
To: Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board

On: 6 November 2023

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Best Value thematic report

1. Summary

- 1.1 The duty of best value applies to all public bodies in Scotland, and requires organisations to ensure that there is good governance and effective management of resources, whilst also ensuring activities focus on improvement and deliver the best possible outcomes for the public.
- 1.2 Elected members will be aware that previously local authorities were subject to best value audit arrangements in relation to this duty, which have evolved over time. The last formal report on best value activities in Renfrewshire was published in 2017 and was undertaken by our previous external auditors Audit Scotland. Regular reports on follow up best value audit activities were reported to the Audit Risk and Scrutiny Board as part of the annual audit reporting process.
- 1.3 In March 2023, the Accounts Commission announced a new approach to auditing best value in local authorities. This ensures compliance against the statutory duty, but is now fully integrated within the annual audit undertaken each year within a local authority. Detailed best value work is also carried out each year around a particular theme selected nationally, with findings collated into a national report. This is the first year that this process has been undertaken in relation to Renfrewshire Council.
- 1.4 The Council's annual audit process was conducted by our external auditors Azets, and the Council's Annual Audit Report is being presented as part of this policy board agenda for oversight and scrutiny by elected members.
- 1.5 Our external auditors have also produced a standalone best value thematic report for consideration by the Board, as part of its annual programme of work, which is attached as Appendix 1 to this paper.

- 1.6 Elected members are asked to note that the overall assessment made by our external auditors in relation to the best value work undertaken this year is that *“We are satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to demonstrate Best Value under each reported area of the 2022/23 thematic review”*
- 1.7 Auditor judgements have been provided against a number of core areas set out in the report, with all rated yellow or green. The appendix within the Best Value thematic report contains an action plan to be progressed by the Council in response to the recommendations made by the external audit team. The action plan contains two actions which relate to opportunities to strengthen the prioritisation of council plan activities, and related monitoring arrangements. These will be actioned and any updates will be provided to elected members through the regular 6 monthly update reports on the Council Plan which are provided to the Leadership Board.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are requested to note the contents of the best value thematic report provided by the Council’s external auditors as part of the annual audit process.
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Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – the Best Value report specifically notes the wider financial sustainability issues which the Council is responding to, as is specifically covered within the Annual Audit Report presented as part of this board agenda.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none.
3. **Community/Council Planning** – the Best Value report notes the progress that has been made in terms of progressing principles of community empowerment in Renfrewshire, as well as the work that is planned.
4. **Legal** – none
5. **Property/Assets** – the Best Value report notes the work being undertaken in Renfrewshire to review our current portfolio of assets.
6. **Information Technology** - none.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - 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** - none.
11. **Privacy Impact** - none.
12. **COSLA Policy Position** –not applicable.
13. **Climate Risk** – The Best Value report considers the programme of work being progressed by the Council and partners to work towards achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030

List of Background Papers

None



Renfrewshire Council

**Leadership of the development of new
local strategic priorities**

Best Value thematic work in councils 2022-23

October 2023



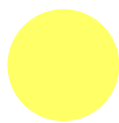
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Key messages

Overall Conclusion

We are satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to demonstrate Best Value under each reported area of the 2022/23 thematic review. Our gradings reflect the point of time of our reporting with some areas for improvement identified.

How clear is the new council vision and its priorities?	Auditor judgement	
	Risks exist to the achievement of operational objectives	
	Renfrewshire Council has a clear strategic ambition. The overall vision is for “Creating a fairer Renfrewshire built on innovation, wellbeing and opportunity”. With numerous actions and plans in its strategic Council Plan it is difficult to distinguish which of them are the key priorities and it can be argued that focussing efforts on all of them will dilute the efficiency of the delivery. The Council set a clear performance framework and service tracking of Council Plan objectives. Through our review of the first progress report we noted that there is some disconnect between the Plan objectives which all were marked either as complete or green for progress, and indicators, which were of a more mixed picture. We note however that some of the indicators might relate to a longer term targets.	

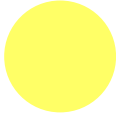
How effectively have the views of citizens and communities been reflected in the priorities and decisions taken by the council?	Auditor judgement Effective and appropriate arrangements are in place  The Council activities to involve its citizens in decision making are wide ranging. Community empowerment, wealth and wellbeing are reflected in the strategic priorities underpinning Council Plan. To support these priorities, the Council is continuing to actively seek to design operating models and services that strengthen the community voice and bring decision making into communities. Some examples of community engagement activities include work around the Local Development Plan, working with communities on Housing Led Regeneration and Renewal Programme priorities, participatory budgeting programmes, and tenant participation. The Bowles Report in relation to the Dargavel school has covered the decision making issues relevant to the outcome of building too small a school to meet community needs. The impact of that decision on educational outcomes for school children in the Bishopton and Dargavel areas remains a significant concern for the local community. The Council has put in a range of mitigations to address those concerns, but we note that the affected local communities continue to raise a number of concerns with the Council.
How effectively do the council priorities reflect the need to reduce	Auditor judgement Effective and appropriate arrangements are in place 

inequalities and climate change?

