ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 MARCH 2023

BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN UPDATE

1.0   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1.   The purpose of this report is to provide members a final update on the Best Value Improvement Action Plan which emerged from the Accounts Commission findings on the Controller of Audits Statutory Report on the Council.

1.2.   The action plan was agreed by the Council in June 2020 and an update was provided to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in March 2021 and 2022. Audit Scotland's 2020/21 Annual Audit Report (November 2022) concludes that the Council has an appropriate and effective best value framework in place and continues to make good progress addressing the recommendations in Best Value Assurance Report 2020.

1.3.   The Committee will recall in our last report in March 2022, of the 36 actions set out within the original improvement plan, 22 were completed and the intent was to bring back an update on the remaining 14 actions.

1.4.   Members are asked to note the full update as set out within appendix 1.

1.5.   Members are also asked to note that as CEO I have set in process the development of a change programme that seeks to ensure the organisation is able to meet the financial, policy and societal challenges ahead. This will influence a new Best Value action plan which I will bring to this committee for its consideration.

ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL   **AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE   **16 MARCH 2023**

BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN UPDATE

2.0   INTRODUCTION

2.1   The purpose of this report is to provide members a final update on the Best Value Improvement Action Plan and an introduction to a forthcoming change programme from which will emerge a new Best Value action plan to support the organisation in meeting the challenges ahead.

3.0   RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1   The Audit and Scrutiny Committee notes below an update against the themes of the Best Value Improvement Action Plan and the associated table set out within appendix.

3.2   Members are also asked to note an introduction to the forthcoming change programme and that a new Best Value action plan will be presented for the consideration of this committee at a future meeting.

4.0   DETAIL

4.1   In September 2020, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee considered the findings report and recommendations from the Accounts Commission Findings on the Controller of Audit Scotland's Statutory Report on the Council. The Committee also noted the action plan that was agreed by the Council in June 2020 and this report provides a third and final update on the plan (with previous updates having been submitted to this committee in March 2021 and 2022).

4.2 Audit Scotland's 2020/21 Annual Audit Report (November 2022) concluded that the Council has an appropriate and effective best value framework in place and continues to make good progress addressing the recommendations in Best Value Assurance Report 2020.

4.3 The Committee will recall in our last report in March 2022, of the 36 actions set out within the original improvement plan, 22 were completed and the intent was to bring back an update on the remaining 14 actions and a summary of these can be found below.

4.4 Theme 1; Develop the transformation agenda, supported by an affordable and achievable medium to longer term financial strategy. The outstanding action (BV1.2) relating to the provision of a Capital Strategy remains ongoing. The draft plan has been through a number of revisions and during this period the Council's Executive Leadership Team appointed in June 2022 on internal secondment a Corporate Programme Coordinator to undertake a holistic review of the organisations approach to prioritisation and phasing of capital projects with an objective to develop a long term 'pipeline of projects'. This has positively influenced the Capital Strategy and a final draft version will come to the Policy and Resources Committee in August 2023.

4.5 Theme 2; Improve performance management reporting to provide a balanced picture of long term trends in performance against targets.

4.6 Action BV2.3 to procure or develop a performance system in house whilst delayed has progressed. Previously a specification for a new performance system was agreed and a procurement exercise was undertaken with no satisfactory outcome with regards to price. An alternative and more holistic approach was undertaken to seek to self-develop an organisational data platform that will provide a performance dashboard. Work has commenced on building the new dashboard for the Area Performance Reports that are submitted to Area Committees and will go live for FQ1 2023/24. This activity is linked to the data initiative on which there is more information at paragraph 4.8 below.

4.7 A review of public performance reporting will be undertaken as part of a wider review of the organisations Performance Improvement Framework which is re-scheduled to be completed by September 2023.

4.8 Theme 3; Increase the pace of transformational change to deliver the business outcomes.

4.9   Action BV3.3 sets out the requirement to complete an options appraisal on data analytics/business intelligence as a tool to inform transformation and improvement. This work was initially delayed due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

4.10   In November 2021, the Executive Leadership Team learned from Aberdeen City Council on their journey to harness data to improve decision making. Subsequently the Council's Executive Leadership Team instructed ICT to consider options for the development of our own in-house system using Microsoft 365 technology. In October 2022 ELT, having reviewed the options, agreed a business case to self-develop an 'on site' data platform (i.e. not in the 'cloud') and secure additional resource to develop data 'products' (e.g. dashboards).

4.11   The prioritisation and development of data 'products' is directed by the internal Data Advisory Group consisting of senior officers from across the organisation. The Head of Customer Support Services chairs the Data Advisory Group which is accountable to the Council's Executive Leadership Team.

4.12   It is through this endeavour that the Council is developing a new in-house system to produce performance dashboards. Whilst still early in its development, the Data Advisory Group and its associated data platform will in time become powerful agents for the provision of real time data to improve decision making.

4.13   A particularly pioneering and emerging product is a Cost of Living Data Dashboard which is a collaboration combining data on council tax reductions, council tax arrears, applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund, average income (by post code) and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation to provide an insight into possible areas of need across our areas. The data is grouped by school catchment areas as schools are being viewed as a means to address the target audience where need is deemed greatest. This data dashboard has been shared with the Council's Financial Inclusion Action Group who intend to direct action on targeted support based on the data provided. It is important to note that this work is in its infancy and illustrates what can be achieved through collaboration, knowledge and with the right tools.

