

447th meeting of the Accounts Commission for Scotland
Thursday 7 June 2018, 10.15am
in the offices of Audit Scotland, 102 West Port, Edinburgh

Agenda

1. **Apologies for absence.**
2. **Declarations of interest.**
3. **Decisions on taking business in private:** The Commission will consider whether to take items 10 to 15 in private.
4. **Minutes of meeting of 10 May 2018.**
5. **Audit Scotland Board update** The Commission will consider a report by the Secretary to the Commission.
6. **Update report by the Secretary to the Accounts Commission:** The Commission will consider a report by the Secretary to the Commission.
7. **Update report by the Controller of Audit:** The Commission will consider a verbal report by the Controller of Audit.
8. **Local government overview report: impact and approach for 2019:** The Commission will consider a report by the Director of Performance Audit and Best Value.
9. **Best Value Assurance Report: West Dunbartonshire Council:** The Commission will consider a report by the Controller of Audit.

The following items are proposed to be considered in private:

10. **Best Value Assurance Report: West Dunbartonshire Council:** The Commission will consider the actions that it wishes to take.
11. **Strategic Scrutiny Group Update:** The Commission will consider a report by the Director of Performance Audit and Best Value.
12. **Performance audit - draft report: Children and young people's mental health:** The Commission will consider a report by the Director of Performance Audit and Best Value.
13. **National Fraud Initiative:** The Commission will consider a report by the Director of Audit Services.
14. **Scottish Government and CoSLA Consultation: Early learning and childcare service model for 2020: draft response:** The Commission will consider a report by the Secretary to the Commission.
15. **Commission business matters:** The Commission will discuss matters of interest.

* It is proposed that items 10 to 15 be considered in private because:

- Item 10 require the Commission to consider actions in relation to a report by the Controller of Audit. The Commission is then obliged by statute to inform the council in question of its decision, which the Commission does before making the decision public.
- Item 11 presents an update on discussions with strategic scrutiny partners which may include confidential policy matters that the Commission would wish to discuss in private before proceeding.
- Item 12 proposes a draft audit report which the Commission is to consider in private before publishing.
- Item 13 proposes a draft report which the Commission is to consider in private before it is published.
- Item 14 is a draft response to a Scottish Government consultation on which the Commission may wish to discuss confidential policy matters.
- Item 15 may be required if there are any confidential matters that require to be discussed outwith the public domain. The Chair will inform the meeting in public at the start of the meeting if this item is required and what it covers.

The following papers are enclosed for this meeting:

Agenda Item	Paper number
Agenda item 4: Minutes of meeting of 10 May 2018	AC.2018.6.1
Agenda item 5: Report by Secretary to the Commission	AC.2018.6.2
Agenda item 6: Report by Secretary to the Commission	AC.2018.6.3
Agenda item 8: Report by Director of Performance Audit and Best Value	AC.2018.6.4
Agenda item 9: Report by Controller of Audit	AC.2018.6.5
Agenda item 11: Report by Director of Performance Audit and Best Value	AC.2018.6.6
Agenda item 12: Report by Director of Performance Audit and Best Value	AC.2018.6.7
Agenda item 13: Report by Director of Audit Services	AC.2018.6.8
Agenda item 14: Report by Secretary to the Commission	AC.2018.6.9

MEETING: 7 JUNE 2018

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Minutes of the 446th meeting of the Accounts Commission held in the offices of Audit Scotland at 102 West Port, Edinburgh, on Thursday 10 May 2018, at 10.15am

PRESENT: Graham Sharp (Chair)
Sandy Cumming
Alan Campbell
Sheila Gunn
Sophie Flemig
Ronnie Hinds
Tim McKay
Stephen Moore
Pauline Weetman
Geraldine Wooley

IN ATTENDANCE: Paul Reilly, Secretary to the Commission
Fraser McKinlay, Controller of Audit and Director of Performance Audit and Best Value (PABV)
Fiona Daley, Consultant, Appointments and Assurance Team (AAT) [Item 18]
Gemma Diamond, Senior Manager, PABV [Items 15 and 17]
Corrinne Forsyth, Senior Auditor, PABV [Items 14 and 16]
John Gilchrist, Manager, AAT [Item 18]
Brian Howarth, Assistant Director, ASG [Items 15 and 17]
Ross Hubert, Senior Auditor, ASG [Items 15 and 17]
Pat Kenny, Director, Deloitte [Items 14 and 16]
Mark MacPherson, Senior Manager, PABV [Items 14 and 16]
Pearl Tate, Senior Audit Manager, ASG [Items 15 and 17]
Elaine Boyd, Assistant Director, Appointments and Assurance [Item 18]
Owen Smith, Senior Manager, AAT [Item 18]
Karlyn Watt, Senior Manager, Deloitte [Items 14 and 16]

Item No Subject

1. Apologies for absence
2. Declarations of interest
3. Decisions on taking business in private
4. Minutes of meeting of 12 April 2018
5. Minutes of meeting of Financial Audit and Assurance Committee of 26 April 2018
6. Minutes of meeting of Performance Audit Committee of 26 April 2018
7. Audit Scotland Board update
8. Update report by the Secretary to the Accounts Commission
9. Update report by the Controller of Audit
10. Draft Commission Annual Report
11. Draft Commission Strategy Update
12. Commission engagement strategy: report and update
13. Best Value update
14. Audit of Best Value: East Ayrshire Council
15. Audit of Best Value: Fife Council
16. Audit of Best Value: East Ayrshire Council
17. Audit of Best Value: Fife Council
18. Draft Audit Quality Annual Report
19. Commission business matters

1. Apologies for absence

It was noted that no apologies for absence had been received.

2. Declarations of interest

The following declarations of interest were made:

- Sandy Cumming, in items 15 and 17, as Chair of Scotland's Rural College which has a campus in Cupar, Fife.
- Sophie Flemig, in items 14 and 16, since family members are employed by East Ayrshire Council.
- Ronnie Hinds, in items 15 and 17, as a former Chief Executive of Fife Council. (He took no part in consideration of item 15 and left the room during consideration of item 17.)
- Stephen Moore, in items 15 and 17, as a former chief officer of Fife Council. (He left the room during consideration of item 17.)
- Geraldine Wooley, in items 15 and 17, as a resident of Fife and as member of the Fife Valuation Appeal Committee.

3. Decisions on taking business in private

It was agreed that the following items be taken in private:

- Items 16 and 17 require the Commission to consider actions in relation to a report by the Controller of Audit. The Commission is then obliged by statute to inform the council in question of its decision, which the Commission does before making the decision public.
- Item 18 proposes a draft report which the Commission is to consider in private before publishing.

No business was notified by members for item 19 and thus the Chair advised that the item would not require discussion.

4. Minutes of meeting of 12 April 2018

The minutes of the meeting of 12 April 2018 were approved as a correct record.

Arising therefrom, the Commission:

- In relation to item 6 (third bullet), in response to a query from Tim McKay, noted advice from the Director of PABV that he would provide in early course information on any Barnett consequential arising from the additional funding provided to councils in England for the repair of potholes.

Action: Director of PABV

- In relation to item 8 (fifth bullet), in response to a query from Ronnie Hinds, noted advice from the Secretary that he would arrange a meeting in early course between the Chair, Deputy Chair and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework to discuss actions arising at the Commission meeting.

Actions: Secretary

5. Minutes of meeting of Financial Audit and Assurance Committee of 26 April 2018

The Commission approved as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Financial Audit and Assurance Committee of 26 April 2018.

6. Minutes of meeting of Performance Audit Committee of 26 April 2018

The Commission approved as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Performance Audit Committee of 26 April 2018, subject to noting that Sandy Cumming did attend the meeting.

7. Audit Scotland Board update

The Commission considered a report by the Secretary providing an update on the business of the Audit Scotland Board.

During discussion, and having noted a verbal update from the Chair on recent Audit Scotland Board activity, the Commission:

- Noted advice from the Chair, in response to a query from Sophie Flemig, that a discussion on the engagement of young people in audit would take place at the August meeting of the Commission.
- Agreed, in response to a point by Alan Campbell, that future such reports include the agenda of the most recent meeting of the Board, even if the minute is not publicly available.

Action: Secretary

Thereafter, the Commission noted the report.

8. Update report by the Secretary to the Accounts Commission

The Commission considered a report by the Secretary to the Commission providing an update on significant recent activity relating to local government and issues of relevance or interest across the wider public sector.

During discussion, the Commission:

- In relation to paragraph 5, in response to a query from Stephen Moore, agreed that download information on supplements to performance audits be provided in the Secretary report.

Action: Secretary

- In relation to paragraph 11, in response to a query from Stephen Moore, noted advice from the Secretary that he would ensure access for Commission members to Quality Scotland information and services.

Action: Secretary

- In relation to paragraph 13, in response to a query from Stephen Moore, noted advice from the Director of PABV that a report on legacy matters relating to the 2014 Commonwealth Games was part of the work programme, scheduled for 2020/21.

- In relation to paragraph 41, in response to a query from Stephen Moore, to note advice from the Director of PABV that he would continue to monitor matters in relation to the proposal to establish safe injecting spaces for drug users in Glasgow.

Action: Director of PABV

- In relation to paragraph 43, in response to a query from Sheila Gunn, agreed that more information be provided (by way of in the 'current issues' report to the Financial Audit and Assurance Committee) on the announcement by North Lanarkshire Council to purchase 100 houses each year on the open market.

Action: Secretary and Director of PABV

- In relation to paragraph 45, in response to a query from Stephen Moore, to note advice from the Director of PABV that he would continue to monitor matters in relation to downward trends in the number of specialist teachers supporting pupils with additional support needs.

Action: Director of PABV

- In relation to paragraph 51, in response to a query from Geraldine Wooley, noted advice from the Controller of Audit that matters arising from the inquiry into the construction of the DG One leisure centre, Dumfries, would be considered as part of the ongoing work for the Best Value Assurance Report on Dumfries and Galloway Council, to be considered by the Commission later in the year.

Action: Controller of Audit

- In relation to paragraph 80, noted advice from the Controller of Audit that he would provide more information on the involvement of Capita in providing services for Scottish councils.

Action: Controller of Audit

- In relation to paragraph 81, noted advice from the Secretary that he would provide further information on the recent Court of Appeal ruling in relation to the pay policy of Nottingham City Council.

Action: Secretary

Following discussion, the Commission noted the report.

9. Update report by the Controller of Audit

The Controller of Audit provided a verbal update on his recent activity including meetings and discussions with stakeholders.

Following discussion, the Commission noted the update.

10. Draft Commission annual report

The Commission considered a report by the Secretary proposing for publication the content of the Commission's annual report 2017/18.

Following discussion, the Commission agreed:

- to approve the annual report 2017/18, subject to some drafting changes agreed during discussion, to be published on 7 June.
- The publication arrangements and next steps for promotion and implementation of the annual report.

Action: Secretary

11. Draft Commission strategy update

The Commission considered a report by the Secretary to the Commission proposing a revised Commission Strategy 2018-23 and accompanying annual action plan, arising from the Commission's considerations at its Strategy Seminar.

Following discussion, the Commission agreed:

- That thought be given as to how to make supplementary planning guidance be made more accessible to Commission members and the public.

Action: Associate Director, ASG & PABV

- To approve the revised Commission Strategy 2018-23 and annual action plan,

subject to some drafting changes agreed during discussion, to be published on 7 June.

- The publication arrangements and next steps for promotion and implementation of the Strategy.

Action: Secretary

12. Commission engagement strategy: report and update

The Commission considered a report by the Secretary to the Commission proposing (a) a progress report against the Commission's Engagement Strategy 2017/18; and (b) a revised Engagement Strategy for 2018/19.

