

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Executive****Council:** 22 June 2022

Subject: Towards 2030**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This report sets out the progress of the Council over the last decade, and highlights the key challenges moving forward towards 2030.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended Council:

- notes this paper and considers the journey so far as well as key issues pertaining to the future.

3. Background**Our Council**

- 3.1 The Council has undergone a journey of transformation over the last decade underpinned by investment in people and assets and significant regeneration to progress towards West Dunbartonshire as the best place in Scotland to live, work, learn, visit and invest.
- 3.2 In 2011 the Council was praised by the Accounts Commission for "significant progress" and "effective and improved leadership of councillors and officers, sharing a commitment to making improvements", marking a dramatic recovery from 2006 when the authority had received the spending watchdog's most severe sanction. Progress has been consistent since with ongoing external recognition, highlights include:

Annual report 2017/18 – Audit Scotland

The Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) published in June stated that West Dunbartonshire Council had made significant improvements in how it works over the last ten years. *The Council demonstrates a focus on delivering Best Value and there was evidence of continuous improvement in its services.* In August 2018, the Council agreed a Best Value Assurance Improvement Plan to address all the recommendations included in the BVAR with progress reported in the Annual Audit Report.

Audit Scotland's annual audit of the Council in 2020/21 highlighted that the Council continued to make good progress in demonstrating evidence of improvement in its services and has a clear focus on delivering Best Value with effective systems in place to monitor and report its performance and drive continuous improvement. A critical element in this is the strategic planning process with a strategic plan developed every five years setting out the priorities for the Council and annual delivery plans in place across every service area to monitor progress against local and national performance targets.

Regeneration

A number of regeneration projects have been completed in recent years, transforming neighbourhoods, educational facilities, care homes, infrastructure and leisure. These included the redevelopment of Clydebank waterfront; developing West Dunbartonshire Energy Centre and district heating system to use green energy to heat homes; the construction of our award-winning offices in Dumbarton as part of our ongoing commitment to regenerating our town centres; and the delivery of hundreds of new energy efficient Council homes.

Recognition

There has been national recognition for achievements including a COSLA award, becoming the first Council to receive the Nurturing Schools Award, our new Dumbarton offices being named Regeneration Project of the Year and been awarded Heat Pump of the Year as well as being listed in the Top 10 of flexible employers in Scotland.

3.3 Covid Response

Throughout 2021/22 COVID continued to provide unprecedented challenges for delivery of Council services which included managing the impact of changes to national restrictions, especially as a result of rising infection rates due to the emergence of the Omicron variant. The Council's Strategic Resilience Group (SRG) and the Operational Resilience Group (ORG) met to discuss the challenges the pandemic presented with regular updates reported to Council to ensure elected members were fully updated on the impact across all services. These included:

Service	Impact and Action Taken
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued to respond and adapt to the regularly updated Scottish Government 'Reducing Risks in Schools Guidance' issuing Education Leaders with the relevant advice and support to maintain the necessary protective measures for operational delivery of the service. • Continued to work with colleagues in Environmental Health and Corporate Health and Safety to ensure enhanced and rigorous COVID Safe Protocols and COVID Risk Assessments in place. • Delivered the schools and ELC's Asymptomatic Testing Programme to support twice weekly lateral flow testing for staff and secondary school pupils to minimise the spread of COVID. • Significant operational challenges faced by the service through the numbers of positive COVID cases among staff and children and young people. Staff showed great commitment and effort to ensuring there has been minimal disruption to the learning for children and young people. • Created agile and flexible working plans to offset the impact of staff or child/young person absence which provided continuous service across all schools and ELC's. This was supported by remote/blended learning. • Continued to enhance the digital technologies inclusion provision to support remote/blended learning. • Re-established programme of transition experiences for children and young people entering P1 or S1. • Provided financial and food support to families requiring most support. • Closely monitored CO2 levels across the learning estate. • Provided free summer 2021 Activity Programme.
Citizen, Culture and Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing enhanced cleaning in Council premises including schools and nurseries. • Processing £1m of Self-Isolation Support Grants. • Recruited additional staff to ensure capacity to engage with citizens on issues being experienced with housing repairs due to the impact of COVID.
Supply, Distribution & Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With restrictions in place during the pandemic, internal works such as housing repairs could not be undertaken, except for emergencies. This resulted in a significant backlog of work. Restrictions were lifted 26 April and an action plan was put in place to address outstanding repairs and improve performance where possible. However, continuous high levels of COVID related absence, together with the national skills

