

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Executive****Council: 26 February 2020**

Subject: West Dunbartonshire Best Value Assurance Report**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to report completion of the Council Best Value Improvement Plan approved by Council in August 2018 following the Audit Scotland Best Value Assurance Review of West Dunbartonshire Council.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** Members are asked to:
- Note that Council's Improvement Plan, developed in response to the recommendations contained in the BVAR, has been fully delivered

3. Background

- 3.1** The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 established statutory duties for Scottish Local Authorities, focused on securing Best Value. Under these arrangements West Dunbartonshire Council was last audited in 2006, with follow up reports published until 2010.
- 3.2** Following a review of the approach, Audit Scotland developed a new approach to auditing best value adopted in 2016, which ensures that each Local Authority has a process of Best Value Assurance (BVA) undertaken at least once in a five-year period. The new BVA approach focuses on strategic audit priorities of:
- the clarity of council priorities and quality of long-term planning to achieve these
 - how effectively councils are evaluating and implementing options for significant changes in delivering services
 - how effectively councils are ensuring that members and officers have the right knowledge, skills and time to lead and manage delivery of council priorities
 - how effectively councils are involving citizens in decisions about services
 - the quality of council performance reporting to help citizens gauge improvement.
- 3.3** The Best Value Assurance process took place in West Dunbartonshire from January 2018 to April 2018. Audit Scotland carried out an evidence review of strategies and documents, as well as conducting a range of interviews and intending key council meetings. The audit covered:

- The Council vision and strategic direction
- The Council's self-assessment / evaluation processes and the impact made
- How effectively the Council plans its use of resources, including asset management, financial planning and workforce planning
- How the Council delivers services with partners, including consideration of City Deal and shared service developments
- Community engagement and how this impacts on the Council's activities
- A review of the Council's continuous improvement programmes such as regeneration and office rationalisation
- Overall assessment of outcomes performance and the reporting of these, including the council's; public performance reporting – potentially with detailed work in elicited areas being identified from our initial review.

3.4 The BVAR for West Dunbartonshire was presented to Accounts Commission on 7 June 2018 and published on Thursday 28 June, along with the Accounts Commission findings, on the [Account Commission website](#). The report was circulated to all elected members on the date of publication, along with a briefing note on Commission findings. Following this, the report and a supporting improvement plan were considered by Council in August 2018. The improvement plan was approved for delivery during 2018/19 – 2019/20, with progress updates to be reported through Audit Committee.

3.5 The BVAR provided an assessment of the Council and its performance since the last audit in 2006. Overall the audit was positive, providing independent external assurance on delivery of Best Value in West Dunbartonshire. The Commission endorsed the recommendations made in the Audit Scotland report and also noted the significant progress made by Council since the most recent audit follow-up report in 2010.

3.6 Based on the BVAR, Audit Scotland made five recommendations which provide direction on the key areas which Council should focus improvement activity over the coming period. These recommendations cover the themes of:

- Capital project management
- Workforce planning
- Reducing absence
- Developing the Community Alliance
- Enhancing cross party working

4. Main Issues

BVAR & Recommendations

- 4.1** The improvement plan agreed by Council in August 2018 detailed the actions and timescales for delivery of these in each of the five recommendation areas of the BVAR. Lead officers were also identified in the improvement plan.
- 4.2** Work on the range of actions identified to address the recommendation areas of the BVAR has been monitored through the monthly Performance & Monitoring Review Group. In addition, it was agreed that progress would be reported to Audit Committee on a regular basis over the period of the plan with a final report presented to Council following conclusion of the improvement plan.
- 4.3** The scorecard report, attached as appendix 1, describes delivery of each of the five action areas. Good and timely progress was made on delivery of all agreed actions areas. However, the initial delivery date for action area 4 on community empowerment proved challenging; work on development of the community empowerment strategy progressed well, but did not progress at the pace required to deliver for the June 2019 target date for the action. This extension to the planned timeline was put in place through the Community Empowerment Steering Group, and reported through Audit Committee, to ensure full ownership and support for the strategy and supporting action plan across key stakeholder groups at a community, Council and partnership level. The Strategy was presented for endorsement at Community Planning West Dunbartonshire before being considered and approved at November Council.
- 4.4** Audit Scotland recently reviewed progress of the improvement plan as part of their core annual audit activity. In doing this, the senior auditor met with the performance & strategy manager to gain a general overview of the actions areas. Following this, individual meetings were arranged with action lead officers as required. This review of progressed was then reflected in the 2018/19 Annual Audit Report where Audit Scotland reported good progress against each of the 5 action areas.