Following discussion, the Commission agreed:

- To approve a progress report against the Engagement Strategy 2017/18, to be published on 7 June.
- To approve a revised Engagement Strategy and action plan 2018/19, to be published on 7 June.
- The publication arrangements and next steps for promotion and implementation of the progress report and Strategy.

Action: Secretary

13. Best Value Assurance Report schedule 2019

The Commission considered a report by the Director of PABV inviting the Commission to consider a proposed schedule for the third tranche of Best Value Assurance Reports (BVARs).

Following discussion, the Commission agreed to endorse the proposed schedule of councils to be included in third tranche of BVARs.

Action: Director of PABV and Secretary

14. Audit of Best Value: East Ayrshire Council

The Commission considered a report by the Secretary to the Commission presenting the Controller of Audit's Best Value Assurance Report on East Ayrshire Council and seeking direction on how to proceed.

Following questions to the Controller of Audit, the Commission agreed to consider in private how to proceed.

15. Audit of Best Value: Fife Council

The Commission considered a report by the Secretary to the Commission presenting the Controller of Audit's Best Value Assurance Report on Fife Council and seeking direction on how to proceed.

Following questions to the Controller of Audit, the Commission agreed to consider in private how to proceed.

16. Audit of Best Value: East Ayrshire Council [private]

The Commission discussed how to proceed in relation to the statutory report by the Controller of Audit on the Best Value Assurance Report of East Ayrshire Council.

Following discussion, the Commission agreed to make findings, to be published on 29 May 2018.

Action: Secretary

17. Audit of Best Value: Fife Council [private]

The Commission discussed how to proceed in relation to the statutory report by the Controller of Audit on the Best Value Assurance Report of Fife Council.

Following discussion, the Commission agreed to make findings, to be published on 24 May 2018.

Action: Secretary

18. Draft audit quality annual report [private]

The Commission considered a report by the Assistant Director, Appointment and Assurance proposing the draft Audit Quality Annual Report 2017/18 for the Commission's endorsement, as part of the Commission reporting its assurance on quality in its own annual report.

During discussion, the Commission:

- Noted advice from the Assistant Director that:
 - In relation to a query by Ronnie Hinds, that she would be discussing with Audit Scotland the reported data in relation to staff surveys.
 - She would discuss with the Secretary how the Commission is updated on progress by audit providers against improvements identified in the report, including the involvement of the Commission's committees.
 - She would discuss further with the Commission matters around the use of the Financial Reporting Council grading system in internal reviews.
 - The reporting of the Commission's strategic audit priorities and the four dimensions of audit and Best Value as set out in the Code of Audit Practice would be taken forward as part of the development of annual planning guidance for the 2018/19 audit year.
- Agreed that future reports give more prominence to the improvements arising from quality assurance reporting.

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Endorsed the draft Audit Quality Annual Report 2017/18, subject to some drafting changes agreed in the discussion.

Action: Assistant Director, Appointments and Assurance

- Noted that the draft report would be approved by the Board of Audit Scotland, therefore including the Commission Chair.
- Noted that the report would be published on 15 June.

19. Commission business matters

The Chair, having advised that there was no business for this item, closed the meeting.

MEETING: 7 JUNE 2018

REPORT BY: SECRETARY TO THE ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

AUDIT SCOTLAND BOARD UPDATE

Purpose

1. This report provides an update on the business of the Audit Scotland Board.

Background

2. Audit Scotland is established in statute to “provide such assistance and support as the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission require in the exercise of their respective functions and, in particular, is to provide them, or ensure that they are provided, with the property, staff and services which they require for the exercise of those functions”.¹
3. Audit Scotland (i.e. its Board) consists of the Auditor General, the Chair of the Commission, and three other members.² These three members, including a Chair, are appointed by the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.³
4. As well as being a member of Audit Scotland’s Board, the Commission Chair is also a member of its two committees, the Audit Committee and the Human Resources and Remuneration Committee.
5. In *Public Audit in Scotland*⁴, the Commission, the Auditor General and Audit Scotland set out how they together deliver public audit in Scotland. They state that “by working together and each fulfilling our distinct roles, the Auditor General, the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland will ensure a strong system of public audit works to support transparency and promote improvement in the performance of public bodies.”
6. To this end, the Commission at its meetings considers for its interest the business of Audit Scotland Board.

Current Board business

7. The most recent meeting of the Board was on 2 May 2018, but the minute of this meeting is not yet publicly available as it is yet to be ratified by the Board. This will be available after the next Board meeting on 6 June 2018 and considered by the Commission thereafter.
8. The Chair will, however, provide a verbal update on any relevant business for members’ interest, and invites questions from members to this end. The Commission agreed at its last meeting that the agenda for the most recent Board meeting be provided (even if the minute is not yet available). The agenda is attached in the Appendix.

¹ Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000, Section 10(3).

² Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000, Section 10(2).

³ The Scottish Commission for Public Audit was established under Section 12 of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000 and is made up of 5 MSPs. Its main areas of responsibility are to (a) examine Audit Scotland’s proposals for the use of resources and expenditure and report on them to the Parliament; (b) appoint an auditor to audit the accounts of Audit Scotland; (c) lay these accounts and auditor’s report before the Parliament; and (d) appoint three of the five members of Audit Scotland’s Board, including its Chair.

⁴ *Public Audit in Scotland*, Accounts Commission, Auditor General and Audit Scotland, May 2015.

Conclusion

9. The Commission is invited to consider this update for its interest and seek further information from the Chair as appropriate.

Paul Reilly
Secretary to the Commission
29 May 2018

Agenda

Wednesday 2 May 2018, 10.15am

Audit Scotland offices, 102 West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN

1. Welcome and apologies
2. Declarations of interest
3. Decision on items to be taken in private For approval

Standing items

4. Chair's report – verbal update
5. Accountable Officer's report – verbal update
6. Accounts Commission Chair's report – verbal update
7. Review of minutes: For approval
Board meeting, 28 March 2018
8. Review of action tracker For information

Strategy and planning

9. New financial powers and constitutional change update For information
10. Review of the new approach to auditing Best Value For information
11. Work programme and publication schedule For information
12. Engagement with young people For information
13. Data Protection Policy For approval
14. Information Security Management Policy For approval

Business management

15. Any other business
16. Review of meeting
17. Date of next meeting: 6 June 2018

Items to be taken in private

18. Corporate plan 2018-21

For approval

[Item to be taken in private to support the effective conduct of business – information intended for future publication]

MEETING: 07 JUNE 2018

REPORT BY: SECRETARY TO THE ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

UPDATE REPORT

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to provide a regular update to the Commission on significant recent activity relating to local government, as well as issues of relevance or interest across the wider public sector.
2. The regular Controller of Audit report to the Commission which updates the Commission on his activity complements this report. The Commission's Financial Audit and Assurance Committee also receives a more detailed update on issues relating to local government. This report also complements the weekly briefing provided by Audit Scotland's Communication Team made available on the extranet site, which provides more detailed news coverage in certain areas.
3. The information featured is also available on the Accounts Commission member portal. Hyperlinks are provided in the electronic version of this report for ease of reference.

Commission business

Publications:

4. On 17 May, the Accounts Commission published [Councils' use of arm's length organisations](#). The Commission found that ALEOs can bring benefits, including reducing costs, increased uptake in sport and leisure and improved standards of care. The report also highlights issues in councils' use of ALEOs, and stresses the need to continue to follow the principles of the Following the Public Pound code agreed by the Commission and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.
5. On 24 May, the Accounts Commission published [Best Value Assurance Report: Fife Council](#). The report highlights that Fife Council continues to improve and has tackled aspects of underperformance head on. It highlights a strong commitment from councillors and staff to realise the change and improvements needed to meet future challenges. Graham Sharp, Sandy Cumming and Tim McKay will meet senior councillors and officers of the council on 18 June to discuss the report and findings.
6. On 29 May, the Accounts Commission published [Best Value Assurance Report: East Ayrshire Council](#). The report notes that East Ayrshire Council is performing well, services are improving, and there is strong partnership working. The commission found that the majority of services are improving, against a backdrop of financial, social and economic challenges in East Ayrshire. Ronnie Hinds, Sheila Gunn and Stephen Moore will meet senior councillors and officers of the council on 12 June to discuss the report and findings
7. The download statistics the reports published by the Commission over the last 12 months (as at 28 May) are set out in the **Appendix**. (At the last meeting, the Commission agreed that download figures for all report supplements be included: these have been included.)

Other business:

8. At the Accounts Commission meeting on 12 April, Tim McKay requested that further information be provided on any Barnett consequential arising from the additional funding provided to councils in England for the repair of potholes. Audit Scotland can confirm that any spending on local roads at UK level results in 100 per cent equivalent spending coming to Scotland.
9. At the Accounts Commission meeting on 10 May, the Secretary advised that he would provide further information on the recent Court of Appeal ruling in relation to the pay policy of Nottingham City Council. On 23 April, the Court of Appeal ruled that [Nottingham City Council was wrong to impose a freeze on incremental pay rises in 2011](#) as part of a single status agreement. The claimants, supported by Unison, argued that the pay freezes constituted the unlawful deduction of wages, because they had a contractual right to pay progression. However, Nottingham City Council contended that, under the single status agreement, there is no contractual obligation to pay progression. The Employment Tribunal ruled in favour of the employees in August 2015; however, the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) allowed Nottingham City Council to appeal the decision in May 2016. The Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal and ruled that all employees are entitled to arrears of pay, equivalent to what they would have earned if pay progression had been operated in each of the years in which it was frozen. The implications for other councils are not straightforward, as at the centre of the case was the content of the single status agreement in question
10. On 30 May, the Commission Chair briefed the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee on [Local government in Scotland: Challenges and performance 2018](#). He was accompanied by Fraser McKinlay, Controller of Audit; Ronnie Nicol, Assistant Director, Performance Audit and Best Value (PABV); and Ashleigh Madtijej, Auditor, PABV.
11. At the same meeting, the Chair briefed the Committee on the performance audit [Councils' use of arms length external organisations](#). He was accompanied by Fraser McKinlay, Controller of Audit; Ronnie Nicol, Assistant Director, PABV; and Derek Hoy Auditor, PABV.
12. On 22 May, the Chair and Secretary met Bob Doris MSP, Convener of the Local Government and Communities Committee to discuss matters of mutual interest.
13. On 24 May, the Chair and Secretary met Jenny Marra MSP, Convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee to discuss matters of mutual interest.
14. On 24 May, the Chair and Controller of Audit met office-bearers of SOLACE to discuss matters of mutual interest, particularly around the progress of auditing Best Value.
15. On 25 May, the Chair and Secretary met the CoSLA President and Vice President of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) (Councillors Alison Iveson and Graham Houston) and Chief Executive (Sally Loudon) to discuss matters of mutual interest.
16. The Commission has launched its Twitter account at [@AccCommScot](#). The account was first used to promote the recently published performance audit report on Arm's Length external organisations. It will be used to publicise forthcoming Commission meetings, report on the outcome of those meetings, promote individual reports, and report on the progress of the Commission's work programme. The Audit Scotland Twitter account ([@AuditScotland](#)), which previously fulfilled some of this role, will now complement the Commission's account.

Auditor General for Scotland

17. On 27 April, the Auditor General published [The 2016/17 audit of Edinburgh College](#). In her report, the Auditor General found that Edinburgh College has made good progress and reduced its deficit from £7 million to £2.5 million, and exceeded its teaching and learning target for the first time since the college's merger in 2012.
18. On 27 April, the Auditor General published [The 2016/17 audit of New College Lanarkshire](#). The Auditor General reported that New College Lanarkshire received a £1.9 million advance from the Scottish Funding Council in July 2017 after suffering cash-flow problems, and found that there were several issues which created the college's financial problems.