	<p>shortage in trades, impacted on the ability of building services to deal with the backlog as well as newly reported repairs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitored and reported progress regularly to the Chief Executive and elected members. • Maintained communication with tenants through appropriate forums including tenant groups, housing news, social media, and text messaging.
<p>People & Technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All teams continued to deliver full service to support the organisation and maintain essential service delivery during pandemic. • Delivered a managed 'Return to Office' programme designed to deliver a safe, gradual return with appropriate restrictions maintained to protect our employees. • Implemented enhanced ICT security measures to better support employees and Members working in hybrid environment and to protect the organisation. • Actively supported the recruitment and associated contracts and payment of over 80 COVID recovery posts and over 50 Vaccination support team posts
<p>Housing & Employability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established a number of community based facilities to allow the Communities Team to engage with the community. • Increased focus on homelessness prevention working with landlords and introducing a Tenant Support Fund. • Maintained communication with tenants through appropriate forums including tenant groups, housing news, social media, and text messaging. • Over the course of the pandemic delivered 316 new homes. • Working 4U established remote community hubs from which they delivered one-to-one and group support services and established and managed a crisis support service which has also informed future priorities • Implemented revised working practices to deliver services across Housing Operations during the pandemic in line with restrictions. • Allocated over 900 houses despite pandemic restrictions. • Neighbourhood team and caretaking service continued to operate in communities during the pandemic

Regulatory & Regeneration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visited and provided advice to businesses to ensure they are aware of applicable health protection guidance and that they continue to operate in a safe manner. • Changed to deliver services remotely including registration of deaths. • Delivered a range of sector specific Scottish Government COVID grants across our business community.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued to update their estimates of the cost of COVID to ensure Scottish Government funding was allocated appropriately. • Supported local communities by processing COVID hardship payments, free school meal payments. • Adapted interventions to meet emerging needs including allocation of funds to foodbank support, Scottish Welfare fund top ups and additional support for people facing housing rent and council tax pressures.

4. Main Issues

4.1 Over the past year, West Dunbartonshire has had to address the twin tasks of managing the Covid-19 pandemic and beginning the recovery in our communities, services and economy. We continue to adapt and evolve our approach to ensure we deliver to the public at a time when public bodies have been under more pressure than ever experienced. This has meant learning new ways of delivering services, as well as refocusing our resources to ensure that we address the key issues. At the same time, we have also been ensuring we have the capacity and skills to fully respond to what our citizens need.

The Council and the Community Planning Partnership have a pivotal role in supporting and working with communities and now must lead recovery work with and alongside our local communities, focusing on getting the services people need in place as pressures and stresses escalate and impact the day to day lives of individuals and communities.

A report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has warned that the Scottish Government will face "tough decisions" between "axing, taxing or hoping for extra funding" in its multi-year resource spending review.

Significant pressure will be all around us as we move towards 2030 and deliver for our communities. Some difficult choices will be required to be made

as the economic impact of events including the pandemic and Brexit continue to take hold and the cost of living continues to rise.

COSLA has written to the Scottish Government seeking funding for a more generous pay deal for local government workers - with Council leaders backing a call for a "significant pay increase" for Council workers facing soaring inflation, to be "funded by the Scottish Government". Council leaders supported urgent calls for the First Minister and Finance Secretary to demand "the additional funding necessary to make such an enhanced pay offer", and for a meeting between the Scottish Government, COSLA and trade unions, "to press the case for sustainable long term funding for Local Government."

As we move forwards the priorities are around:

- Developing our Strategic Plan for 2022-27
- Balancing the finances - both revenue and reviewing capital investment plans
- Responding to the soaring cost of living and poverty
- Building the wealth of our communities
- Further developing partnership working with communities, public sector agencies and the third sector

Facing the challenges together is key and both Council and partners must focus on:

- Boosting our economy, creating good jobs and investment opportunities
- Addressing the cost of living crisis, tackling fuel poverty
- Education of our workforce and our people
- Sustainability and delivering on net zero
- Caring for our people
- Looking after our environment

We must create prosperity and jobs, good homes and continue our efforts to position West Dunbartonshire as a destination of choice to live, work, learn, visit and invest. .