The Council's priorities have a strong focus on the need to reduce inequalities. The Community Plan was refreshed almost exclusively to focus on the inequalities and the 'Fair' strategic outcome in the Council Plan.

The Council demonstrates clear commitment to those priorities through numerous initiatives to tackle inequality.

Renfrewshire Council has a clear commitment to tackling climate change, having declared a climate emergency in 2019 and a target to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030. This commitment forms a stand-alone strategic outcome in the Council Plan ('Green') which closely links to Plan for Net Zero and RenZero identity.

How good are the delivery plans and is there alignment of financial, workforce, asset and digital plans with the council's priorities?	Auditor judgement Risks exist to the achievement of operational objectives  The Council has delivery plans in place for achieving the Council Plan priorities, however work on addressing financial sustainability challenges is ongoing. The Council is aligning its financial, people and other key plans with its priorities. The Council is still actively having to manage the impact of the pandemic and the recovery of services as well as the longer term impact for citizens. In addition, and more recently, the impact of the cost of the living crisis adds further challenge and complexity. We recognise that the financial sustainability is one of key challenges facing the council and we have made a separate comment on that in our report on 2022-23 audit. Achieving financial sustainability has a potential of indirectly impacting achievement of other objectives in the Council Plan.
Overall, how effective has the leadership been (political and officer) in setting clear priorities and	Auditor judgement No major weaknesses in arrangements but scope for improvement exists 

a sustainable approach to delivering them?

The Council has in place an appropriate governance framework to support member / officer relationships. Member and officer working relationships are effective.

In the past Renfrewshire Council has been subject to criticism in relation to difficult working relationships between elected members and on cross party working. From our work to date and interviews with the members we have observed a clear improvement in this area, with a collaborative approach adopted by the current members.

Our audit has also identified a gap in the overall effectiveness of scrutiny arrangements within the Council and we have recommended that the Council evaluates the effectiveness of its Audit, Scrutiny and Risk Board against CIPFA good practice guidelines.

Definition

We use the following gradings to provide an overall assessment of the arrangements in place as they relate to best value. The text provides a guide to the key criteria we use in the assessment, although not all of the criteria may exist in every case.¹



¹ Our overall judgements have not considered the pace and depth of improvement as part of this review. The Council has approved its Council Plan not that long ago and it would be difficult to make a judgment so early on progress against it. We will consider the Council's progress in implementing the Plan during the course of our appointment and will apply judgement as to the pace and depth of improvement as part of this work.

Scope of the audit

When discussing the Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022, William Moyes, Chair of the Accounts Commission said: “Councils are operating in a complex and increasingly volatile, unprecedented and unpredictable environment. Strong leadership from councils is needed now more than ever, with new and returning councillors being able and willing to make difficult decisions about where and how to spend highly pressurised resources.”

This report concludes on the effectiveness of the council's leadership of the development of the council's strategic priorities, following the recent local government elections.

The Accounts Commission's Strategy (2021-26) sets out its priorities to focus on inequalities, funding, communities and recovery. The Code of Audit practice sets out the Best Value work required to report on these priorities.

Code of Audit Practice 2020 Best Value reporting requirements

Best Value reporting – extract from the Code

87. The Accounts Commission's approach to Best Value involves reporting on individual local government bodies and thematically across the local government sector through performance reports:

- As part of their integrated wider-scope annual audit work appointed auditors use a risk-based approach to assess and report whether the audited body has made proper arrangements for securing Best Value and is complying with its community planning duties, including reporting progress against previous Best Value findings and recommendations.
- The Accounts Commission also requires the Controller of Audit to report to the Accounts Commission on each council or Integration Joint Board (IJB) at least once over the five-year audit appointment on the body's performance on its Best Value duty. This enables the Accounts Commission to make findings for improvement where appropriate. ²
- The Accounts Commission reports nationally on thematic aspects of local government bodies' approaches to, and performance in, meeting their Best

² The Controller of Audit will report the first tranche of council BV reports to the Commission between October 2023 and August 2024 on Moray, Falkirk, Dundee City, Orkney Islands, South Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Clackmannanshire and West Dunbartonshire.