Audit Scotland

19. Audit Officer Veronica Cameron has written a blog about the European Organisation of Regional External Public Finance Audit Institutions (EURORAI) conference in Rotterdam, whose theme was 'Conducting audits on cyber and information security', and which took place on 18-20 April. The blog has been placed on the members' extranet site.
20. On 22 May, the Scottish Government announced that [communities and charities with new ideas to tackle child poverty will be given the opportunity to bid for part of a new £7.5 million Innovation Fund to tackle child poverty](#). Director of Performance Audit and Best Value Fraser McKinlay will sit on the scrutiny panel.

Issues affecting local government

Scottish Government:

21. On 14 May, the Scottish Government published its Annual Report on Welfare Reform Follow up Paper: Housing and Social Security. The report [highlights the effects of Universal Credit on tenants and landlords](#), and states that households renting in the private and social sector have been 'severely affected'.
22. On 14 May First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced that the Scottish Government [will publish a Healthy Weight and Diet plan in summer 2018](#). The aim of the plan is to halve childhood obesity in Scotland by 2030. Currently, 29 per cent of children are at risk of being overweight, including 14 per cent who are at risk of being obese.
23. On 17 May, [the Scottish Government opened its consultation on Funeral Expense Assistance Regulations](#). This is a consultation on the draft regulations to implement Funeral Expense Assistance, which will replace the current UK Government Funeral Expenses Payment in Scotland by summer 2019. The purpose of the consultation is to gather views on the draft Funeral Expense Assistance regulations and identify any gaps, issues or unintended consequences. The consultation closes on 23 August.
24. On 17 May, the Scottish Government published its response to a Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 request, which [related to Scottish Government correspondence with the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland](#). The request asked for copies of all correspondence between Scottish Government Ministers and Officials with the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland regarding all drafts, including initial drafts, of the Local Government in Scotland: Challenges and Performance 2018 report. It also requested the details of all meetings held between Scottish Government Ministers and Officials with the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland regarding all drafts of the *Local Government in Scotland: Challenges and Performance 2018* report.

25. On 22 May, the Scottish Government announced it will [provide an additional £5.5 million in funding to the Clyde Gateway regeneration programme](#), which covers the east end of Glasgow and the north part of South Lanarkshire. The funding will go to support job creation.
26. On 22 May, the Scottish Government announced that nine local authorities [have been allocated £50 million funding from the Attainment Scotland Fund in 2018/19](#) to help close the poverty-related attainment gap.

Scottish Parliament

General:

27. On 26 April, proposals on the [new devolved social security system in Scotland were given unanimous support in the Scottish Parliament](#). The bill saw several successful amendments from opposition parties.
28. On 1 May, during the Ministerial Statement about the expansion of funded early learning and childcare, the Auditor General's concern about the lack of baseline data to measure childcare spending was raised by Liz Smith (Mid Scotland & Fife) (Con). Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab) referenced the Auditor General's concerns about the gap between council requirements and what Scottish Government was willing to provide.
29. On 15 May, MSPs [refused consent for the UK Government's legislation to repatriate powers from Brussels](#), accusing it of "overriding the Scottish Parliament". Scottish Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Scottish Greens backed the Scottish Government position to reject the bill, while the Scottish Conservatives voted against. The motion was passed 93 votes to 30.
30. On 21 May, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre published Local Government Finance: Facts and Figures 2013-14 to 2018-19. The briefing [presents a range of clear, factual information around local government finance, including information about trends in the Revenue and Total settlements for local governments](#). Some of the methodologies to arrive at the final figures were developed in partnership with Audit Scotland.

Parliamentary Committee News

Local Government and Communities Committee:

31. On 9 May, the committee considered the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2, and [completed Stage 2 consideration of the Bill](#).
32. On 15 May the committee published a report on the Consultation on the Scottish Government's Draft National Outcomes. The committee identified three out of the 11 proposed National Outcomes to fall within the committee's remit. These were: 'we live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe'; 'we tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally'; and 'we grow up loved, safe and respected, so that we realise our full potential'. [The committee reported that they were generally content with the outcomes within its remit](#).
33. On 17 May the committee published a report setting out a number of recommendations to strengthen the Planning (Scotland) Bill. [The legislation aims to streamline the system of development planning](#), support delivery of planned developments and includes a new right for communities to produce their own plans for

their local areas called Local Place Plans.

34. On 16 May the committee [agreed to recommend to Parliament](#) that the revised Code of Conduct for Councillors be approved. The substantive changes made by the latest version of the code are: (1) in addition to Section 3 of the Code to make clear that bullying or harassment is completely unacceptable and will be considered to be a breach of the Code; and (2) changes to the rules on declarations of interest by councillors who are also members of Regional Transport Partnerships.
35. On 22 May the committee published the [Local Government and Communities Committee Annual Report 2017/18](#), in which it mentions its recommendation that Audit Scotland be involved in a review of the Small Business Bonus Scheme. The report refers to its evidence session with the Accounts Commission on its report Local Government in Scotland: Financial Overview 2016/17, as part of its scrutiny of the Scottish budget.
36. On 23 May the committee took evidence on [alcohol licensing in Scotland](#), and also took evidence on accessing greenspaces in Scotland. On 16 May the committee took evidence on the [Code of Conduct for Councillors](#) and on [progress with housing supply and the Joint Housing Delivery Plan for Scotland 2015-2020](#).

Public Audit and Post Legislative Scrutiny Committee:

37. On 3 May the committee took evidence on the [governance of public bodies](#) from a range of stakeholders including Bill Thomson, Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland, and Ian Bruce, Public Appointments Manager, Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland. The committee has decided to consider this process after issues were found with evidence received in relation to the Scottish Police Authority and NHS Tayside.
38. On 10 May the committee took evidence from a range of stakeholders including Auditor General for Scotland Caroline Gardner, Audit Scotland Associate Director Claire Sweeney and Assistant Director of Audit Fiona Mitchell-Knight on the [2016/17 audit of NHS Tayside](#).
39. On 17 May the committee took evidence from a range of stakeholders on early learning and childcare, [including considering evidence in private from Caroline Gardner, Auditor General for Scotland](#).

Finance and Constitution Committee:

40. On 2, 3 and 9 May the committee took evidence from a range of [stakeholders on the European Union \(Withdrawal\) Bill](#).

Other Committee:

41. On 30 April the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee announced that it will be [working with the Local Government and Communities Committee to scrutinise the National Outcomes](#) that most closely apply to its remit.

COSLA

42. On 17 May COSLA announced that the [COSLA and Scottish Government Regeneration Grant Fund](#) is now open for applications. The fund supports locally developed regeneration projects that involve local communities, and help to support and create jobs.

Improvement Service

43. In April the Improvement Service published Scotland's Councillors 2017-22, which [provides contains self-reported demographic information about councillors](#). 33.3 per cent of Scottish councillors responded to this survey. Some of the survey findings were that: the average age of councillors is 53; 65.7 per cent of councillors are male; 98 per cent chose 'white' as their ethnic group; and 62.8 per cent reported that their highest level of qualification was a degree of professional qualification.
44. In May the Improvement Service announced a [successful joint bid to the Scottish Government for £250,000](#), which will help fund the work to design local pilots of basic income in four councils across Scotland.
45. In May the Improvement Service was highly commended at the LARIA Research Impact Awards 2018, [coming second in the 'best use of local area research' category](#).

By-elections results

46. On 5 April, Liberal Democrat councillor Denis Rixson [gained from the SNP in the Caol & Mallaig by-election](#) in the Highlands.

Other Scottish local government news

47. On 1 May, [alcohol minimum unit pricing came into effect in Scotland](#). Alcoholic drinks will now cost a minimum of 50p per unit in Scotland. The policy is being introduced to tackle the damage caused by cheap, high strength alcohol.
48. On 22 May, Public Contracts Scotland published a report which [found that 78 per cent of public sector contracts in Scotland were awarded to small and medium businesses \(SMEs\) in the past year](#). Of the 22,000 contracts advertised through Public Contracts in 2017/18, 17,500 were awarded to SMEs, of which 13,500 were Scottish businesses.
49. On May 25, the [new EU General Data Protection Regulations \(GDPR\) came into force](#). The Digital Office for Scottish Local Government has been leading a GDPR Readiness Project to ensure councils are ready to implement the new regulations. Working in partnership with councils across Scotland, Glasgow City and Fife councils have taken the lead in developing a GDPR toolkit, which includes a standard project plan, model risk registers, flowcharts and a wide range of templates for councils to use in implementing their arrangements for GDPR. Councils have also worked collaboratively to establish a consistent legal interpretation of the new legislation, helping to manage risk and reduce duplication of effort.
50. On 28 May, [seven out of eight Conservative councillors withdrew from the ruling coalition at Moray Council](#). The withdrawal was a result of disagreements about the authority's senior management structure and how best to modernise the council. The withdrawals leave five independent councillors and one non-aligned Conservative as a minority-ruling administration. It was reported that council leader George Alexander is in talks with opposition parties.

Scrutiny, inspection, regulatory and related bodies

Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO):

51. [The SPSO's Newsletter - May](#) outlines investigation reports, recent SPSO news and highlights emerging issues. More information on the SPSO's work, including detailed investigations and decision reports, is available on the [Our findings](#) webpage. The

Commission's Financial Audit and Assurance Committee will consider more detailed intelligence from the SPSO on a six-monthly basis.

Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland:

52. On 27 April, following an investigation, the Commissioner submitted a report to the Standards Commission for Scotland setting out his conclusion that [Councillor Finlay Cunningham of Eilean Siar Council has contravened the Councillor's Code of Conduct](#) by failing to register his interests in a company in which he has one-third ownership. The report incorporates Councillor Cunningham's comments on the Commissioner's conclusion.

Standards Commission for Scotland

53. There have been [no hearings](#) by the Standards Commission since my last report.

Care Inspectorate

54. On 25 April the Care Inspectorate published its [Statistical Summary Report](#) for Quarter 4 of 2017/18. This presents data on the number of registered care services, new registrations and cancellations, complaints about care services and quality theme grades.
55. On 2 May the Care Inspectorate announced that they are consulting on a [draft framework of quality indicators](#) to support self-evaluation that leads to improvement across services for vulnerable children, young people and families. Anyone with an interest in this sector of care was invited to share their views. The deadline for consultation submissions was 25 May.
56. On 8 May the Care Inspectorate published new guidance on [building care homes that meet the needs and respect the rights of people who live in them](#). The guidance is aimed at anyone designing or building a new care service and can also be used by care providers thinking of upgrading existing care services.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary Scotland (HMICS)

57. On 22 May HMICS published an update on Police Scotland call handling, which [looks at the progress made by Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority in the past three years](#).

UK Parliament

General:

58. On 30 April, James Brokenshire replaced Sajid Javid as the [Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government](#). Brokenshire was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland until January 2018.

Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee:

59. On 10 May the Committee announced it was launching an inquiry to examine the [future role of the high street](#) in contributing to the local economy and the health, cohesion and cultural life of the local community and the challenges faced amid changing demographic, technological and other trends. The Committee is accepting written submissions until 22 June.

60. On 23 May the Committee announced its decision to [follow-up its work on the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety](#) by holding further evidence sessions on the immediate and longer-term changes needed to improve the safety of residential tower blocks.

Scottish Affairs Committee:

61. On 26 April the Committee announced it was [launching an investigation into the future of the oil and gas industry](#). The Committee accepted written submissions until 1 June.
62. On 1 May, the Committee [concluded its inquiry into Digital Connectivity](#) with an evidence session with Matt Hancock MP, Minister for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Public Accounts Committee:

63. On 9 May, the Committee published a [report into the adult social care workforce in England](#). It found that the adult social care sector is underfunded, with the care workforce suffering from low pay, low esteem and high turnover of staff.

