

Report

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:-

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