult fiscal decisions about the funding of public services in the wake of the pandemic.

7.2. Lessons learned:-

- ◆ The timing and nature of funding for local government is creating pressure and uncertainty for councils beyond the current financial year. Funding is being provided incrementally and the lack of certainty regarding future budgets makes effective short and medium-term planning very difficult for councils.
- ◆ Covid-19 will have long-term impacts on councils and the communities that they serve. Councils are likely to require additional support to address the challenges of remobilising services, and supporting social and economic recovery. If additional funding is provided with specific conditions or is ring-fenced for specific purposes councils will then be forced to make difficult prioritisation decisions with potential negative impacts on other services. A lack of flexibility in future funding may lead to a differential impact on service delivery and exacerbate existing financial sustainability risks.
- ◆ As reported in Local government in Scotland: Challenges and performance 2018, services such as planning, cultural services, environmental health and roads have borne the brunt of service cuts in recent years. The trend has been one of larger reductions to relatively smaller service areas with no change in real terms to social care and education spending. The increased financial constraints created by Covid-19 are likely to create a further risk to recovery should smaller

services face further cuts. This will adversely affect councils' ability to provide important services that people and communities rely on.

- ◆ Councils have reacted well to the changing environment and have acted quickly to implement new governance arrangements that are safe and flexible. Although delegation to officers and emergency committees was undertaken at some councils in the early stages, it is welcome that all 32 councils now have arrangements in place to support remote meetings. It is likely that the requirement for remote meetings will continue for some time, therefore all councils should ensure that public participation is facilitated as soon as possible to provide openness and transparency in decision-making.
- ◆ Councils' medium-term financial plans will need to be updated to reflect the significant financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although considerable challenge and uncertainty still exists, it is important that councils have a plan in place that identifies medium-term impacts so that steps can be taken to manage risk and plan effectively. Good medium-term financial planning, based on modelling various future scenarios and focusing on clear priorities, is more important now than ever.

8. General Conclusions

- 8.1. Looking to the future, councils have started to plan for longer term recovery from the crisis. In progressing towards this, there must be recognition that a return to 'business as usual' will not be possible and that the negative impacts of the pandemic will be felt for years to come.
- 8.2. We are still learning about the significant long-term challenges, and councils' recovery and renewal plans should address the longer-term implications of the pandemic for local economies, communities and individuals. Recovery plans must also recognise the longstanding issues of inequality that exist and set out actions to address the differential impact of Covid-19 on different groups.
- 8.3. There has been some ongoing learning resulting from the emergency response to the pandemic. Councils' service delivery arrangements and working practices changed at an unprecedented pace and on a scale that would have been considered impossible in the past. The need to respond quickly with simplified procedures has allowed councils to operate more flexibly and achieve outcomes that would previously have taken much longer. It is important that councils now consolidate and build on the factors that allowed this level of change and innovation to take place so quickly.
- 8.4. Councils should also identify the positive developments to take forward into renewal planning to maintain this momentum. It is also important for councils to avoid the risk of reverting to 'business as usual' in areas where new ways of working are having positive outcomes, for example flexible working and an increase in digitally enabled services. We will consider further lessons learned in more detail in future local government overview reports.

9. Employee Implications

- 9.1. There are no direct employee implications.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. There are no direct financial implications.

11. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 11.1. There are no implications for climate change, sustainability or the environment in terms of the information contained in this report.

12. Other Implications

- 12.1. Considering the detail of the report and identifying actions as appropriate contribute towards effective risk management.

13. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 13.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no impact assessment is required.

- 13.2. There is no requirement for consultation on the content of the report.

Paul Manning

Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

18 October 2021

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

- Accountable, effective, efficient and transparent
- Ambitious, self aware and improving

Previous References

- None

List of Background Papers

- Audit Scotland Report 'Local Government in Scotland: Overview 2021'

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

Tom Little, Head of Communications and Strategy

Ext: 4904 (Tel: 01698.454904)

E-mail: Tom.Little@southlanarkshire.gov.uk

Report

5

Report to:	Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum
Date of Meeting:	26 October 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

Subject:	East Dunbartonshire Council Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) Published by the Accounts Commission
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ provide an overview of the recent BVAR report published by the Accounts Commission

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the contents of the report be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. South Lanarkshire Council was audited by Audit Scotland in October and November 2018, with the final report being published by the Accounts Commission on 28 March 2019.
- 3.2. South Lanarkshire Council considered the BVAR at its meeting on 26 June 2019. An action plan was presented to Council for approval, addressing each of the BVAR recommendations.
- 3.3. On 19 September 2019, the Forum agreed to consider summaries of BVAR reports as they are published by the Accounts Commission, in order to place the South Lanarkshire audit in context and keep members informed about noteworthy Best Value developments elsewhere.
- 3.4. This report summarises the key themes and recommendations from BVARs published since the last meeting of the Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum, namely:-
- ♦ East Dunbartonshire Council (published 29 September 2021)

4. Summary of Key Messages and Recommendations

4.1. The key messages for East Dunbartonshire Council are:-

- ♦ The council has demonstrated a good pace of improvement since the last Best Value report in 2017. Service performance is strong and has improved in most services, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The council's priorities are clearly

reflected in its financial plans and its Business and Improvement Plans (BIPs). It is well placed to meet the challenges of the future.