Other UK Audit Bodies

National Audit Office:

64. On May 24 the NAO published [Transformation guidance for audit committees](#), which assists those overseeing transformation projects by setting out questions committees should ask during set-up, delivery and live-running phases.

Other general – UK

65. On 27 April, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman warned councils that [capping personal budgets goes against the requirements of the Care Act](#). The announcement was made after an investigation found Wiltshire Council was placing people into bands rather than paying for care based on need.
66. On 2 May, [an investigation conducted by health magazine Pulse](#) reported that 90 per cent of the 80 local authorities approached have reduced their public health budgets for 2018/19. The reductions are most prominent for early intervention and prevention services.
67. On 10 May, the latest statistics on [Delayed Transfers of Care](#) were published, which found that there were 154,600 total delayed days in March 2018 in NHS England. This is a drop in delayed days from the same time last year. The president of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services welcomed the new figures and noted emergency funding had 'played a huge and helpful role' in reducing delays.
68. On 10 May, [a poll of 4,000 care recipients and carers](#), carried out by the Care and Support Alliance, found that one in five respondents felt unsafe moving around in their own home due to a lack of care, while four in ten were unable to go outside. A fifth of respondents reported they had also gone without meals.
69. On 11 May, the Equality Commission called for a [national strategy](#) to ensure disabled people have access to suitable housing as a survey of all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales reported a chronic shortage of housing that can be adapted to help people living with disabilities.

70. On 11 May, the Automobile Association reported that potholes are [costing motorists and insurers at least £1 million each month](#). The report also found that there were more pothole claims made during the first four months of 2018 than for the whole of 2017.
71. On 14 May, a report conducted by the accountancy firm Moore Stephens [found that funding shortages in the social care sector have resulted in an 83 per cent increase in the number of private care providers entering insolvency](#).
72. On 16 May, a group of local authorities in England launched the [Jadu Library](#), a new open source library which will help them share digital services. This will help them to avoid potentially costly and time-consuming replication.
73. On 16 May, the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Town and Country Planning Association published [a new guide](#), 'Planning for Climate Change – a Guide for Local Authorities', which provides an overview of current policy and legislation.
74. On 17 May, the final [Hackitt report](#) was published, which proposed reforms that would see local councils having extra responsibilities for monitoring the safety of higher-risk residential buildings. The Hackitt report was commissioned in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire. The author of the report, Dame Judith Hackitt, is an engineer and civil servant, and is currently the Chair of manufacturing trade body EEF.
75. On 17 May, the UK Government [committed £400 million](#) to pay for the whole costs of the replacement and removal of unsafe cladding on council and housing association tower blocks.
76. On 18 May, ICT body the Society of Information Technology Management published its latest [Better Connected survey](#), which found that, overall, local authority websites have shown progress in the presentation of information and services on mobile devices about children's services. The survey looked at all 2016 UK councils with responsibilities for children's services.
77. On 22 May, the mayor of London Sadiq Khan announced that [all 33 London boroughs have signed up to the Rogue Landlords and Letting Agents Checker](#). The database is a free online tool which allows Londoners to check if the landlord or letting agent of a rental property has been convicted of any housing offences.

Conclusion

78. The Commission is invited to consider and note this report.

Paul Reilly
Secretary to the Accounts Commission
30 May 2018

APPENDIX:**ACCOUNTS COMMISSION REPORTS IN PAST 12 MONTHS - DOWNLOADS**

Report	Date	Report downloads	Podcast downloads
Best Value Assurance Report: East Ayrshire Council	29 May 2018		
Best Value Assurance Report: Fife Council	24 May 2018	226 (+226)	
Councils' use of ALEOs	17 May 2018	380 (+380)	
Local government in Scotland: Challenges and performance 2018	5 April 2018	2090 (+592)	62 (+ <30)
Local government in Scotland: Challenges and performance 2018 - Supplement	5 April 2018	61	n/a
National Scrutiny Plan 2018/19	4 April 2018	277 (+95)	n/a
Statutory report on Edinburgh schools (Edinburgh City Council)	3 April 2018	771 (+87)	137 (+ <30)
Statutory report on significant fraud in Dundee City Council	22 Mar 2018	912 (+151)	119 (+ <30)
Early learning and childcare	15 Feb 2018	2528 (+384)	140 (+ <30)
Early learning and childcare - supplement	15 Feb 2018	105 (+ <30)	n/a
Falkirk Council Best Value follow-up audit 2017	1 Feb 2018	1187 (+94)	83 (+31)
Best Value Assurance Report: Clackmannanshire Council	25 Jan 2018	1558 (+118)	*
Best Value Assurance Report: Orkney Islands Council	14 Dec 2017	914 (+88)	*
Local government in Scotland: Financial overview 2017	28 Nov 2017	2754 (+278)	38 (+ <30)
Local government in Scotland: Financial overview 2017 – Supplement 1	28 Nov 2017	*	n/a
Local government in Scotland: Financial overview 2017 – Supplement 2	28 Nov 2017	76	n/a
Local government in Scotland: Financial overview 2017 – Supplement 3	28 Nov 2017	40	n/a
Local government in Scotland: Financial overview 2017 – Supplement 4	28 Nov 2017	37	n/a
Best Value Assurance Report: West Lothian Council	23 Nov 2017	1045 (+75)	94 (+ <30)
Best Value follow-up audit: East Dunbartonshire Council	16 Nov 2017	593 (+48)	79 (+ <30)
Best Value Assurance Report: East Renfrewshire Council	07 Nov 2017	1279 (+76)	158 (+ <30)
Equal pay in Scottish councils	7 Sep 2017	2143 (+124)	197 (+ <30)
Best Value Assurance Report: Renfrewshire Council	31 Aug 2017	2344 (+216)	*
Self-directed support: 2017 progress report	24 Aug 2017	4628 (+326)	78 (+ <30)

Report	Date	Report downloads	Podcast downloads
Self-directed support: 2017 progress report – Supplement 1	24 Aug 2017	*	n/a
Self-directed support: 2017 progress report – Supplement 2	24 Aug 2017	130	n/a
Self-directed support: 2017 progress report – Supplement 3	24 Aug 2017	*	n/a
Self-directed support: 2017 progress report – Easy read summary	24 Aug 2017	54	n/a
Best Value Assurance Report: Inverclyde Council	1 Jun 2017	1619 (+66)	307 (+ <30)

Key:

(x) Increase in numbers since last month

* This figure is below 30

n/a Not applicable.

MEETING: 7 JUNE 2018

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF PERFORMANCE AUDIT AND BEST VALUE

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OVERVIEW: IMPACT AND APPROACH FOR 2019

Purpose

1. This report provides the Commission with a summary of the initial impact of the two overview reports published during 2017/18, *Local government in Scotland: Financial overview 2016/17*, and *Local government in Scotland: Challenges and performance 2018*. The report also invites the Commission to consider the development of overview reporting for 2019 and beyond.

Background

2. Local government overview reporting is an important part of the Accounts Commission's annual reporting programme. As the Commission's flagship reports, the two local government overview reports provide an annual opportunity for the Commission to share its conclusions from audit activity throughout the year alongside commentary on key issues concerning local government. Supporting evidence is drawn from the range of local and national audit work carried out in the year, specific research and analysis carried out in the weeks prior to the reports being drafted, and other sources.
3. In June 2017, the Commission considered the impact of its new approach to overview reporting, which included issuing two reports – a financial one in November 2016 and a more forward-looking report that focussed on performance in March 2017. The Commission noted this had improved the impact of overview reporting and been welcomed by stakeholders. It agreed to continue with those arrangements.
4. The overview reports were particularly important during this last year, which saw new elected members and council administrations in place following the elections in May 2017; the first annual reports published following the new five-year audit appointments; and the implementation of the new approach to auditing Best Value, including publication of the new Best Value Assurance reports.
5. The financial overview was published on 28th November 2017 and the challenges and performance report on 5th April 2018.

Impact

Media and political reaction

6. The media response for *Local government in Scotland: Financial overview 2016/17*, focused on the scale of the financial challenge facing councils and that situation becoming “increasingly critical”, with negative impact becoming evident in a number of service areas.
7. There was extensive coverage across print, broadcast, specialist and online outlets. It was the lead story on Good Morning Scotland and featured prominently across the main print titles. The acting chair of the Commission was interviewed by the BBC, STV, and Radio Clyde. The Record carried a leader, the Times used its own graphic (based on exhibit 6 and crediting our work), and the Scotsman, Press and Journal and Courier also focused on local councils.

8. There was interest from BBC and commercial radio stations and online via the BBC, STV, the Guardian and specialists. The Commission's key messages were well reflected and there was good recognition of the role of the Commission as an independent watchdog. Reaction from political parties, SG and CoSLA helped promote further interest. On publication day the report was the subject of an urgent question in Parliament.
9. CoSLA commented that: *"Today's Overview Report from the Accounts Commission is a timely and accurate reflection of the precarious financial position Scotland's Councils finds themselves in and explains clearly why this year, more than ever, Scotland's Councils need a fair settlement from Scottish Government."* Its Resources Spokesperson Councillor Gail Macgregor said: *"The Accounts Commission is correct. Councils are showing increasing signs of financial stress and face even tougher challenges ahead. Indeed, it is only tough choices and prudent financial management that have allowed us to continue to deliver for communities despite the difficulties. The Accounts Commission are (sic) also absolutely right to point out that the funding of Councils from the centre has reduced, while costs and demands have increased, and more Councils are having to rely on reserves to fund services."*
10. The *Financial Overview* had by the end of March 2018, achieved 2958 downloads (pdf and rtf) and 38 podcast downloads – similar numbers to last year.
11. There was wide coverage of the *Local government in Scotland: Challenges and performance 2018* report across all media. It made the Scotsman front page and featured in the Telegraph, Times, P&J, Herald, Record, Sun, and National. The Chair of the Commission was interviewed by BBC and STV. The story, with excerpts from these interviews, ran well both on TV and radio, including Good Morning Scotland, Central FM, Kingdom FM and Wave 102.
12. Overall the coverage accurately reflected the Commission's key messages. Labour, the Lib-Dems and the Royal College of Nursing responded to the report. In a statement, CoSLA welcomed its publication saying: *"Councils have continued, again as the report recognises, to take hard and difficult decisions, amid high public expectations and we have delivered for our communities as best as we can. Councils have already transformed and will continue to do so, but it is not an overnight fix."* As with previous reports, coverage of the Overview continued after publication in specialist and local media and journalists finding fresh perspectives, such as with local government staffing levels.
13. The *Challenges and Performance Overview* had in its first three weeks (to end April) 1728 downloads (pdf and rtf formats) and 62 podcast downloads, slightly higher than last year over the same initial period.

Councils

14. We have not carried out any formal or extensive exercise to assess councils' views on the overview reports this year. We have, however, collected a degree of informal feedback from our day to day engagement activity, and a few unsolicited comments. Overall these have been very positive, welcoming the Commission's bolder statements on the impact of funding reductions, opening up the issue of the local government funding formula and the recognition of the importance of transformation.
15. Examples of comments include:
 - *"...extremely helpful, and a major piece of work. You seem to have made sense of the dark art of Scottish Government finance!!"*
 - *"It is notoriously difficult to make year on year comparisons, so this is a major step forward."*

- “Our Chief Executive and Leader are sitting with a copy of your report on their desks!! So it has been well received.”
- “Your recent publication is creating quite a bit of interest here, and all very positive comments about the quality of the report.”
- “Our Council Leader is considering using some of the data for future budget briefings.”