Value and community planning duties. Local government appointed auditors report locally on any such Best Value thematic work prescribed by the Accounts Commission.

This report covers the thematic aspect of the Best Value audit requirements. The Commission has directed auditors to report on the effectiveness of the leadership of the development of the council's strategic priorities.



In carrying out the work auditors have considered the following questions:

- How clear is the council's new vision and its priorities?
- How effectively have the views of citizens and communities been reflected in the priorities and decisions taken by the council?
- How effectively do the council priorities reflect the need to reduce inequalities and climate change?
- How good are the delivery plans and is there alignment of financial, workforce, asset and digital plans with the council's priorities?
- Overall, how effective has the leadership been (political and officer) in setting clear priorities and a sustainable approach to delivering them?

The coverage of the work is in line with the expectations for council's arrangements for the seven Best Value themes in the [Local Government in Scotland Act 2003](#), [Best Value Statutory Guidance 2020](#).

Council vision and priorities

A council focused on achieving Best Value in how it operates will be able to demonstrate that elected members and officers have a clear vision and priorities for their area.

The Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022 says that Scotland's councils have had a pivotal role in supporting and working with communities as they respond to the impacts of Covid-19. Following the council elections in May 2021, council's will have reviewed their priorities.

The Council has established a clear vision and ambitions as set out in its Council Plan 2022-27 developed together with refreshed Renfrewshire Community Plan

Renfrewshire Council has a clear strategic ambition. The overall vision is for "Creating a fairer Renfrewshire built on innovation, wellbeing and opportunity".

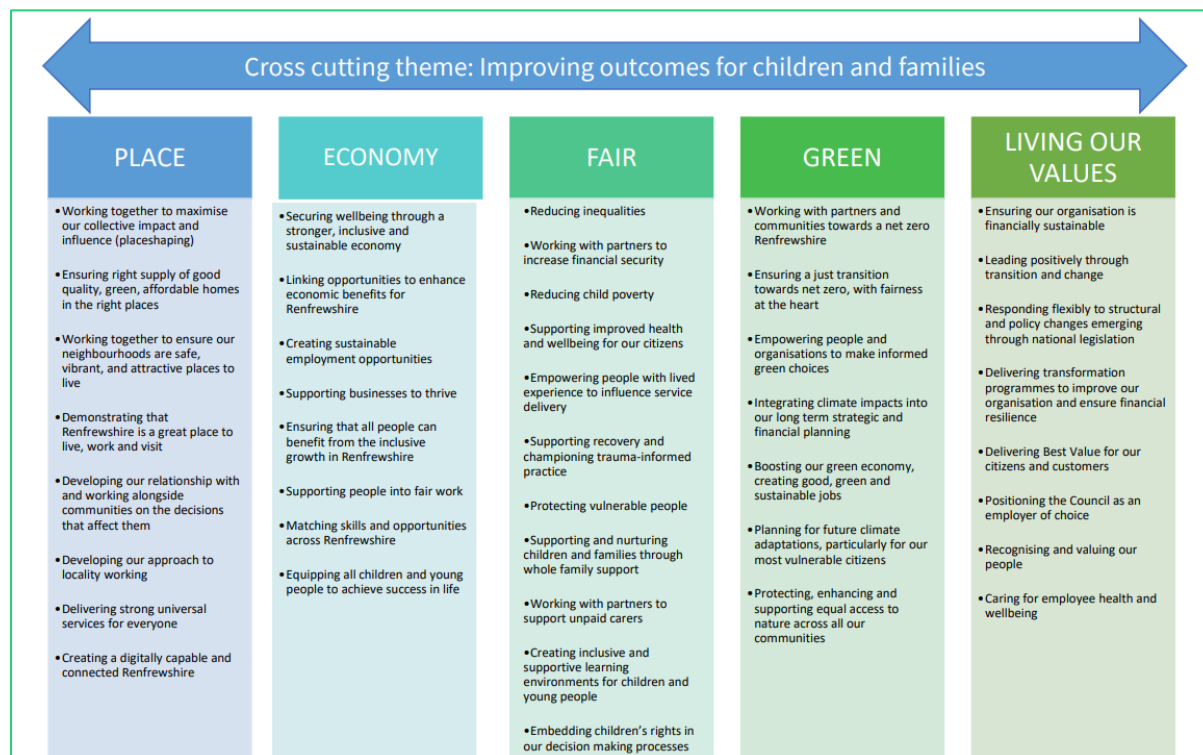
"Our Council Plan sets out the Council's priorities for the next 5 years, it describes the actions we will take to deliver change across Renfrewshire within the themes that need our focus. This Plan remains ambitious even though we know that we face huge hurdles. Whilst still in recovery from the pandemic, we face renewed financial challenges for Renfrewshire Council and likely structural changes through the proposed development of the National Care Services - both will lead to fundamental changes in the way we work and deliver services. As a Council, we have so many positives to build on, we have passion and creativity, and we remain committed to delivering strong universal services that people in Renfrewshire need every day to live their lives well."

