

To: Leadership Board

On: 4 December 2019

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Best Value Assurance Report – Progress Update on Improvement Plan

1. Summary

- 1.1 On 31st August 2017, the Accounts Commission published the Best Value Assurance Report for Renfrewshire Council. The report provided an updated assessment of the Council and its performance, following on from its last audit in 2006.
 - 1.2 Overall the report was positive, providing independent assurance to local residents and businesses on the extent to which the Council is achieving Best Value. At that time, Audit Scotland also provided direction on the key areas on which the Council should focus its improvement activities going forward. The report specifically included 7 recommendations relating to areas such as cross party working, community engagement, partnership working, financial sustainability, workforce planning and governance arrangements.
 - 1.3 An action plan which set out the Council's proposed actions to progress these recommendations was approved by Council in September 2017.
 - 1.4 This report provides a summary of progress to elected members, and a full update is provided for each recommendation and related activity within Appendix 1 to this report. The majority of actions are now complete, and it is proposed that going forward, progress updates are provided on the remaining actions on an annual basis.
 - 1.5 The recently published Annual Audit Report for 2018/19 prepared by Audit Scotland, found that the Council is making good progress in addressing the recommendations from the 2016/17 Best Value Assurance Report, with further actions for developing individual development plans for elected members and locality plans identified.
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2. Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- i) Note the progress achieved in terms of implementing the BVAR improvement plan as detailed at appendix 1; and
 - ii) Agree that the frequency of reporting progress on the BVAR improvement plan to Leadership Board changes to an annual basis.
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3. Background

3.1 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 Scotland reviewed the methodology used to audit Best Value in 2015, and introduced a new approach based on a 5 year programme of engagement and audit, intended to provide greater reassurance to citizens on the extent to which all local authorities are achieving Best Value. Audit Scotland were appointed as the Council's external audit team for this purpose.

3.2 Renfrewshire Council was the second of six Councils selected to receive a Best Value Assurance Report in Year 1 as part of the new approach, with the subsequent report published by the Accounts Commission in August 2017. The report included 7 specific recommendations, as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

4. Progress Update – Improvement Plan

4.1 Within the Council, progress on the recommendations has been monitored on a regular basis by the Corporate Management Team and six-monthly updates provided to the Leadership Board. Appendix 1 provides a full progress update for each of the related activities being undertaken.

4.2 The recently published Annual Audit Report for 2018/19 prepared by Audit Scotland found “the Council continues to make good progress addressing the recommendations contained in our 2016/17 Best Value Assurance Report”. The report commented positively on the Council's performance management framework, governance arrangements and the recently established Alcohol and Drug Commission, which is a Community Planning Partnership sponsored commission.

4.3 Excellent progress has been made on the 7 recommendations from the BVAR, which have all being completed, with the exception of elected member development which continues to be subject to ongoing review by Audit Scotland. One additional action was identified in the 18/19 Annual Audit Report, pertaining to locality planning, which will be reported against within the improvement plan going forward.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 It is proposed that given progress achieved, best value monitoring reports are now submitted to the Leadership Board on an annual basis going forward. The Head of Policy and Commissioning will continue to act as the link officer in terms of engaging with Audit Scotland on a regular basis around Best Value, through the shared risk assessment process and annual audit work.
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Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – the BVAR sets out how effectively the Council is using its resources and financial planning arrangements.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – the BVAR sets out the Council's arrangements for Organisational Development and Workforce planning.
3. **Community Planning** – the BVAR assesses how well the Council works with its partners.
4. **Legal** - none.
5. **Property/Assets** – none.
6. **Information Technology** – The BVAR provides examples of how well the Council is using new technology.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** – none.
 - (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** – none.
9. **Procurement** – none.
10. **Risk** - Shared Risk Assessment is a proportionate and risk-based approach to assessing Scottish Councils.
11. **Privacy Impact** – none.
12. **COSLA** - Welcomed the risk based and proportionate approach to audits.

13. **Climate Risk** – no risks, the paper notes that a Cross-party working group has been established.