16. The Commission has agreed to hold a number of engagement events with councils in September. Previous engagement sessions have been well received, and the Commission has decided to focus on smaller group sessions this year, allowing more informal and in-depth discussions. These conversations will offer a further opportunity for the Commission to promulgate its key overview messages and learn more about council views on the main issues they face and what they would like to see covered in future overview reports.

Scottish Parliament

17. Both reports created interest from the committees of the Scottish Parliament.

- The Commission’s Interim Chair and the Controller of Audit provided a briefing on the *Local Government Financial Overview 2016/17* to the Local Government and Communities Committee on 29th November 2017. A wide range of questions were asked by the MSPs, and unfortunately, an error in the report led to us misinforming the committee and subsequently the Controller of Audit apologising and issuing a correction. Members of the Commission were made aware of this at the time.
- The Commission Chair and the Controller of Audit are (at time of writing) due to brief the Local Government and Communities Committee on the *Local Government Overview – Performance and Challenges 2018* report, at its meeting on 30th May.

Other stakeholders

18. The audit teams for both overview reports have continued to build effective relationships with key stakeholders, especially with a view to continuing to create greater consistency in financial and performance data reporting across local government.

19. The process for the overview reports last year introduced a project advisory group for the first time, comprising a small number of representatives from key stakeholders to act as a reference group for the audit team during each project. The members of the advisory group were from: - CoSLA (finance lead officer); Scottish Government (policy, finance and analytical services reps); Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe); the Improvement Service; SoLACE; the CIPFA Directors of Finance Group; and the Fraser of Allander Institute. Meetings of the group were facilitated by the audit team and the Commission sponsors attended.

20. The advisory group was effective in offering the audit team the opportunity to test its thinking at key stages in each project, and to hear how emerging messages might play with specific stakeholders. Members of the group were also useful in checking the accuracy of our understanding and sharing methodologies for various analyses.

21. There is scope for some improvements in our use of the advisory group in future projects. This would include clarifying the roles expected of its members, managing the business of each meeting more precisely, and using the individual members to check on issues at an earlier stage in the process and between formal meetings. We might also consider having distinctive members for each overview project to allow us to target advisory members suited to the specific focus of each report. There is also potential to address some practical challenges in being able to programme meetings and discussion time into the tight timescales currently involved in the overview reporting process.

Approach for 2019 and beyond

22. Local government overview reporting is an established and important part of the Commission's work programme. Commission members refer to these as 'flagship' reports, and it is important that we continue to review and improve our approach.
23. The strength of overview reporting is that it brings together results from all the audit work carried out over the year on behalf of the Commission. The challenge in overview reporting is the sheer volume of issues that could potentially be commented on. The Commission will want to focus on the impact these reports can have in enhancing public transparency and accountability, but also in making a difference and contributing to improved local government.
24. This requires an effective balance between reporting on a set of routine annual conclusions – such as funding gaps, reserves, debt levels - where the focus should be on trends; and reporting on topical strategic issues – such as transformation, leadership and capacity - to reflect the changes and improvements needed across local government. To report on these issues effectively, it is important that all audit work in local government includes a focus on both the routine and the strategic themes that contribute and that this is built in at the planning stage.
25. The Commission has developed a set of clear strategic audit priorities, and we are continuing to improve the integration of the main strategic planning and audit risk management processes that currently exist. For example, work is taking place to ensure that:
 - the audit risks and priorities for local government are clear,
 - these are communicated effectively through annual audit planning guidance and other supplementary materials,
 - audit work, data analysis, research and external engagement is appropriately focussed on the audit risks and priorities,
 - results from the range of activities is consistent and fed into the various outputs in place - which include internal facing products for the Commission (such as cluster briefings, current issues reports and the Controller of Audit's annual assurance and risks report), and external facing products (such as performance audit reports, annual audit reports and the two overview reports).
26. The process of overview reporting will be improved in future by identifying the key themes and focus at an earlier stage, and by the analysis work being carried out over a longer period and more systematically. We can also continue to improve the consistency of data analysis and descriptions, including with external organisations such as the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe).
27. In terms of the scope of the overview reports, we would want to engage with the Commission as early as possible. This would be with a view to developing a more systematic approach to the routine analyses that will feature to some extent every year, and the more topical issues (which might feature in one report or may be covered over several reports in the short term).
28. We envisage some focus on the following issues in the reports this year:
 - Continued story on the development of LG Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) and what it tells us about local government services, and the impact on them of funding pressures
 - A more in-depth look at one or more areas of service performance, by taking a 'deeper dive' into LGBF and other available data

- How councils are funded is a complex picture that we are seeking to shine a light on, including the funding formula that we referred to at a high level in 2017 and would want to develop the story this year.
- Similarly, how councils are responding to reducing finances will be of continuing interest including for example:
 - the scope of financial strategies
 - funding gaps, building on coverage in previous years
 - fees and charges and maximising income,
- Some comparative analysis of what is happening in England in Wales, and how this might inform our views on the Scottish situation.
- Commentary on what is coming out of audit work under the new approach to auditing Best Value
- Commentary about IJBs, drawing on the performance audit we have programmed for this area
- The continuing story of transformation.

29. The Commission's oversight of the overview reports last year was as follows:

- The Chair and Deputy Chair acted as our Commission sponsors. This worked well and we propose the same arrangement for 2018/19.
- The draft scope for both reports and the emerging messages for the local government overview 2018 were considered by both FAA and PA committees. This recognised the whole Commission's interest in overview reporting, and the strategic links between the two reports. However, in considering the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the process, the Commission may want to consider the option of this year, of the full Commission considering the scopes, emerging messages and draft reports for both overview reports.
- The scope for the financial overview was considered in August and the draft report considered in October prior to November publication. The scope for the main local government overview was considered in September, the emerging messages in November and the draft report in March prior to publication early in April. I would propose a similar timetable this year.

30. Alongside this, the Audit Scotland team will work closely with the Commission's Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretary, throughout the process.

Conclusion

31. The Commission is asked to:

- a) note the initial impact of the overview reports in 2017/18;
- b) agree the proposed approach to overview reporting in the future, including timescales for 2018/19 and the option of the full Commission considering scope and emerging messages rather than committees;
- c) consider any specific themes for content that the Commission can identify at this stage.

Fraser McKinlay
Director of Performance Audit and Best Value
7 June 2018

MEETING: 7 JUNE 2018

REPORT BY: SECRETARY TO THE ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

BEST VALUE ASSURANCE REPORT: WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to introduce for the Commission's consideration the Controller of Audit's Best Value Assurance Report for West Dunbartonshire Council.

Background

2. A key objective of the approach to auditing Best Value is to allow the Commission to provide more regular assurance to the public about how councils are performing in relation to their Best Value statutory duties. It is intended that this will be achieved by the Controller of Audit submitting a Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) on each council at least once during the five-year audit appointment and also by Best Value being reported in annual audit reports.
3. The attached BVAR is the ninth such report presented to the Commission.
4. While this is the first BVAR on West Dunbartonshire Council, the report reflects on the progress made by the Council since its last Best Value report. The Controller of Audit reported to the Accounts Commission in October 2006. A formal hearing was held in November 2006 to further inform the Accounts Commission's judgements on the Council. Recommendations for improvement were then made in the Best Value report published in February 2007. The attached BVAR report summarises the findings from previous Best Value reports on the Council.

The Controller of Audit report

5. The BVAR is made by the Controller of Audit to the Commission under section 102(1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (as amended by subsequent legislation including the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003).
6. The legislation enables the Controller of Audit to make reports to the Commission with respect to:
 - the accounts of local authorities audited under the Act;
 - any matters arising from the accounts of any of those authorities or from the auditing of those accounts being matters that the Controller considers should be considered by the local authority or brought to the attention of the public; and
 - the performance by a local authority of their statutory duties in relation to best value and community planning.
7. A copy of the report is being sent to the Council, which is obliged to supply a copy to each elected member of the Council and to make additional copies available for public inspection. Once the Controller of Audit's report is sent to the Council it is effectively in the public domain.
8. The report concludes with a series of recommendations proposed by the Controller of Audit which are to be part of the Commission's considerations.

Procedure

9. The legislation provides that, on receipt of a Controller of Audit report, the Commission may do, in any order, all or any of the following, or none of them:
 - direct the Controller of Audit to carry out further investigations
 - hold a hearing
 - state its findings.
10. Findings may include recommendations and the persons to whom those recommendations may be made include Scottish Ministers, who have powers to make an enforcement direction requiring an authority to take such action as is specified in the direction.
11. Members of the audit team will be present at the Commission's meeting and will be available to answer questions on the evidence and judgements presented in the report. This is done in the public part of the Commission meeting.
12. The Commission is then expected to consider in private how it wishes to proceed. Subsequently, the Commission is obliged by statute to inform the council of its decision, which the Commission does before making the decision public.

Conclusion

10. The Commission is invited to:
 - a) consider the Controller of Audit's BVAR on West Dunbartonshire Council; and
 - b) decide in private how it wishes to proceed.

Paul Reilly
Secretary to the Commission
29 May 2018

West Dunbartonshire Council

Best Value Assurance Report



Prepared for the Accounts Commission by the Controller of Audit

June 2018

The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is the public spending watchdog for local government. We hold councils in Scotland to account and help them improve. We operate impartially and independently of councils and of the Scottish Government, and we meet and report in public.

We expect councils to achieve the highest standards of governance and financial stewardship, and value for money in how they use their resources and provide their services.

Our work includes:

- securing and acting upon the external audit of Scotland's councils and various joint boards and committees
- assessing the performance of councils in relation to Best Value and community planning
- carrying out national performance audits to help councils improve their services
- requiring councils to publish information to help the public assess their performance.

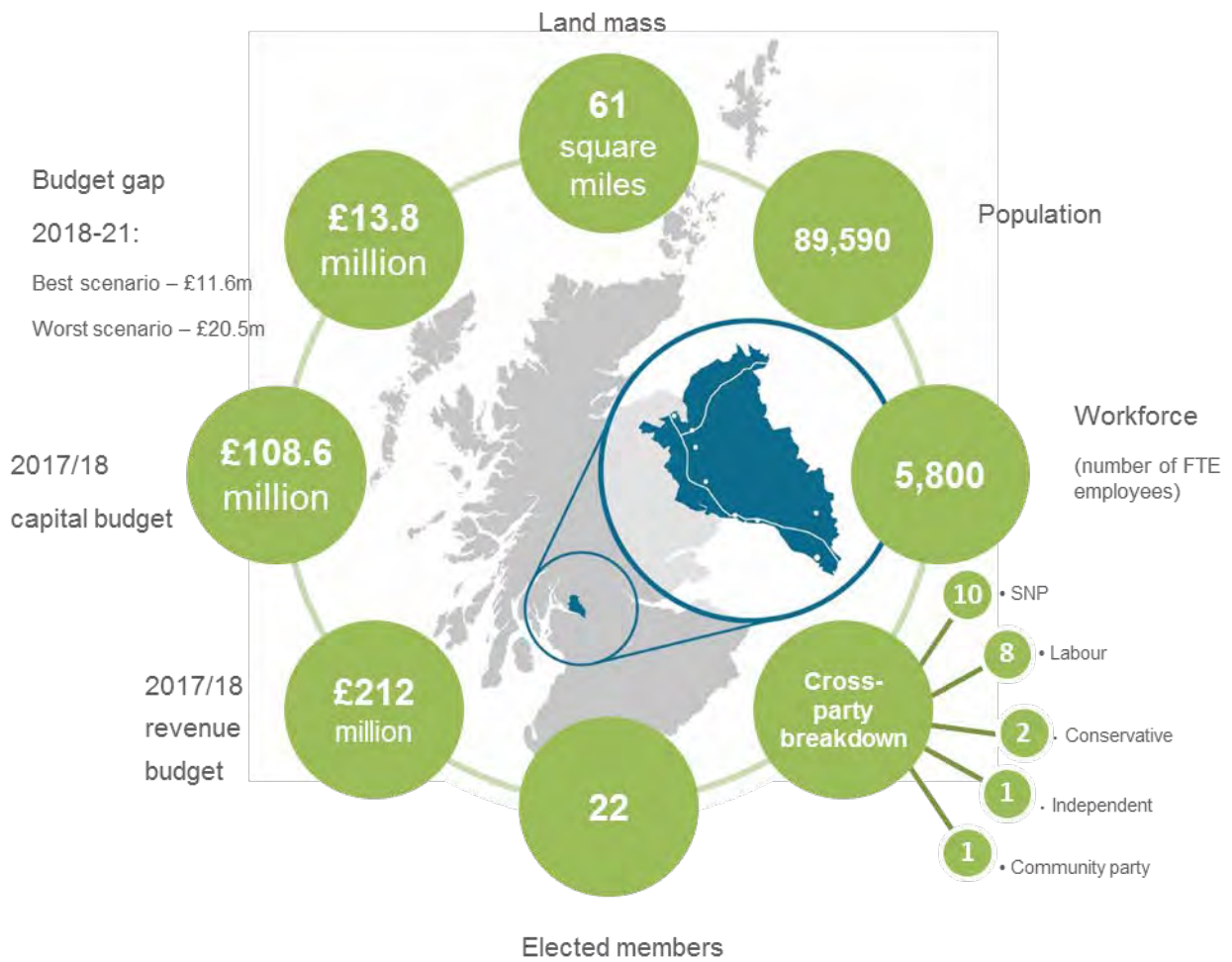
You can find out more about the work of the Accounts Commission on our website: www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/about-us/accounts-commission

Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000 under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. We help the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission check that organisations spending public money use it properly, efficiently and effectively.

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Key facts



Audit approach

1. The statutory duty of Best Value was introduced in the Local Government Scotland Act 2003. The audit of Best Value is a continuous process that forms part of the annual audit of every council. Findings are reported each year through the Annual Audit Report. The Controller of Audit will also present a Best Value Assurance Report to the Accounts Commission at least once during the five-year audit appointment for each council.

2. While this is the first assurance report on West Dunbartonshire Council, the report reflects on the progress made by the council since its last Best Value report. The Controller of Audit reported to the Accounts Commission in October 2006. A formal hearing was held in November 2006 to further inform the Accounts Commission's judgements on the council. Recommendations for improvement were then made in the Best Value report published in February 2007. Throughout this report we make reference to the February 2007 report. Appendix 1 summarises the findings from previous Best Value reports on the council in the Best Value audit timeline.

3. This report seeks to provide the Commission with assurance on the council's statutory duty to deliver Best Value, with a particular focus on the Commission's Strategic Audit Priorities. We look for a council to demonstrate Best Value by showing continuous improvement in how it delivers its priorities. The pace, depth and continuity of improvement are key to how well a council meets its priorities in future.

4. Our work covers many Best Value characteristics in the statutory guidance but does not cover them all. Our audit approach is proportionate and risk-based, that is, it reflects the context, risks and performance of the individual council. It also draws on the information from audit and scrutiny work we have carried out in previous years. Our [2016/17 Annual Audit Report](#) was our starting point.






5. In this report, we show how we assessed the council's improvement over time and our conclusions are reflected in the [Key Messages](#) on page 7. We did initial work to gauge the audit's scope – by reviewing previous audit and inspection reports and council documents; meeting senior council officers; and drawing on our wider public sector knowledge and experience. [Exhibit 1 \(page 6\)](#) shows the areas we decided to focus on. We assessed detailed evidence in February and March 2018. We also:

- interviewed councillors and senior officers
- observed council, committee and board meetings
- reviewed documents and performance data
- observed staff focus groups.

6. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and assistance provided to the audit team by councillors, officers and the council's partner organisations.

Exhibit 1

Key areas of focus for our audit

Area of focus		
 <p>Vision and strategic direction, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the council is trying to achieve. • The council's strategic plan 2017-2020 and its fit with wider community plans. • The effectiveness of the council's leadership. 		<u>Part 1</u>
 <p>Performance, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council's service performance. • Reports by organisations that independently inspect council services. 		<u>Part 2</u>
 <p>Use of resources, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The services' budgets and capital budgets, which pay for projects such as new buildings. • The council's workforce. 		<u>Part 3</u>
 <p>Partnership working, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The community planning partnership. • Shared services with other local authorities. • Queens Quay, redevelopment of the former John Brown's shipyard. • The City Deal, providing investment in local projects. 		<u>Part 4</u>
 <p>Continuous improvement including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council's overall direction, depth and pace of change. • Performance management and reporting arrangements. • Self-assessment and how it drives improvement action. • The programme of office rationalisation. 		<u>Part 5</u>

Source: Audit Scotland

Key messages

1. Since our last Best Value Report in 2007, West Dunbartonshire Council has made significant improvements in how it works. The council now demonstrates a focus on delivering Best Value and we found evidence of continuous improvement in its services.
2. In 2007, the Accounts Commission highlighted extensive and fundamental weaknesses in leadership and direction and poor relationships among elected members and between members and officers. Since then, changes to the senior officer team, including the appointment of the current Chief Executive in 2011, have played a key role in the improvements the council has made. Officers and councillors from all parties work well together for the benefit of the residents of West Dunbartonshire.
3. Overall, service performance is improving and most residents who have provided feedback to the council are satisfied. The council maintains a steady pace of change that has led to improved outcomes in its priority areas including housing services and educational attainment amongst schoolchildren.
4. The Council's latest Strategic Plan 2017-2022 lays out a focused and ambitious vision for the period, which reflects the needs of its community. There is evidence to demonstrate that the views of the community influenced council budget-setting and decision-making. The Strategic Plan is clearly aligned to the Community Planning Partnership's strategic priorities.
5. The Strategic Improvement Framework provides a structured and practical approach to help council services to continue to improve. The council has demonstrated a commitment to delivering services differently in West Dunbartonshire and is working well with partners to achieve this. Partnership initiatives include:
 - a shared IT data centre with East Dunbartonshire Council
 - membership of the Civil Contingencies Service with Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde councils
 - a communications partnership with Stirling Council.
6. The council has a good record of delivering services within budget. It has developed both medium and long-term financial plans. However, it has a projected funding gap of £13.8 million for the three years to 31 March 2021, which will be a challenge to make up. Service reform needs to continue.
7. In recent years, the council has significantly expanded its capital budget, which pays for projects such as buildings and roads. But there is a trend of significant slippage in the capital programme, which means that a number of projects are being finished late. The council now needs to strengthen project planning and management.

- 8.** The council has a detailed organisation-wide, five-year workforce plan and individual service-specific workforce plans.
- 9.** Our 2007 report highlighted that scrutiny in the council needed to improve. There is evidence of significant improvement in this area, with members working together and demonstrating stronger scrutiny.

Part 1

Does the council have clear strategic direction?



The Council has an ambitious vision for 2017-2022, which takes into account community needs.

The vision is supported by clear priorities and target outcomes. The focus is a programme of regeneration, and plans to reduce inequality and poverty in the area.

There is clear alignment between the council and the Community Planning Partnership's (CPP) strategic priorities.

Leadership from senior officers and members is effective and has been an important part of the council's improvement since 2007.

Officers and councillors from all parties work well together for the benefit of the residents of West Dunbartonshire.

West Dunbartonshire faces many challenges

7. West Dunbartonshire is west of Glasgow, north of the River Clyde and is one of the smallest Scottish councils in terms of area (31st out of 32) and population (25th). Across the three main areas of Clydebank, Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven there is great diversity. The council area ranges from the densely populated urban centre of Clydebank to the more rural setting of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. The area faces a number of challenges including a reducing population, high levels of economic deprivation and relatively poor health outcomes.

8. Some parts of West Dunbartonshire are prosperous, but significant inequalities exist between communities. 48 of the 121 data zones (population units) across West Dunbartonshire are among the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland¹. West Dunbartonshire has seen relatively large increases in its share of the most deprived areas, showing the biggest increase in Scotland in relative deprivation from 2012. Between October 2016 and September 2017, unemployment in West Dunbartonshire was 5.2% compared to the Scottish average of 4.3%².

9. West Dunbartonshire has a population of 89,590. By 2039 the population of West Dunbartonshire is projected to decrease by 6.7% whereas the population of Scotland overall is projected to increase by 7.5%. In West Dunbartonshire by 2039:

¹ *SIMD16 council area profile and analysis: West Dunbartonshire*, Scottish Government, November 2016.

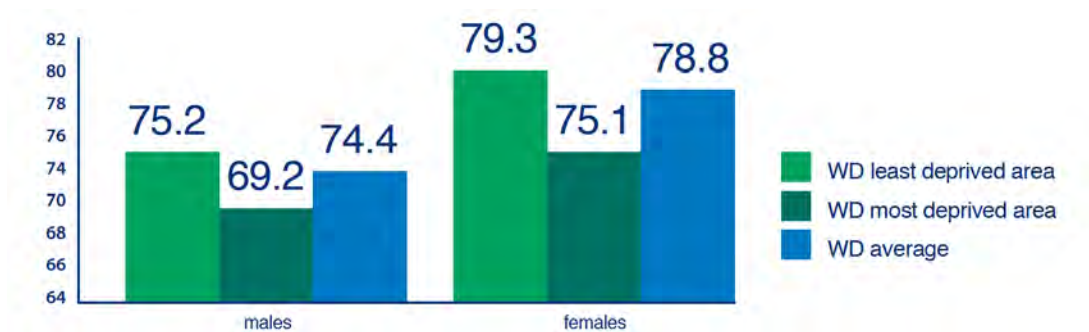
² [Scotland's Labour Market, Table and Charts, February 2018, Scottish Government.](#)

- the number of people aged 75 and over is projected to increase by 71% (to approximately 12,000) – affecting health and social care services for older people
- the number of people of working age is projected to fall by 20% (to 46,500)– and a lack of local workforce could potentially make the area less attractive to some businesses
- the number of children and young people aged 0-15 years is forecast to fall by 12.1% (to 13,700) – affecting services such as schools.

10. West Dunbartonshire has life expectancy rates that are statistically significantly worse than the Scottish average, with the second lowest life expectancy at birth of all Scottish local authorities. Male life expectancy at birth in West Dunbartonshire is improving more rapidly than female life expectancy. The effect that poverty has on life expectancy can be seen when comparing life expectancy rates in the least and most deprived areas of West Dunbartonshire ([Exhibit 2](#)). Such inequalities represent a long-standing and long-term challenge in West Dunbartonshire.

Exhibit 2

Life expectancy in West Dunbartonshire by deprivation, 2009-2013



Note: Scotland averages: Males – 77.1, Females – 81.2.
Source: West Dunbartonshire Council Strategic Plan 2017-2022.

The council has a clear vision supported by a set of priorities and outcomes developed from a good understanding of local need

11. Since the 2007 report, West Dunbartonshire Council has in place a vision and suite of strategic priorities, described firstly in council plans and then through its five year strategic plans for 2012-17 and 2017-2022. The 2012-17 Strategic Plan included an overall vision of: ‘A prosperous West Dunbartonshire recognised as a dynamic area within a successful Scotland.’ In October 2017, the Council approved its Strategic Plan for 2017-22. The vision is ‘to deliver high quality services, led by priorities identified by the communities of West Dunbartonshire, in an open and transparent way’. The new strategic plan has five priorities linked to supporting outcomes (See [Exhibit 3](#)). The council agreed on its priorities and outcomes based on a good understanding of what local people wanted after consulting them, and on the administration’s election commitments.