The Council Plan

Renfrewshire Council set out its vision and ambitions in the new Council Plan approved in September 2022. The Plan uses strategic outcomes to communicate internal and external communication and engagement. The Plan also describes a cross-cutting theme – improving outcomes for children and families. Every one of the 5 strategic outcomes should directly contribute to this outcome and demonstrate that services are working together to get it right for children, families and communities.

There was a significant piece of work, undertaken through a Strategic Needs Assessment which underpinned both documents, outlining the key themes, needs and opportunities for Renfrewshire. The Community Planning Executive Group had full oversight of the development process. There was Community Impact Assessment commissioned in light of the pandemic and cost of living crisis which

informed the development of the Council Plan. This was scrutinised as part of their development by a cross party sounding board.



There are many priorities in Council Plan, which might dilute the effectiveness of its delivery

The Plan sets out five strategic outcomes for Renfrewshire, and then individual detailed priorities against each, together with actions to achieve those. Those actions translate into SMART actions to show the specific activity required across Council services and to as set of performance indicators and data to measure impact. Six-monthly updates on Council Plan progress will be reported to the Council's Leadership Board, which is made available online.

Across Renfrewshire Council, each Service develops a Service Improvement Plan (SIP) on an annual basis – these SIPs sit under the Council Plan and describe the activities that each Service will undertake in order to support the delivery of the Council Plan.

However, with numerous actions and plans it is difficult to distinguish which of them are the key priorities and can be argued that focussing efforts on all of them will dilute the efficiency of the delivery. To demonstrate our point, the first objective 'Place' has seven 'priorities', 13 actions and 8 indicators. While having this level of

detail demonstrates a thought-through, research-based approach, it might be difficult to distinguish which of these objectives are being, or should be, prioritised.

Recommendation 1

The Council set a clear performance framework and service tracking of Council Plan objectives; The Council might want to revisit the way it tracks Plan objectives progress to ensure reporting is accurate

The Council approved a Performance Framework for Council Plan in December 2022. The Framework includes a targeted suite of actions and indicators, progress against which will be reported to the Leadership Board every 6 months. Where possible, the scorecard of indicators for each Council plan outcome contains both quarterly and annual indicators to ensure that members of the board are able to access timely and relevant performance information. The Framework contains 55 high-level actions to be achieved in the next five years, with 39 performance indicators to measure the progress. All of these have been identified as important to monitor and deliberately selected for that purpose.

The first update against Council Plan progress has been reported to Leadership Board in June 2023. These present a mixed picture, due to challenges with resourcing and cost pressures. We also note that there is some disconnect between the Plan objectives which all were marked either as complete or 'green' for progress, and indicators, which indicated a more mixed picture.

Recommendation 2

Citizen and community engagement

Recovery from the pandemic will require councils to work alongside their local communities. There must be a focus on getting the services people need in place as pressures and stresses escalate and impact the day to day lives of individuals and communities.

Councils, with their community planning partners, have a responsibility to ensure that people and communities are able to be fully involved in the decisions that affect their everyday lives.

Early and meaningful engagement and effective collaboration with communities to identify and understand local needs, and in decisions that affect the planning and delivery of services should be a core part of determining a council's vision and priorities.

The Council's activities to involve its citizens are wide ranged but challenges remain

Community empowerment, wealth and wellbeing are reflected in the strategic priorities underpinning Council Plan. To support these priorities, the Council is continuing to actively seek to design operating models and services that strengthen the community voice and bring decision making into communities. Community empowerment is also one of the key guiding principles of the Council's Fairer Renfrewshire programme.

Community engagement and participatory budgeting

Renfrewshire Council has a number of initiatives in relation to community engagement summarised in its Community Plan 2017-27, which was refreshed in 2022. A Connected Communities programme is being led by the Head of Policy and Partnerships as part of the overall Right for Renfrewshire programme. Key strategic plans by partners such as One Ren and HSCP also reflect this focus, as do high level strategic plans and regeneration programmes e.g. Whole Family Wellbeing or Housing Regeneration programmes.

The Community Impact Assessment and resultant programmes such as Fairer Renfrewshire are based on consultation and engagement on priorities. The Fairer Renfrewshire Panel is supporting and shaping local work in relation to poverty and inequality.