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Appendix One – Progress achieved against the Best Value Assurance Report Improvement Plan.

Audit Scotland Recommendations	What we will do	When will we do this by?	Who is leading on this?	Progress Update –December 2019
<p>1. Councillors should improve cross-party working, given the financial challenges that exist and the important decisions that will need to be made in the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to embed Cross Party Sounding Board and identify opportunities for all elected members to work together on issues of common interest and importance for the Council and the Renfrewshire area. 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>All elected members</p>	<p>Key actions undertaken to address this recommendation have included:</p> <p>The Cross-Party Sounding Board was established in May 2017 following revisions to the Council's governance structures.</p> <p>The Board has met on several occasions to date to consider issues such as the Council Plan, Community Plan and the review of local governance.</p> <p>In June 2019, a climate emergency was declared by the Council. Elected Members from the Cross-Party Sounding Board have established a Climate Emergency Working Group.</p>
<p>2. 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a review of the current training and development programme through engagement and consultation with elected members, to identify potential opportunities to further support attendance and participation levels. 	<p>31 December 2017</p>	<p>Chief Executive All elected members</p>	<p>Previous updates to Board have highlighted the progress that has been achieved to date in terms of this recommendation. This included a full review of the training and development programme in consultation with elected members.</p> <p>Changes were subsequently made to the training and development programme, including use of external speakers, offering twilight sessions and delivering focused weeks of training and development once a year.</p> <p>The 2019 training week included a diverse range of subjects such as: cybercrime; domestic abuse-raising awareness; ethical standards; tour of Renfrewshire projects and major assets; Community Empowerment Act & Community Asset transfer'; and budget and financial reporting.</p> <p>Members were asked individually for feedback on the specific sessions that they attended and more generally on the arrangements and programme, this included comments such as: "excellent very informative", "...very informative, timing, content, delivery style and presenters"</p>

				<p>In the Annual Audit Report 2018/19 published in November 2019, Audit Scotland recognised that there have been improvements in this area, yet further action is required by Elected Members to review their individual training requirements with a view to agreeing tailored personal development plans.</p> <p>The Improvement Service recognises that not all elected members will make use of the learning opportunities offered regardless of the support available and will choose to access learning at their own pace. To make it easier for elected members to access CPD training resources at a time and place of their choosing, the full range of Improvement Service workbooks are now available in the online Members' Library.</p> <p>Elected members will continue to be reminded regularly of the support available to develop their own PDPs and consulted upon the topics for the annual training week.</p>
<p>3. 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.</p>		<p>June 2018 (subject to publication date of Audit Scotland's national review report – scheduled for Spring 2018)</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>Our external audit team from Audit Scotland, have made no further recommendations for the Council to address in relation to governance arrangements for Renfrewshire Leisure.</p> <p>Key actions undertaken to address this recommendation have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A summary of Renfrewshire Leisure's Business Plan 2018/19 was reported to the Leadership Board in February 2018 and in May 2019. Previously the Business Plan was considered by the Board as an exempt paper. • In February 2019 the Leadership Board approved proposals to change the composition of the membership of the Renfrewshire Leisure Board. The two places held by officers from Renfrewshire Council were filled by community representatives, with one vacancy recently arising. • Two officers from Renfrewshire Council were subsequently appointed as observers to Renfrewshire Leisure Board meetings in September 2018 by the Leadership Board. The two officers are the Head of Policy and Commissioning and the Head of Finance. • Regular monitoring meetings are held between Renfrewshire Leisure and the Head of Policy and Commissioning. • Improvements in the reporting of performance information relating to Renfrewshire Leisure have been made as part of the monitoring arrangements. Six monthly internal scrutiny sessions also form part of the monitoring relationship with Renfrewshire Leisure.