Exhibit 3

West Dunbartonshire Council's Strategic Plan (2017-22): priorities and supporting outcomes

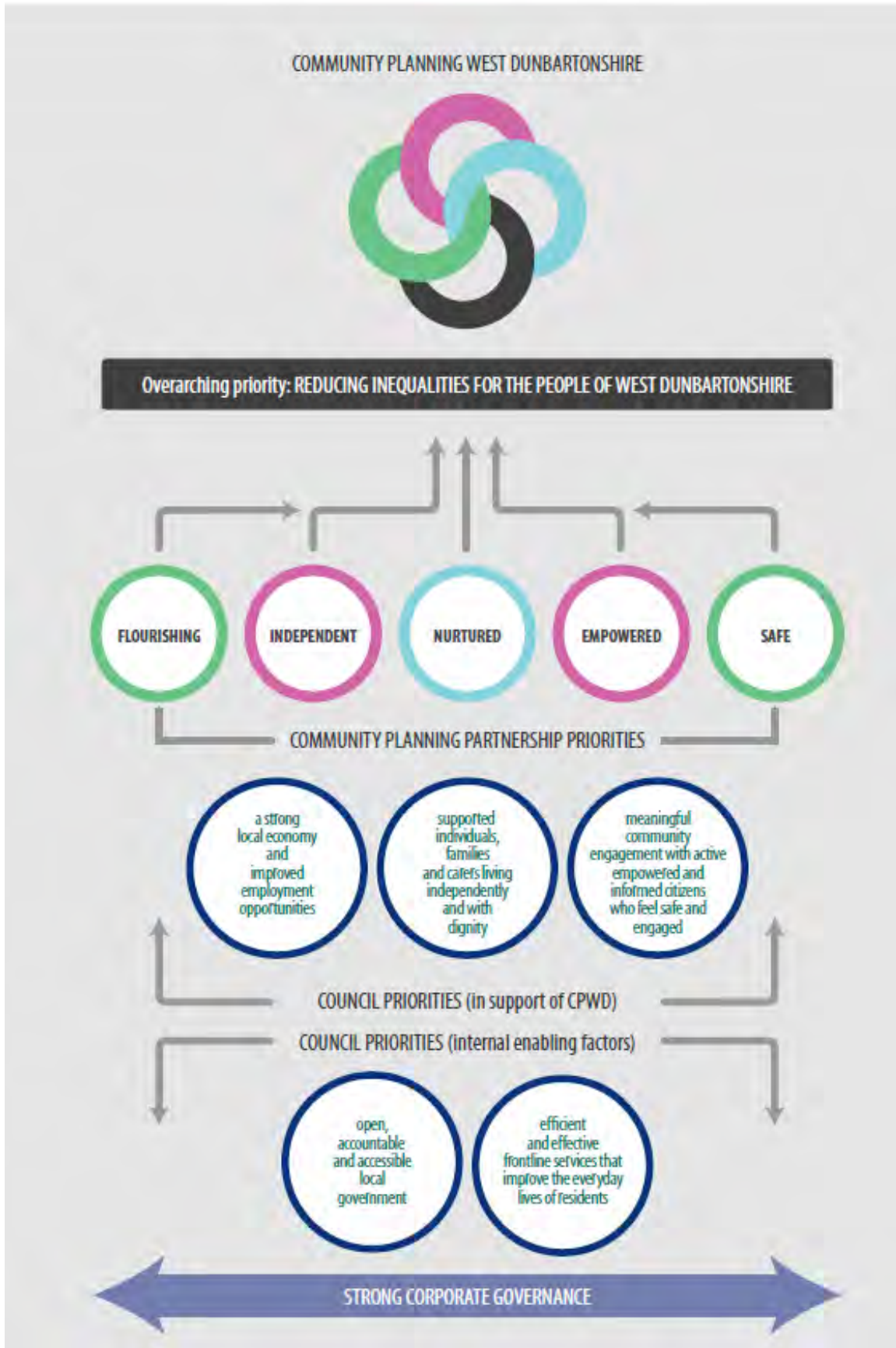
Strategic priority	Supporting outcome
A strong local economy and improved job opportunities	Increased skills for life and learning
	Increased employment and training opportunities
	A growing economy
Supported individuals, families and carers living independently and with dignity	More affordable and suitable housing options
	Enhanced life chances
	Improved wellbeing
Meaningful engagement with active, empowered and informed citizens who feel safe and engaged	Strong and active communities
	Fully consulted and involved citizens who are able to make full use of the Community Empowerment Act
Open, accountable and accessible local government	Equity of access for all residents
	A continuously improving council delivering best value
Efficient and effective frontline services to improve the everyday lives of residents	A committed and skilled workforce
	Sustainable and attractive local communities

There is clear alignment between the council and the Community Planning Partnership's (CPP) strategic priorities

12. Councils do not deliver services alone. The council has a leading role in the West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership, known as Community Planning West Dunbartonshire (CPWD). The partnership includes representatives from the council, health board, police and fire services and local charities and voluntary organisations. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires community partnerships to produce a Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) for its area. CPWD's LOIP was issued in October 2017. The plan sets out shared vision for the area. [Exhibit 4](#) on page 12 shows how the LOIP links the council and the CPWD's strategic priorities. The LOIP covers ten years, which is longer than the council's five-year Strategic Plan. This helps the partnership to target broader areas for improvement.

Exhibit 4

How the Council priorities link to and support the CPWD’s Local Outcome Improvement Plan long-term aspirations

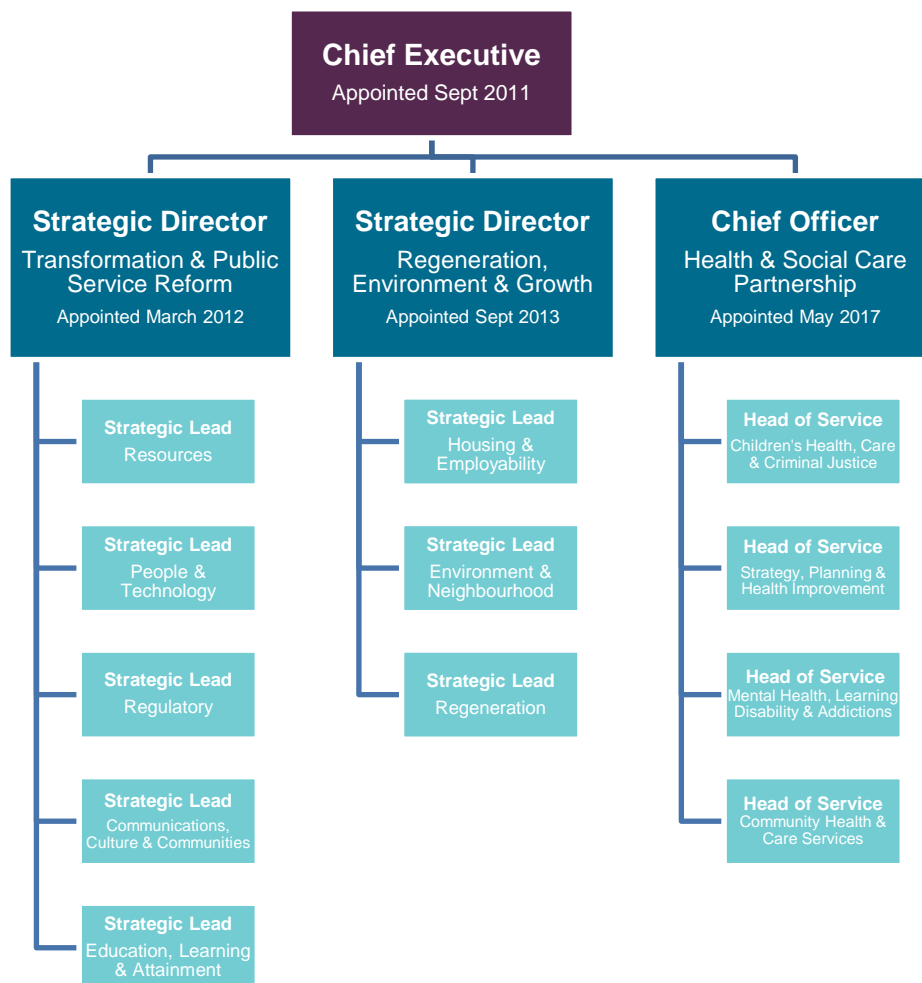


The council's service plans will help deliver the strategic priorities

13. The council has three strategic directors, one of whom operates as the Chief Officer of the West Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), as [Exhibit 5](#) shows. Council services are split across eight areas, with each managed by a strategic lead officer. In addition, there are four heads of service within the HSCP.

Exhibit 5

West Dunbartonshire Council's structure



14. Each strategic lead area has an annual service delivery plan. These plans set out the key actions for each service to help deliver the council's Strategic Plan. The plans also set out more operational improvement priorities and actions identified through the service planning process. We discuss the service plans further in Part 2 of this report.

15. As the council only adopted the new strategic plan in October 2017, the 2017-18 service delivery plans still reflect the priorities and performance indicators from the previous plan. New service delivery plans were introduced in May 2018 to support the new strategic plan. We found continuity and consistency between the 2012-17 and 2017-22 priorities and performance indicators.

16. As well as these planning processes, the council's Strategic Improvement Framework enables the council to review and improve services and helps ensure it

can continue to deliver them in the longer term. This is discussed further in Part 5 of this report.

17.The council's strategic priorities are taken into account when decisions are being made. All council and committee covering reports include a strategic assessment. This acts as a prompt to officers and members to consider how any issues and decisions will help deliver on the council's priorities. This is an area of good practice.

The council consults with the community when making decisions

18.The 2017-22 strategic plan priorities were informed by a consultation by the current administration during the 2017 election campaign. The consultation asked residents what was important to them and what their priorities were. It was undertaken via online and paper surveys and received over 3,000 responses.

19.The council has an Engaging Communities Framework in place. This helps the council to consult on important issues. There is a focus on online consultation, for example, on the budget, rent setting and the local development plan. Local people can also give their views during a consultation in libraries and the council's one-stop shops. The council also has a citizens' panel. The framework provides a practical guide which explains what community engagement is and how staff can best use the range of tools, methodologies and approaches available to them.

20.There is evidence of the community being involved in council decisions. Examples include the following:

- Following a review of library opening times, the council amended proposals to reflect over 1,000 responses to a consultation.
- Housing tenant forums have participated in decisions about, for example, rent setting and housing allocation policy.
- Participatory budgeting, where local residents were involved in the allocation of small grants to upgrade community facilities and reduce social isolation.

21.The West Dunbartonshire Tenants and Residents Organisation (WDTRO) is an independent, umbrella group which works to influence decisions on council houses and services. The council supports the group and has regular contact with and provides training for WDTRO members. Creating the Joint Rent Group is an example of good working relationships. Through this, tenants feel their interests are represented.

22.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 challenges. For example, it is hard to attract a diverse range of members to join the CA to ensure that it is representative of the whole community. The council held focus groups so that the CA could influence the council's 2017/22 strategic plan, but these were poorly attended by members of the CA. The council should continue to offer help to further develop the role of the CA so it can reach its full potential.

23.The council has good foundations for meeting its responsibilities under the Community Empowerment Act. The Act aims to empower communities by enabling them to own land and buildings and to strengthen their voices in decisions that matter to them. The council has been involved in a number of projects to transfer assets to the community (Case study 1). We will continue to look at how the council implements the Act in future years.

Case study 1

Community Empowerment Act in action: Westbridgend community centre

In 2015 Westbridgend Hall, a well-used community centre in Dumbarton, was closed because the building was no longer fit for purpose and was too damaged to repair. The council allocated £675,000 to build a new centre on the site, on the condition that members of the community ran it.