Some service-specific examples include the Village Improvement Fund, designed with communities around road safety and road layout. The creation of biodiversity

areas has also involved engagement with local communities, alongside parks investment. This work links closely with the Council's award-winning Team Up to Clean Up Programme, which empowers local people to make changes and environmental improvements in their local areas. Finally, the new school menu design was carried out with parent/carers and pupils.

The Council has participatory budgeting programmes which reflect this way of working, for example, You Decide and Celebrating Renfrewshire. There is also established a lived experience panel as part of Fairer Renfrewshire Programme, following on from the Alcohol and Drugs commission where lived experience featured significantly in the evidence gathering and workshops. In addition, Renfrewshire's local partnerships are examples of communities making decisions about their local places. The objectives of Local Partnerships with which the Council is working to develop with communities is to:

- make connections and networks between community groups and the wider community;
- identify, set and share local community priorities;
- listen to, consult and represent local communities; and
- distribute grants to support local priorities.

There are a range of service-specific examples including engagement around the Local Development Plan, working with communities on a Housing Led Regen priorities. There is also a well established tenant participation approach including engagement on housing, sheltered housing and homelessness. Consultation has also been carried out on the design and engagement on active travel, road safety measures, parks' design and equipment with communities in most instances.

Engagement with children and young people is a key focus, and work has been undertaken through Youth Services to develop mechanisms for young people to have a voice and get involved in the decision making process.

Educational Attainment – case study

Closing the poverty-related attainment gap has been a priority for Renfrewshire Council for a number of years. Participation in the Scottish Attainment Challenge has supported this goal and allowed for a number of innovative programmes. Tariff scores for pupils in the most deprived 30% of areas within Renfrewshire have risen steadily and Renfrewshire is one of the best-performing councils in Scotland. In 2017/18, the average score in Renfrewshire was 619 (compared to a Scottish average of 620). By 2021/22, this had risen to 744 in Renfrewshire, an increase of 20% over five years, compared with a Scottish average of 699 (an increase of 13%).

Renfrewshire has made strong progress in literacy and numeracy attainment. In 17/18, 92% of our school leavers had achieved Level 4 in Literacy and 78% had

achieved Level 5. In comparison, 96% of our 21/22 school leavers achieved Level 4 and 87% achieved Level 5. A similar picture emerges for numeracy attainment. In 17/18, 86% of our school leavers achieved Level 4 in Numeracy and 54% had achieved Level 5. Our 21/22 cohort had 93% of school leavers achieving Level 4 Numeracy and 77% achieving Level 5. Our 21/22 leavers cohort outperformed the West Partnership and National figures for percentage of leavers achieving level 4 and 5 in literacy and numeracy.

Progress has also been made in the overall attainment of our school leavers. The percentage of leavers who have achieved a pass in at least 1 Level 5 award has risen from 90.0% in 2018 to 91.5% in 2022. In 2018, 69.1% of school leavers left with an award at Level 6, compared with 72.9% in 2022. More notable progress has been made at deeper levels of achievement. For example, in 2018, 67% of leavers left with 5 or more awards at Level 5 and 37% left with 5 or more awards at Level 6. In contrast, 72% of leavers in 2022 left with 5 or more awards at Level 5 and 42% left with 5 or more awards at Level 6.

Positive progress has been made in relation to positive destinations. In 2018, 93.1% of Renfrewshire school leavers were in initial positive destinations. This figure was behind both Virtual Comparator (95.2%) and National (94.4%) figures. In 2022, 96.6% of Renfrewshire school leavers entered an initial positive destination. This was above both the virtual comparator (96.3%) and national (95.7%) figure. Significant improvements have been made in the initial destinations of our pupils from the 20% most deprived areas. In 2018, 87.7% of leavers from these SIMD zones entered positive destinations. By 2022, this had increased to 93.9%.

Communities affected by the Dargavel Primary school issue

We have reviewed the Council's response to the independent report on issues relevant to the building of Dargavel Primary School (the 'Bowles Report') and evaluated the Council's plans and progress in implementing the recommendations contained in that report. We comment on the full detail in our Annual Audit Report for 2022/23 audit.

The Bowles Report identified a number of significant failures in scrutiny, governance and working practices across a number of Council services. These failures led to the Council commissioning the developer of the Dargavel site (BAE Systems) to build a school with significantly fewer places than required by the scale of the development and the local area. The Council remains in the process of assessing how best to address the recommendations of the Bowles Report, but will be required to now build a new and unplanned school to meet the needs of primary school age pupils. The initial gross capital cost of this new school will be c.£75million with ongoing revenue costs of c£4.5million. These costs do not include the additional running costs of this new school which will also be significant. These additional unplanned costs add to the Council's overall budget deficit.