Through our passion, imagination, commitment, integrity and demonstrating our values of ACHIEVE (Ambition, Confidence, Honesty, Innovation, Efficiency, Vibrancy and Excellence) we must focus on critical areas outlined below. Although by no means an exhaustive list, this demonstrates the complexity and challenges we will face as one of the 32 Council areas across Scotland.

- Delivering within tight budgets, financial constraints and with increasing cost pressures.
- Regeneration of sites and job creation

- Raising attainment
- Accessing external funding
- Developing our town centre plans and 20 minute neighbourhoods
- Responding to the Climate Emergency and delivering on the Scottish Government's net zero 2045 ambition
- Effectively running our new District Heating facility and addressing fuel poverty in our communities
- Continuing to develop our new housing investment and housing services
- Providing opportunities for active and sustainable travel.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** A high proportion of the working population are employed in Public Sector Scotland (about 48%) and currently the Council has around 6500 with approximately 60-70% living within West Dunbartonshire. The dependency on employment within the Council is critical to support our communities and the prospect of a lack of funding to incentivise and support workforce investment is a potential significant challenge.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** The Council, like all councils, faces significant financial challenges and is required to operate within tight fiscal constraints for the foreseeable future due to the continuing difficult national economic outlook and increased demand for services. With so many external influences impacting on the economy, forecasting remains very difficult. The COVID-19 pandemic has elicited a fiscal response from the UK and Scottish Governments which is without precedent in modern times with both governments releasing large sums of funding to support the economy, households and frontline services in the COVID-19 response to help protect jobs, businesses and livelihoods.
- 6.2** Approximately 76% of the Council's budget is supported by Aggregated External Finance (AEF) from the Scottish Government. This includes general revenue grant, specific grants and Non-Domestic Rate income. The remaining 24% is made up from Council Tax and other Council sources of finance e.g. fees and charges. Consequently the Council has limited access to levers to influence income levels.
- 6.3** In addition the Scottish Government currently produces single year financial settlements for Local Government making it extremely challenging for the Council to accurately estimate future funding levels. However on the 31 May 2022 the Scottish Government published its Resource Spending Review providing insight into strategic priorities for the period up until 2026/27. Whilst it does not provide councils with their specific allocations it is sufficient to provide an overview of Scottish Government intentions. The Resource Spending Review states that Council funding will remain as 'flat cash' (at

current 2022/23 levels) until 2025/26 with a £100m added in 2026/27. This equates to a real term reduction (taking inflation into account) over the next four years of 7% which represents a continuing erosion of core funding for local government. A “flat-cash” settlement ignores the impact on Local Government of the material increases in inflation and energy costs and requires councils to absorb the full cost of any pay awards.

6.4 The further we look toward 2030 the greater the uncertainty about the financial challenges the Council will face. In addition to the extent to which COVID-19 will continue to affect the national economy there are a number of further key issues which are likely to impact on the Council’s revenue budget. These include:

- the impact of population change/demographic shifts on funding levels
- future decisions of the Scottish Government regarding funding provided for Local Government and protection of other parts of the national budget
- potential use of available tax raising powers
- continuance of Health and Social Care integration within a context of increasing demand
- pension costs influenced by the impact of auto-enrolment
- costs associated with sustainability including waste disposal and recycling, energy and fuel costs
- the impact of the Feeley review of the delivery of Adult Social Care.

7. Risk Analysis

7.1 The new Strategic Plan will detail the priorities for the Council over the next five years and will be underpinned by performance indicators monitored and reported on annually through the annual report. This framework will demonstrate that the Council has robust processes in place to plan, manage and improve performance. Failure to produce a strategic plan for the 5 year term of the Council would be a significant risk.

7.2 Due to the ongoing reductions in funding, and uncertainty over future funding levels, there is an inherent risk of there being insufficient financial resource to meet current and future service requirements and provide much needed support to the communities and businesses of West Dunbartonshire. The Council must continue to develop longer term financial planning, and maintain robust budget preparation and monitoring processes, as well as continuing to focus on transformational change to deliver services more efficiently and effectively.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** There are no direct issues relating to this report as it is for noting. An EIA will be completed during the development of the new Strategic Plan 2022-27

9. Consultation

- 9.1** This report has been compiled in consultation with some of the Chief Officers and the newly appointed Chief Executive.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** A new strategic plan is being developed for 2022-27 and will set out the strategic priorities for the Council for the coming five years.

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Appendices: N/A

Background Papers: N/A

Wards Affected: N/A