
ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Chief Executive

14 March 2024

Corporate Improvement Plan Update

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document updates the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on the progress of the new Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) within the Performance Excellence Project. The Committee received an update on the overall Performance Excellence Project in December 2023 and on the last Best Value Action Plan in March 2023.

The report highlights completed work and upcoming activities to facilitate development and implementation of the new plan.

Members are recommended to consider and note the progress of work on the Corporate Improvement Plan and planned activities in this regard.

Corporate Improvement Plan Update

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 As part of our duty to deliver Best Value, the Council is required to evidence continuous improvement which it does through a variety of means, one of which is identifying corporate improvements relevant across the organisation. Members of Audit and Scrutiny Committee will recall that the final update on Best Value Action Plan in March 2023 included an action to bring details on the change programme (Connect for Success) and a new Best Value Action Plan to the committee at the first available opportunity. This report outlines work undertaken and planned towards development and implementation of a new action plan under the scope of a Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) to this end.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that members consider and note the work undertaken to date on the Corporate Improvement Plan and the activities planned to deliver and implement it.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 The requirement for continuous improvement comes from Best Value, as outlined in the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. This had been monitored through associated Best Value audits and action and improvement plans. The previous Corporate Improvement Plan ended in 2022 and, as members will recall, a new one is currently being developed as part of the Performance Excellence programme. This new plan will align with the Corporate Plan and support Council priorities during the current administration's term.

4.2 As reported in March 2023, the Council's operating model is changing over a 4 year process based on the Connect for Success Change Programme principles which have been introduced by the Chief Executive: -

- We are one council, one place
- We focus on our purpose and mission
- Our employees are empowered
- We take decisions informed by data
- We are a learning council
- We are agile and adapt to change
- We maximise opportunities that technology offers

These principles will be embedded into our CIP and improvements will contribute to one or more of these principles, supporting the transformation in how we do our business.

4.3 The recent Accounts Commission report Best Value in Scotland (September 2023) outlines progress that has been made by councils in regard to what is working well and what should improve in Scotland's councils since the introduction of Best Value. The report also identifies a need for improved pace and depth of continuous improvement. To meet this requirement, this can be evidenced through development of, and ongoing progress in regard to, a CIP. Developing the new CIP involves applying a methodology of research, consultation and engagement. Evidence for improvement will come from a range of sources including audits, self-assessment activities, feedback from employees or customers, previous improvement activity undertaken through accredited bodies and benchmarking. Information from these activities will be collated to identify corporate thematic improvements. Heads of Service, internal audit and governance have already provided information that is being analysed to identify relevant improvement activities that can be applied on a corporate basis. Corporate thematic groups will also feed into this process eg Data Advisory Group, Our Modern Workspace etc. Improvements identified will align with Council priorities and Connect for Success.

4.4 In the Best Value 3 Action Plan, under the objective "Develop the transformation agenda, supported by an affordable and achievable medium to longer term financial strategy", action BV1.3 "Financial Planning: review and update the medium to longer term financial strategy" involved developing a medium to longer term financial strategy. This was considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in August 2021 and is complete. We can, however, further develop this approach through longer-term budget planning linked to the Council's priorities which have been agreed subsequent to the Action Plan being written, and budget-setting will be aligned to these as far as possible.

- 4.5 In the meantime, we continue to pursue improvement activities. We are reviewing our approach to self-assessment. A template has been developed to evaluate our performance in relation to meeting corporate objectives and key performance indicators, cost of delivering services and customer satisfaction. This has been trialled on a team basis (HR and OD) and on a thematic basis (transport; community engagement; school meals). Evaluation of the thematic assessment approach is close to conclusion and a decision will be made on the best way to incorporate self-assessment going forward.
- 4.6 People Too consultancy are conducting a review of our Roads and Infrastructure Service. This is a comprehensive review considering all aspects of the Service and service delivery and has included self-assessment evidence from a variety of sources to inform recommendations. Recommendations are currently at an early stage and it is anticipated that any changes adopted will be done so through a staged process.
- 4.7 We have established a Council-wide Data Advisory Group and appointed a Data Manager. The Data Manager has held development sessions for senior managers and leaders, is developing a data platform and has worked with various teams to improve data analytics to inform specific policy areas such as the Cost of Living Crisis.
- 4.8 We have also established a Community Engagement Group which is in the process of developing an engagement framework based on best practice and aligned with our Connect for Success Principles.
- 4.9 Our approach to digital improvements is accelerating with an established group of Digital Champions, a new programme for developing our business efficiency through MS365 called AB365. This is complemented by a range of service specific digital improvements and our expanding use of bots in the Customer Service Centre.
- 4.10 Our People Strategy and Strategic Workforce Plan, which set out our strategic approach to our future workforce were approved by Committee on 15th February 2024.
- 4.11 The resulting improvements from all of this work will form the action plan element of the CIP. The draft CIP will be discussed with Heads of Service through

Departmental Management Teams and the final plan will be submitted to Council for adoption. Audit and Scrutiny Committee will continue to receive regular updates on progress against the improvements.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 In conclusion this report outlines activities relating to development of a new Corporate Improvement Plan, both completed and planned.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy – This work will deliver a new Corporate Improvement Plan.
- 6.2 Financial – No financial implications have been identified as a result of this report.
- 6.3 Legal – The Council has statutory duty to ensure Best Value and to comply with the Accounts Commission’s SPI direction.
- 6.4 HR – No HR implications have been identified as a result of this report.
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: No Fairer Scotland implications have been identified as a result of this report.
- 6.5.1 Equalities - Corporate improvement actions identified will take due consideration of Equality impacts.
- 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty - Corporate improvement actions identified will take due consideration of Socio-economic impacts.
- 6.5.3 Islands - Corporate improvement actions identified will take due consideration of Islands impacts.
- 6.6 Climate Change – No climate change implications have been identified as part of this report.
- 6.7 Risk - The Council fails to evidence sufficient and robust continuous improvement as required by statute.
- 6.8 Customer Service - continuous improvement in our processes and how we do our business provides improved experiences for our customers.
- 6.9 The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – Corporate improvement actions identified will take due consideration of the rights of the child.

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Chief Executive

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