The Bowles Report in relation to the Dargavel school has covered the decision making issues relevant to the outcome of building a school which is too small to meet community needs. The impact of that decision on educational outcomes for school children in the Bishopton and Dargavel areas remains a significant concern for the local community. The Council has put in a range of mitigations to address those concerns, but we note that the affected local communities continue to raise a number of concerns with the Council.

Reducing inequalities and tackling climate change

Council priorities are expected to reflect the Best Value expectations that all activities should contribute to tackling poverty, reducing inequality, promoting fairness, respect and dignity for all citizens, alongside a focus on sustainable development, including climate change.

The Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022 report says that the impact of the pandemic and service disruption have been felt most strongly by those already experiencing inequality. Councils have worked hard and adapted to maintain service delivery but those most in need of support are still being affected. Councils must evaluate these impacts so that recovery and renewal supports those most affected and addresses inequalities.

Around two-thirds of councils have formally declared a climate emergency, and COSLA's Blueprint for Local Government states that climate change is a 'greater threat than COVID'. The Scottish Government has recently published guidance on public sector leadership on the global climate emergency to help public bodies in leading climate action. Addressing the climate emergency and setting actions to achieve net zero will need to be a key element of councils' recovery and renewal from the pandemic.

The Council's priorities have a strong focus on the need to reduce inequalities.

As a part of Community Impact Assessment, the Council run a specific equalities-led engagement programme, recognising that the pandemic exacerbated inequalities. The assessment was commissioned in light of the pandemic and cost of living crisis informed the development of the Council Plan. This work then led to the Social Renewal Plan and Fairer Renfrewshire programme and the findings were also reflected in the Strategic Needs Assessment. The Community Plan was refreshed almost exclusively to focus on the inequalities and the 'Fair' strategic outcome in the Council Plan.

Council commitment to reduce inequalities includes specific funding for the programme and a sub-committee of the Leadership Board established to specifically focus on this key priority area. A Fairer Renfrewshire Officer Group has been established to share learning, understanding and information on fairness and inequality issues across Renfrewshire, and there are initial plans to develop a wider partnership group also.

Examples of targeted work include working with young people as part of the Plan for Net Zero. The lived experience panel and the Alcohol and Drugs Commission work and close engagement with the DEAR group (Diversity Equality Alliance in Renfrewshire) to understand local need and priorities.

A cost of living evidence event was held in October 2022 year bringing together a wide range of local groups, organisations and partners to identify key priorities and influence the development of the Fairer Renfrewshire programme. This programme brings together all the activities that the Council have been progressing through the social renewal plan, through our tackling poverty programme and alcohol and drugs programme.

Another area which shows this approach in practice is through how 'Renfrewshire Keeps the Promise', including:

- Renfrewshire Promise Keepers network: recruited over 166 (and growing) Promise Keepers from across the Council and partners who act as local champions, helping to educate and improve services for Care Experienced people.
- Renfrewshire Language Policy: guidelines for how people speak about and describe Care Experience and Care Experienced children and young people. This was co-designed with Care Experienced young people.
- 'Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together' policy, which was co-designed by Care Experienced young people from the Renfrewshire Champions Board.

The work on inequalities is aligned with Renfrewshire's Economic Recovery Plan 2020 to 2022 which addressed the immediate impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic on Renfrewshire's economy. This included a specific focus on inequalities with one of the key objectives 'Tackling inequalities; employment, income, education and health including measures to mitigate the risks of increasing multiple disadvantages and any widening of the gap between the most and least deprived as a result of the economic crisis' as well as a theme to support young people. This work has now been mainstreamed within Renfrewshire's long term Economic Plan, driven forward by Renfrewshire's Economic Panel.

Delayed Discharge – case study

Within a national context, Renfrewshire was the highest performing HSCP area in Scotland at March 2023 for standard delays with 137 bed days lost. This equated to a rate of 93 per 100,000 population. The national average rate at March 2023 was 874 and the Greater Glasgow and Clyde average was 676.6 per 100,000 population. This level of performance has been maintained over a decade, with Renfrewshire consistently one of the best performing council areas.

Employability Support – case study

Renfrewshire Council's Employability Programme, INVEST, continued to provide employment and training support, with the team supporting 1,370 new registrations to the service throughout the year, 538 people into paid employment and 340 into sustained work after 6 months following support from the service. A further 507 people were supported to secure qualifications which could help them in seeking paid, or higher paid work through the service.