4.14   Action BV3.8; the Council is on track to reduce the number of ICT applications in use by 10% by March 2023 with the implementation of MS 365 contributing to the reduction of standalone applications.

4.15   With the introduction of MS365 we have a number of examples of council staff relying less on legacy systems and applications. The performance management system (Pyramid) will be decommissioned shortly with the new

data management project providing a new opportunity to collate, analyse, and report on performance data in a more efficient manner. Similarly, we no longer use external paid for services from companies like Survey Monkey because we can run our own internal surveys using MS Forms. We're using automated forms to speed up approvals processes for the most common forms.

4.16   We no longer use our bespoke Video Conferencing systems as MS Teams enables us to meet, communicate, and collaborate across the entire Scottish public sector. We have learned to collaborate across network boundaries in Teams channels and this has contributed to a reduction in emails and fewer external telephone calls as partners and suppliers are more accessible and contactable via federated links on MS365.

4.17   We see significant environmental benefits from our new approach to printing. We no longer print and post council committee papers with all now distributed online and we have removed all personal desktop printers from offices and use strategically placed and more efficient multi-function print and copy devices across the entire corporate and education estates.

4.18   Theme 4; Assess the extent to which regeneration and economic development initiatives are delivering the vision and corporate outcomes.

4.19   For the review, appraisal and monitoring of regeneration and economic initiatives, the Council now has in place adoption of best practice as set out by the UK Government (i.e. Her Majesty's Treasury Green Book Guidance).

4.20   Post project evaluation is now business as usual for large capital projects and work is ongoing to streamline this activity for all capital projects. An external audit was undertaken to assess the training requirements and a tailored training programme was put in place. The programme is now largely complete for 75% of officers and will be completed later this year.

4.21   Theme 5; Work with communities and community groups to improve engagement.

4.22   Actions in relation to measuring satisfaction with communities (BV5.1 and 5.2). As part of the performance excellence project, the project team liaised with the Customer Engagement and Transformation Manager to develop a new corporate customer satisfaction survey which will be issued October 2023 and will be repeated annually to provide trend data on organisational customer satisfaction.

4.23   On identifying priorities for better future engagement (action BV 5.4), the Council's Executive Leadership Team (ELT) will agree in the summer 2023 a

programme of Service Re-Design where services will be co-designing services with stakeholders. This will be a long term programme informed by a service self-assessment programme that will be rolled out in the spring to support the determination of priorities and phasing of the programme.

4.24 Members will note that of those actions within the original Best Value Action Plan not yet complete are in progress and will be completed this year and for this reason as CEO, looking forward to the future challenges of our organisation, a new programme of Best Value activity will be prepared for the consideration of this committee at a future meeting.

4.25 Argyll and Bute Council is operating in a dynamic landscape which brings with it many opportunities and challenges. The operations of the council have done well to meet the challenges faced so far. There is a need to develop the organisation to be in a position to continue to meet the financial, policy and societal challenges ahead.

4.26 Our operations as a Council so far have risen to the challenge of meeting substantial savings and to date has made over £70million in recurring savings since 2010-2011, including £500k reduction in senior management costs. This equates to around 26% of total budget and with each passing year it becomes more difficult to identify savings.

4.27 The Accounts Commission describes our approach as "*having successfully achieved financial balance through a focus on cost reductions. Although the Council's transformation programme has delivered some efficiencies and achieved small scale savings, further work is required to better align its financial and transformation plans to drive meaningful change through new and innovative ways of working*". (Best Value Assurance Report 2020).

4.28 As acknowledged by others, driving change was particularly challenging during the period that the public sector was in response mode to the pandemic and now having returned to some form of normality, to meet the complex challenges our communities face and changes anticipated in the public sector the council needs to adapt the way it operates.

4.29 As CEO I am bringing forward a change programme and the council's operating model will transform over the next 4 years based on the following principles and through a programme of service redesign and other activity.

a) We are one council, one place – with the organisation working across professional and service boundaries, collaboratively for the greater good of the population they serve. Reducing silo working and increasing joint activity across organisations and with partners to improve outcomes.

b) We focus on our purpose and mission– clearly prioritising politically agreed objectives to achieve the greatest possible impact with limited resources, with shared ownership of efforts to achieve common goals.

c) Our employees are empowered – delegate decisions against agreed objectives to speed up decision making and problem solving, harnessing their skills and increasing staff satisfaction.

d) We take decisions informed by data – targeting resources to where they are most needed and evaluating the effectiveness of what we do.

e) We are a learning council – a consistent approach to external and self-evaluation to realise continuous improvement.

f) We are agile and adapt to change.

g) We maximise opportunities that technology offers

4.30 Details on the change programme and a new Best Value Action Plan will be brought to this committee at the first available opportunity.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Progress has continued to be made and the programme will be successfully completed this year. In order to demonstrate how the Council is looking forward, it is intended to bring to this committee new Best Value Action Plan at the first available opportunity against which this committee can continue to scrutinise Council's endeavours to continue to improve best value in the face of an increasingly challenging landscape.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Policy; none.

6.2 Financial; none.

6.3 Legal; the Council requires to comply with the statutory requirements.

6.4 HR; none

6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: none

    6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics; none

    6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty; none

6.5.3   Islands; none

6.6.   Climate Change; none.

6.7   Risk; none.

6.8   Customer Service; none.

Pippa Milne

Chief Executive

22 February 2023

For further information contact:

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APPENDICES

Appendix   1; Best Value 3 Improvement Action Plan v4