<p>4. 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll-out Performance Development and Review programme across the Council • Implement new leadership and management development programmes • Provide 6 monthly updates on the recently approved corporate workforce plan to elected members • Implement new management arrangements to integrate existing HR, organisational development and programme management resources within one function to further strengthen the Council's approach to managing change 	<p>Ongoing with six monthly updates to board.</p>	<p>Director of Finance and Resources (in consultation with CMT)</p>	<p>Key actions undertaken to address this recommendation have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular progress updates on the OD Strategy are provided to the CMT and Trade Unions. • Good collective workforce planning progress is being made by services, with an approximate overall completion rate of 74% against the actions in the Council Workforce Plan (2017-2020). • CMT spotlight sessions on service workforce plans have taken place in 2019. • In April / May 2019 all employees were encouraged to take part in interactive team-based workshops to develop a set of new Council Values or access the on-line version. Almost 1800 employees took part - 967 employees attended workshops to share their views and 818 employees completed the on-line version. Results were combined with those from community and youth engagement activity, analysed and the new values communicated in August 2019. The new values will also be embedded into our policies and guidance including recruitment, induction, training and performance, development and review. • The Council's new performance, development and review programme "People, Performance and Talent" (PPT) has been approved by Members. Since approval, bespoke training and supporting materials have been designed with services to ensure managers have the right skills to carry out PPT effectively. Implementation is taking into consideration the development of the new council Values, which will be incorporated into the full roll out to support organisational transformational change through the "Right for Renfrewshire" programme (20/21-22/23). Talent will be managed through PPT by identifying high performing employees and specific talent in expert areas, creating a high performing and sustainable workforce capable of meeting future challenges. • Roll out of the 'Leaders of the Future', 'ASPIRE' and the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) Levels 2 and 3 development programmes is progressing well, with 469 managers and leaders from throughout the Council participating across these programmes. A further 10 participants have commenced on the new CMI Level 5 programme launched in May 2019, with a level 7 CMI qualification currently being scoped. • Following the recent corporate people development review, a new range of flexible development options and accredited qualifications will continue to be rolled out across the Council in 2019. Future corporate training will offer more accessible, on-demand and digital "bite size" training courses, focusing on supporting future transformational change.
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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the success of the digital skills programme in 2018 which saw circa. 100 front line employees complete basic training to improve their digital skills, funding of £15k has been secured again from the Flexible Workforce Development Fund to support a further roll out of digital skills training across the wider workforce. As part of this approach, circa. 50 catering managers are currently being supported with bespoke digital skills training to operate the new cashless catering system being implemented across Renfrewshire schools. Also, HR & OD, in partnership with West College Scotland and Elite Training, is providing a series of free Microsoft training courses for staff during October / November 2019. • A total of 8 new HR & OD Policies were implemented in 2018. The HR & OD Policy Review Plan for 2019 will update several existing policies and develop new policies to support employees who experience Domestic Abuse or Menopause symptoms. • In January 2019 the Council was recognised as a “Carer Positive Employer” by Carer Positive. • Currently 35 Council officers are participating in the Cross Organisational Mentoring Programme launched in September 2018. An Internal Mentoring Programme is being considered. • In May 2019 the Council reported progress in the last 12 months to reduce the Council’s gender pay gap to 3.58% or £0.55 in favour of men. This is a drop of just over 1% from April 2018, with ongoing action to reduce the pay gap further.
<p>5. 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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to implement the agreed medium term financial strategy which will focus on delivering required savings through the Better Council Change programme, debt smoothing and effective workforce planning. 	<p>March 2020 (end date of Financial Outlook)</p>	<p>Director Finance and Resources / Chief Executive (in consultation with elected members)</p>	<p>In September 2019, an updated financial outlook was presented to Council, setting out the updated financial forecasts for the medium term, the range of potential funding issues facing the Council and the requirement to continue to plan for further significant budget gaps in the period through to 2023.</p> <p>The financial strategy is progressing on the basis of a central financial planning scenario with an estimated forecast budget gap of approximately £45 million to be addressed over the three-year period.</p> <p>The potential scale of the financial challenge will require the Council to deliver savings at a more significant level than in previous years. At the Leadership Board on 18 September 2019, the next stage of the Council’s Transformation programme, Right for Renfrewshire was approved.</p> <p>This action will continue to be reviewed as part of our financial management arrangements and reporting to Council and Policy Board.</p>