During the pandemic, Renfrewshire's Kickstart Gateway was one of the largest youth employment schemes in Scotland, placing 408 young people into roles across Renfrewshire, including 71 at Renfrewshire Council. Work such as this has contributed to Renfrewshire having one of the highest youth employment rates in Scotland.

The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019. Addressing the climate emergency is one of strategic outcomes ('Green') within Council Plan

Renfrewshire Council has a clear commitment to tackling climate change, having declared a climate emergency in 2019. The elected members have agreed to work to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030. This commitment forms a stand-alone strategic outcome in the Council Plan ('Green') which closely links to Plan for Net Zero and RenZero identity. Commitment to climate change was also shown through the establishment of the Climate Change Sub-committee of the Leadership Board. Following the election, this then moved into a formal Policy Board, the Planning and Climate Change Policy Board.

The priorities, targets and actions are set out in Plan for Net Zero which outlines the reasoning, research, themes, actions and next steps required as we work towards becoming net zero by 2030. Renfrewshire themes and actions include: clean energy, sustainable transport, circular economy, connected communities, resilient place.

Climate Goals – case study

Recycling rates were adversely affected across the country during the first phase of the pandemic, and this was evidenced in the LGBF data for 2020/21.

Renfrewshire's recycling rate has shown steady progress in recent years, and is one of only nine councils where more than half of household waste is recycled. In 2021/22, 51.7% of Renfrewshire's household waste was recycled and more recent local data indicates that the proportion is continuing to grow.

Increasing use of alternative fuels within the Council's fleet is also contributing to our Plan for Net Zero. As of 2023, 30.2% of the Council's fleet runs on alternative fuels and refuse collection vehicles which can run on Hydrolysed Vegetable Oil are currently being trialled.

Alignment of delivery plans

Making the best use of public resources is at the heart of delivering Best Value. With clear plans and strategies in place, and with sound governance and strong leadership, a council will be well placed to ensure that all of its resources are deployed to achieve its strategic priorities, meet the needs of its communities and deliver continuous improvement.

Delivery Plans are well established

The Council's strategic framework has a link from the Council and Community Plan to service level and operational plans. Services have their own Service Improvement Plans covering 2022-2025 period. Service plans highlight how key priorities within the Council and Community Plan will be delivered, often at a more granular level.

The Council has a well-established approach around transformation and achieving savings across services through our Right for Renfrewshire programme and now through Financial Sustainability workstream. This work is cross-cutting, supported by the Council's programme management unit and reports to Corporate Management Team (CMT). This includes identifying service changes across other Council areas and data analysis where appropriate.

An example is the ongoing development of digital operations and the use of robotics process automation, whereby digital solutions are being used to ensure the most effective and efficient processes are employed.

The Council is aligning its financial, people and other key plans with its priorities

In setting the 2023/24 budget Council agreed to combine previously unspent funds linked to climate action and community empowerment together in a way which aims to better support the sustainability of community investments, and to better support community groups tackle climate change locally through improved targeting of the available funding. Proposals for the resultant Sustainable Communities Fund were considered by elected members through the Leadership Board on 20 September 2023.

The Council also recognised the difficult financial position it is facing and agreed to consolidate pandemic related funding into a financial sustainability fund which will be utilised in the short term to underpin the Council's financial position while substantive measures are taken to redesign and amend service provision in line with available revenue resource.

As commented in our Annual Audit Report 2022-23 the Council regularly receives updates on the medium term financial position and associated financial risks and

assumptions for financial sustainability. Investment capacity has been severely limited in recent years - a position which is unlikely to improve over the medium term. We recognise that the financial sustainability is one of key challenges facing the council and we make a separate comment on that in our report on 2022-23 audit.

A new people strategy has been recently approved by appropriate Board which had detailed actions related to workforce planning. A new workforce action group will also be set up to support in the delivery of these actions and will regularly review if these actions meet the needs of the Council.

Renfrewshire Council is currently undertaking a Strategic Property review to assess the portfolio size. In addition, Renfrewshire Council will look to produce an Asset Management Plan to assess and understand the current assets across the Council and to plan for the future.

The Council has a Digital Strategy and a Digital Board that meets every 4 weeks.

Community engagement at work

From September 2022 through to December 2022, the Council launched a public (and staff) campaign to build awareness of the scale of the council's financial challenge locally and to pave the way for difficult decisions on changes to services.

The campaign was designed to limit anxiety about change, especially at a time of economic uncertainty and cost of living crisis, and to reassure staff, local people and service users that the council is fully focused on managing its finances and is basing decisions on service data and evidence, social listening and insights gathered previously through a number of resident engagements (Our Values engagement, Public Services Panel 2022, Engagement with tenants - housing regeneration areas and community engagement during Covid recovery). A secondary aim was to provide context for political decision making, so Council decisions are transparent and impacted stakeholders are prepared.