- ◆ The people of East Dunbartonshire are more satisfied with council services than in other areas of Scotland, but the council is not complacent. It has delivered a range of improvement projects. Corporate projects, such as its review of assets and facilities services, are targeted at realising efficiencies and financial savings in the council. Others such as the Snack and Play programme, which helps children in poverty, are targeted at reducing inequalities in its communities.
- ◆ The council and its partners have a clear vision for East Dunbartonshire, through the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) and Place Plans. Partners work well together and are focused on the needs of their communities. This has been crucial in delivering services to those most in need during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ◆ The Leaders of the Council and Chief Executive provide effective leadership in delivering the council's priorities from the LOIP. Officers and elected members work well together in the interests of residents. Elected members effectively scrutinise council decisions and performance.
- ◆ The council is aware of where it needs to improve. Since the last Best Value report its performance management has improved. A comprehensive performance management framework is now in place for reporting progress against local outcome measures. Reviewing performance information triggers improvement actions, which are reflected in Business and Improvement Plans (BIPs). Progress is then reported through the council's How Good Is Our Service (HGIOS) progress reports.
- ◆ The council consults widely and can demonstrate how communities are actively involved in decision-making. Covid-19 has presented an opportunity to reassess priorities and further strengthen community engagement.
- ◆ Financial management is effective, with budgets focused on the council's priorities. The council has consistently delivered services within budget. The financial impact of Covid-19 has been significant and will be enduring, but the council is well placed to meet the future challenges.
- ◆ The council's medium-term financial model forecasts a funding gap of £22 million by the end of 2023/2024. The plan now needs to be updated to consider the implications of Covid-19. Covid-19 restrictions have caused delays in the delivery of the capital programme.
- ◆ The council takes a good practice approach to workforce planning. Workforce plans are in place which include demographic profiles and contain action plans to secure future workforce needs.
- ◆ The council has good working relationships with the Health and Social Care Partnership, but the Integration Joint Board faces significant financial risk unless it transforms the way services are delivered in the longer term.
- ◆ The council reacted well to the immediate challenges arising from the pandemic since March 2020. Governance arrangements were adapted quickly. Staff were supported and redeployed, and the council's progress with its digital strategy enabled it to adapt how services are delivered. The recovery from the pandemic is being built into the governance arrangements. The committee cycle has restarted, and this will aid scrutiny of the recovery phase. The ongoing risks from Covid-19 need to be managed through the corporate risk register.
- ◆ The council recognises that its pace of improvement needs to be maintained as services adapt to the Covid-19 recovery phase. It is too early to see the full impact of the pandemic on service performance. The BIPs for 2021–2024 take the first steps to reflecting on how services will be delivered as the area recovers from the pandemic.

4.2 The recommendations for East Dunbartonshire are that:-

- ◆ The Local Government Benchmarking Framework reports to elected members should include a link to Business and Improvement Plans for those indicators where performance is identified for improvement.
- ◆ The 'Performance and Governance' section of the council's website should be improved in line with the commitment made in the Corporate Performance Improvement Action Plan 2021/2022. The presentation of performance information should be enhanced to make it easier for citizens to see how the council is performing overall.
- ◆ Officers are planning to update the medium-term financial plan to reflect the impact of Covid-19. Once this has been completed, the council should consider developing a long-term financial plan that includes forecasts of its financial position in the years ahead.
- ◆ The corporate risk register should be updated to reflect the council's risks during the Covid-19 recovery phase. Regular review of the corporate risk register by elected members should be introduced.
- ◆ The council should work with the Community Planning Partnership to revise the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan annual progress reports to include a summary of progress against the outcome performance indicators.

5. Next Steps and Recommendations

- 5.1. All BVAR reports and recommendations are available on the Audit Scotland website.
- 5.2. Further reports will be brought to the Forum as these BVARs are published, to keep members informed on Best Value themes, topics and developments elsewhere in Scotland.

6. Employee Implications

- 6.1. There are no employee implications.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. There are no financial implications.

8. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 8.1. There are no implications for climate change, sustainability or the environment in terms of the information contained in this report.

9. Other Implications

- 9.1. There are no risk implications as a result of this report.

10. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 10.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no impact assessment is required.
- 10.2. There was no requirement to undertake any consultation in terms of the information contained in the report.

Paul Manning

Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

29 September 2021

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

- ♦ Achieve results through leadership, good governance and organisational effectiveness

Previous References

- ♦ None

List of Background Papers

- ♦ East Dunbartonshire Council BVAR published by the Accounts Commission on 29 September 2021

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

Neil Reid, Improvement and Community Planning Manager, Finance and Corporate Resources

Ext: 4618 (Tel: 01698 454618)

Email: neil.reid@southlanarkshire.gov.uk