<p>6. Community Planning partners need to plan their budgets and finances together to provide a clearer picture of the overall resources available.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a Strategic Financial Overview exercise on an annual basis with community planning partners. 	<p>Annual basis – March</p>	<p>Chief Executive / Director of Finance and Resources</p>	<p>A key priority within Renfrewshire's Community Plan 2017-2027 is to develop a Community Planning Partnership that is sustainable and connected.</p> <p>Partners provide regular feedback on the financial outlook for their respective organisations and are alert to opportunities to continue to work together to deliver more efficient services which provide for better outcomes.</p> <p>Strategic Partnership Agreements are being developed community organisations and are due to be submitted to Leadership Board in December. Community Planning Partners continue to work together on emerging policy priorities such as Brexit and the Climate Emergency.</p> <p>A specific example of this is the Community Planning Partnership sponsored Alcohol and Drugs Commission, who are considering how the partners can better use their resources to support those impacted by alcohol and drug use. The Commission will hear evidence between March to December 2019 and initial recommendations are due to be reported in early 2020.</p>
<p>7. 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.</p>	<p>Finalise review of Local Area Committees in Renfrewshire</p> <p>Publish Renfrewshire's Community Plan 2017-2027</p> <p>Embed new governance arrangements for community planning in Renfrewshire, developing shared work plans and priorities in consultation with partners,</p> <p>Develop locality plan arrangements</p>	<p>December 2017</p> <p>1 October 2017</p> <p>March 2018</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>An area in which significant progress has been made is in relation to the development of new Local Partnerships which have now replaced Local Area Committees.</p> <p>Local Partnerships have now had three meetings each, agreeing their membership and identifying local priorities for each of the local areas. They have also allocated over £350,000 of grants to support projects in their Local Partnership area.</p> <p>Part of this has been to develop and launch a participatory budgeting pilot, with young people aged 12-25 having a direct say on the allocation of £150,000 of funding. Young people designed and delivered the process, including identifying priorities, agreeing criteria for the fund, supporting applicants and delivering an announcement event with the results on 25 September 2019.</p>

	in line with the requirements of Community Empowerment legislation, with particular focus on working with partners to engage with those people who are most impacted by poverty in Renfrewshire communities and people.	June 2018		
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NEW ACTIONS FROM ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT			
<p>We reviewed the Council's arrangements for collecting, recording and publishing data in 2017/18. Information is publicly available on the Council website, with the main SPI report published as well as a summary version. <i>'It's all about you'</i> provides a graphical and pictorial presentation of performance data. However there is limited reference to performance in the Council's Annual Report.</p> <p>The Annual Report should include a summary position regarding the Council's performance together with relevant detailed performance information. This would improve the accessibility of performance information and help to demonstrate greater transparency by the Council.</p>	February 2019	Head of Policy and Commissioning	<p>This action is now complete.</p> <p>The Council Performance section on our website has been updated to provide several sources to assess how the council is performing. Public performance reporting is undertaken to ensure local citizens, businesses and partner organisations can track Council performance over time.</p> <p>It provides data on how well we responding to complaints, how we are achieving progress against our Council Plan, how we compare with other authorities and the Scottish average, across the following pages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our current performance, which includes the latest version of 'it's all about you' as a storymap. It provides a ranges of performance data, images and case studies; - Renfrewshire data, with the open data platform and data needs assessments; and - Benchmarking information such as the latest Local Government Benchmarking Framework report to Board. <p>For the Council Plan report to Leadership Board in May and December 2019 a summary position has been included on the Council's performance against the progress of the actions and performance on the indicators.</p>

			<p>Council's overall approach to Public Performance Reporting will continue to be reviewed as part of the Annual Review of Compliance with the Local Code of Corporate Governance 2019 which is reported to the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board.</p>
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