The integrated campaign including a short film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uadiX1slgoc> promoted through Council channels, community networks, organic and paid-for social media and through local press advertising. Residents were encouraged to watch the short film and visit the council website for information. The campaign confirmed the level of savings required over the next 3 years, and the likely ways savings will be achieved, using simple language.

Leadership

Effective leadership from councillors, chief executives and senior officers, is key to councils achieving their objectives and providing clear strategic direction. The complex local government environment means collaborative leadership, working with partners, communities and citizens to improve outcomes is more important than ever.

Leaders need to be skilled in effective strategic thinking, decision-making and collaborative working and able to learn lessons from new ways of working. Councillors and officers must be clear on their roles in setting the vision and planning for its delivery.

Leaders should demonstrate behaviours and working relationships that foster a culture of cooperation, and a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation. Good conduct and behaviours when working together are crucial. Working relationships between members and between members and officers should be constructive and productive. Councillors should show a commitment to agreed council priorities and work together to achieve them.

The Council has in place an appropriate governance framework to support member / officer relationships. Member and officer working relationships are effective.

In the past Renfrewshire Council has been subject to criticism in relation to difficult work relationships between elected members and impacting on cross party working. From our work to date and interviews with the members we can see a clear improvement in this area, with collaborative approach adopted by the current members.

The Council established a Cross Party Sounding Board to allow matters to be consulted by officers with Elected Members in what is intended to be a non-political forum. For example, the Board met to discuss the new Council Plan and refreshed Community Plan.

In response to Dargavel linked recommendations, the Council has agreed to establish a cross-party body to discuss and review existing governance arrangements of the Council. Officer briefings for all of the three major political groups are offered in advance of policy boards and these occur more frequently under the current Council.

The Code of Conduct for Councillors forms the basis of the principles and values for elected members. The Council's Protocol for relationships between Political Groups, Elected Members and Officers sets out the respective duties of Members and officers and regulates the standards expected of each. The Protocol will be soon

reviewed as part of the cross party review of the Council's governance arrangements.

Statutory training is provided to elected members. An extensive induction programme was offered to all Elected Members after the 2022 LG Elections (including returning Members). There is also an annual Members Development week, with other training sessions being offered as and when a need is identified, either by officers, members or as a result of new areas of legislation.

From our observations during the short period of our audit appointment the work relationships between officers and elected members appear to be effective.

We note the Bowles Report identifies issues relevant to effective scrutiny, decision making and joint working across and between Council services. Our audit has also identified a gap in the overall effectiveness of scrutiny arrangements within the Council and we have recommended that the Council evaluates the effectiveness of its Audit, Scrutiny and Risk Committee against CIPFA good practice guidelines. We have included a recommendation in this regard in our Annual Audit Report for 2022/23.

Appendix 1: action plan

1. Key priorities	
Observation	With numerous actions and plans in its Council Plan it is difficult to distinguish which of them are the key priorities and can be argued that focussing efforts on all of them will dilute the efficiency of the delivery. While having this level of detail demonstrates a thought through, research-based approach it might be difficult to distinguish which of these objectives are being prioritised.
Implication	While having this level of detail demonstrates a thought through, research-based approach it might be difficult to distinguish which of these objectives are being prioritised.
Recommendation	To consider further priority setting to allow effective delivery of the Council's key outcomes.
Management response	The Council Plan is subject to ongoing review and we are currently gathering the 6 monthly report on progress which will be submitted to Leadership Board in December 2023. A review will be conducted of all priorities, actions and indicators by end of March 2024, and this will inform the next scheduled report to Leadership Board in June 2024. Responsible officer: Head of Policy and Partnerships Implementation date: March 2024

2. Progress reporting against Council Plan

Observation	The first update against Council Plan progress has been reported to Leadership Board in June 2023. These present a mixed picture, due to challenges with resourcing and cost pressures. We also note that there is some disconnect between the Plan objectives which all were marked either as complete or green for progress, and indicators, which were of a more mixed picture.
Implication	Progress against Council Plan objectives might not be reported accurately.
Recommendation	To consider how progress is reported and update as appropriate.
Management response	As outlined in terms of the recommendation on prioritisation, a review of relevant priorities, indicators, and actions will be undertaken by March 2024, which will inform a full report to Leadership Board on Council Plan progress in June 2024. Responsible officer: Head of Policy and Partnerships Implementation date: June 2024



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