Next Steps

- 4.5** While the BVAR Improvement Plan has now been fully delivered, activity on driving Best Value will continue. West Dunbartonshire Council will continue to review and learn from the best value assurance process in other Council areas, internal activity such as the self-evaluation framework, external benchmarking and resident feedback. This will inform preparation and delivery of future best value assurance activity in West Dunbartonshire through the 5-year Best Value Assurance process of Audit Scotland.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no people or personnel implications directly associated with this report. Actions will be delivered within existing capacity.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** There are no financial or procurement implications directly associated with this report. Actions will be delivered within existing budgets.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** Council requires to act on the recommendations made by Audit Scotland and the findings of Accounts Commission. Failure to develop an improvement plan would present a risk to the Councils statutory duty to deliver best value and to the reputation of the organisation.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** The improvement plan and associated actions do not have specific relevance to any protected group. The actions have been screened and assessment as not relevant.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** The improvement actions contained in appendix one were developed in consultation with all key services.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** The improvement plan and response to the BVAR and Accounts Commission findings ensures delivery of the Council priorities:
- open, accountable and accessible local government
 - efficient and effective frontline services that improve the everyday lives of residents

Joyce White

Chief Executive

Date: 13 January 2020

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Appendices: BVAR Improvement Plan



Background Papers: [West Dunbartonshire Council Best Value Report 2018](#)

Wards Affected: All


Best Value Assurance Improvement Plan 2018
February 2020




Capital Programme Management

Audit Scotland recommendation	Action area	Status	Progress Bar	Due Date	Latest Note	Managed by
To reduce the level of slippage on the capital plan, the council should review its project management processes. The council could use the Major capital investment in councils: good practice guide as the basis of a self-assessment	Capital Planning project management approach to be reviewed and updated with a focus on reducing slippage			29-Mar-2019	Action complete. Analysis of drivers for slippage carried out along with a review of current practice against highlighted guidance. Existing programme management guidance will be subject to ongoing review based on learning from these exercises.	Richard Cairns


Workforce Planning

Audit Scotland recommendation	Action area	Status	Progress Bar	Due Date	Latest Note	Managed by
Workforce plans are in place and should be further developed to include forecasts of workforce numbers, the expected shape of the workforce and costs, over the planning period. Progress should be monitored	Workforce planning framework to be embedded and further developed. Long term risk-based scenario planning will be developed, including the forecasting of workforce numbers, composition and costs		<div><div>100%</div></div>	31-Aug-2019	Action complete. Workforce planning for each service completed alongside service plans and presented at relevant committees.	Victoria Rogers

Attendance

Audit Scotland recommendation	Action area	Status	Progress Bar	Due Date	Latest Note	Managed by
Some staff are finding the pace of change challenging and staff absence remains an issue. The council is taking positive steps to try and address this and should continue to explore opportunities for improvement	Employee wellbeing strategy will be implemented and measures embedded		<div><div>100%</div></div>	31-Oct-2019	Action complete. Action plans supporting employee wellbeing strategy are in place, planning and delivery will be ongoing over the lifetime of the Wellbeing Strategy.	Victoria Rogers

Community Empowerment

Audit Scotland recommendation	Action area	Status	Progress Bar	Due Date	Latest Note	Managed by
The Community Alliance (CA) brings together representatives from neighbourhood, interest and user groups. The council sees it as an important engagement link with the community but there are a number of challenges that it needs to address. The council should continue to offer help to further develop the role of the CA and help it reach its full potential	Community Empowerment Strategy, with supporting mechanism in place for strategic engagement of community organisations, will be put in place using principles of engaging communities framework		<div><div>100%</div></div>	30-Jun-2019	This action was delayed to accommodate increased public engagement through the process. Following a third round of consultation a revised draft was produced, identifying key themes and examples of how these are being progressed. The final strategy was presented to both CPWD and Council in November. An implementation plan is also under developed.	Peter Barry

Cross-party working

Audit Scotland recommendation	Action area	Status	Progress Bar	Due Date	Latest Note	Managed by
Councillors should consider working in cross-party groups to address the financial challenges which exist and the important decisions required in the future	Cross party working group arrangements to be explored to ensure Elected Members are sufficiently informed and have all relevant information available to inform decision making.	✓	<div><div>100%</div></div>	28-Feb-2019	Cross party working explored and model now in place	Peter Hesselst