A community-led management committee was set up. Members of Westbridgend Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) started the campaign to encourage people to join the committee. A lot of effort has gone into bringing others on board through public events.

The council's Tenant Participation Team and the Communities Team have supported the new management committee. The teams have spent time with the committee on subjects such as:

- how you work as a committee
- business planning
- priority setting
- how to consult and engage with the community and ensure it is representative
- how you hold a meeting.

Work will continue in building capacity of the group and supporting development of a business plan to inform the design of the future facility. The main focus for the council has been on empowering the community, giving local people skills and confidence and transferring a valuable asset to the community that will provide services based on local needs.

Source: West Dunbartonshire Council 2018

Members and officers demonstrate effective leadership

24. Our previous BV report commented on the lack of effective leadership from senior elected members and officers and poor relationships among elected members and officers. There is evidence to demonstrate effective council leadership from members and officers. This has been an important part of the council's improvement since 2007. The chief executive and senior management team operate well, showing shared corporate ownership and commitment. There is good communication and the team works effectively together.

25. Members have set out a clear vision and priorities for the council through its strategic plans. The Chief Executive and Senior Management Team provide clear direction through the council's 'Leadership and Governance' structure for officers, shown at [Exhibit 6](#). The Chief Executive, strategic directors and the strategic leads meet every Monday to review current issues and the week ahead. Each of the monitoring and scrutiny groups and boards meet monthly. Senior officers are motivated and passionate in striving to achieve the council's priorities.

Exhibit 6

West Dunbartonshire Council's officer governance structure



Officers and councillors from all parties work well together in the interests of residents of West Dunbartonshire

26. In the period to May 2017, a Labour majority administration was in place. Following the elections in May 2017, no political party in West Dunbartonshire had an overall majority. A joint administration was formed, made up of ten SNP councillors and one Independent councillor. As the largest single group not in administration, it was agreed that Labour would form the official opposition.

27. Eight of the 22 members elected in May 2017 are new. The induction programme for councillors was, therefore, crucial for members to be effective in their roles. We consider that the induction programme is a good practice example of support for elected members. The induction programme is followed up by members' seminars. The council currently has 11 seminars scheduled in the period to June 2018. These cover a wide range of areas, such as Community Planning Partnership – Tackling Domestic Abuse, Understanding our Equality Duties, Adult Support and Protection, Safeguarding our Environment and an ICT drop in session. There has been good attendance at members' sessions and development workshops, and we feel the material the council provided was comprehensive and accessible. It is also clear that officers provide ongoing support to members.

28. Within the political environment in which local authorities operate, councillors are working well together. We have observed them asking questions and making decisions based on what they believe is for the benefit and interest of the residents of West Dunbartonshire. Discussions at committees focus on the main issues, and councillors are able to make decisions. Working relationships between officers and councillors are respectful and constructive. Our view is supported by our interviews with a number of members. The council holds briefing sessions or seminars to give councillors more in-depth information to help them scrutinise at committee if particularly complex information is being provided to councillors or new ideas about delivering services are proposed. To further develop this area, the council could consider introducing cross-party working groups to address the financial challenges facing the council and to help with difficult decisions which will have to be made.

Part 2

How well is the council performing?



The council's overall performance is improving and there is evidence that residents are satisfied with services

The council's Strategic Improvement Framework uses benchmarking to help achieve continuous improvement.

The council reports improved performance in two-thirds of its priority indicators for the period 2012-2017. Particular highlights are improvements in housing services and educational attainment amongst schoolchildren from poorer areas.

Resident satisfaction has increased significantly over the last five years.

The council has effective systems in place to monitor performance and drive continuous improvement

29.In 2016, the council consolidated improvement activity in a new Strategic Improvement Framework to monitor its performance and drive continuous improvement. We discuss this further in Part 5 of this report.

30.Members and officers effectively scrutinise how services perform. Examples include the following:

- Each Strategic Service Management Team considers performance reports during routine management meetings.
- The Performance Monitoring and Review Group consider regular reports from across strategic areas through its online performance management system, Pentana. This monitors the performance indicators linked to the Strategic Plan.
- Service committees meet every quarter and get regular performance information.
- Service performance is reviewed through the Corporate Services Committee, Education Services Committee, Housing & Communities Committee and Infrastructure, Regeneration & Economic Development Committee and annually through Council.
- Officers and councillors have a good understanding of what the council has achieved and the challenges that remain.

31.Improvement priorities and actions are clearly set out in the 8 annual service delivery plans. The plans include a review of the previous year's performance. Areas covered include:

- self-evaluation

- benchmarking data
- feedback from customers and employees
- the challenges remaining and areas for improvement
- an overview of resources, including employees and budgets, and risks for each service.

32. The service plans provide balanced analyses of performance and areas for improvement and there is evidence of actions leading to improved outcomes ([Exhibit 7](#)).

33. Public performance reporting focuses on the 2012-17 strategic priorities and is available on the council's website. Performance is displayed in several formats including:

- three performance wheels that give a general overview of progress using a red, amber and green scale
- a document with infographics that highlight targets the council has met and missed
- a table that details specific progress made against targets
- The performance reporting offers a clear analysis of targets that the council has missed and met, along with historical trend information. It may also benefit from providing a summary of the journey of performance in each area and future plans for improvement, alongside the detailed performance indicator report.

The council reports improved performance in two-thirds of its priority indicators for the period 2012-17

34. The Strategic Plan 2017-22 has five-year targets with monitoring and reporting on progress planned annually. The council only approved the plan in October 2017 and it has not yet published performance reports. Targets have milestones for every year and these will be reported to full council each year. Targets are set from a baseline and will be reviewed over time. Annual performance reports against the new strategic plan are planned for members.

35. Service performance against the council's vision and five priorities in the 2012-17 Strategic Plan was measured against 31 performance targets. Exhibit 7 shows that by 2017 it had met or exceeded two-thirds of these.

Exhibit 7**West Dunbartonshire Council 2012/17 strategic plan performance**

	Key area	No. of indicators	2016/17 Target Status
Social mission	Improved economic growth and employment	2	
	Improve life chances for children and young people	3	
	Improve local housing and environmentally sustainable infrastructure	4	
	Improve wellbeing of communities and protect the welfare of vulnerable people	4	
Organisational capabilities	Committed & dynamic workforce	3	
	Fit for purpose estate and facilities	3	
	Innovative use of information technology	2	
	Strong financial governance and sustainable budget management	6	
Legitimacy & Support	Positive dialogue with local citizens and communities	4	

Met
 Narrowly missed
 Significantly missed

Source: West Dunbartonshire Council, Strategic Plan 2012-2017: Progress in 2016/17.

The council can demonstrate positive progress in some key services such as housing, employment and education

36. The performance assessment demonstrates some significant improvements in key services, and highlights that the council still faces significant challenges in a number of areas, for example, achieving a committed and dynamic workforce. Performance targets missed under this priority included per cent of employees satisfied with council, sickness absence per employee and sickness absence per teacher. We discuss this further in Part 3, page 31 and Part 5, page 42. These have been reflected in the council's new plan. The two financial and budget management targets that were missed both relate to rent collection.

37. The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) reported in June 2013³ on the change in strategic direction that the council took in June 2012. The SHR reported that the change had a significant impact on improving the quality of local housing and delivering its asset management plans. The council increased the new supply of social housing for rent from 51 units in 2012/13 to 91 units in 2016/17. The SHR

³ Inquiry Report, West Dunbartonshire Council, The Scottish Housing Regulator, June 2013.

reported positive levels of tenant participation and that the council's new corporate procurement strategy encouraged competitiveness and market testing. Increasing the percentage of council houses and flats that meet the Scottish Housing Standard was a priority indicator in the council's 2012/17 strategic plan. Although nationally its performance is in the lowest quartile, the rate of performance improvement has been good. Only 62% of dwellings met the standard in 2012/13, but this increased to 88% in 2016/17. This remains a key priority in the council's 2017/22 plan. The latest assessment in the West Dunbartonshire Local Scrutiny Plan for 2017/18 details progress in this area.

38. In 2016, West Dunbartonshire Council's Working 4U service won a COSLA gold award in the Service Innovation and Improvement category. This was for its innovative approach to helping people find jobs, develop skills and deal with benefits and debts. The council assisted 21% of unemployed people registered with them into work in 2016/17 compared to 9.7% in 2012/13. This better than the Scottish average of 14%.

39. The council is making good progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap (Case study 2). In 2016/17, 23% of secondary school pupils from deprived areas achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 6 or higher compared to 11% in 2012/13. This is above the Scottish average of 16% in 2016/17. The proportion of pupils entering positive destinations, such as education, training or work, has also improved from 91.1% in 2012/13 to 93.1% in 2016/17. This is in line with the Scottish average of 93.7% and its performance sits in the middle of their family benchmarking group.

Case study 2

West Dunbartonshire is making good progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. This is the overarching priority of Community Planning West Dunbartonshire

West Dunbartonshire Council's strategy for raising attainment was approved in 2012. The strategy provided a strong basis for improvement and also helped the council prepare for the introduction of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) in 2015 and, more recently, the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF).

In January 2018, a review by Education Scotland and Audit Scotland showed considerable improvement in the achievement levels of pupils from deprived areas of West Dunbartonshire. In 2016/17, 23% of secondary school pupils from deprived areas were successful at five or more exams compared to 11% in 2012/13. This is above the Scottish average of 16% in 2016/17 and above other councils in West Dunbartonshire's family group.

The review also highlighted that there is a robust and well-articulated governance framework within the council for education overall and, specifically, for raising attainment. Lines of accountability were clear and there was evidence that governance arrangements were widely understood by council staff and headteachers. There was clear evidence that a 'golden thread' exists in relation to raising attainment and closing the poverty-related gap. SAC and PEF have been used to extend the depth and pace of existing initiatives, ensuring the council's approach is coherent and fully supports its strategic priorities.

Source: How well is West Dunbartonshire Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related gap? Education Scotland, May 2018

The Care Inspectorate's recent joint inspection into services for children and young people reported strong performance in several areas

40. In February 2017, the Care Inspectorate⁴ reported that the council worked with community partners to assess how well services were improving the lives of children, young people and families. The review identified areas of particular strengths including:

- a strong strategic approach and a coherent shared vision
- highly committed staff groups
- young people, including the most vulnerable, were involved in influencing policy and service development
- commitment to early intervention and prevention.

41. The Care Inspectorate identified several actions for improvement for the council including:

- demonstrating investment in early intervention and prevention through robust data collection
- strengthening strategic plans in recognition of national policy directives on prevention of domestic abuse and local use of kinship care
- achieving consistency in quality of risk assessments
- ensuring robust and systematic plans are in place for day-to-day quality assurance.

The council is working with the community planning partners and the HSCP to address these areas for improvement.

Overall, the council's performance against national indicators has improved in recent years. But improvement is slower than other councils in some areas

42. The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) allows councils to compare its local performance against the Scottish average and that of similar councils through family groupings. Although there are over 70 performance indicators in the LGBF, this analysis is based on 35 single-year indicators measuring performance rather than cost⁵. Some ambiguity may exist in the judgement of whether an increased cost is good or bad. Therefore the focus is on outcomes-based indicators where relative performance can be categorically measured.

43. [Exhibit 8](#) shows the council's pace of improvement compared to Scotland as a whole. The council has significantly reduced the number of indicators in the lowest quartile (from 46% to 23%). However, the number of indicators in the top two quartiles has also reduced (from 46% to 37%). The rate of change of indicators in the bottom quartile was higher than both of the council's family groups. The family grouping percentage point change ranged from a reduction of 23% to an increase of 20%. This shows that while the council is improving, the rate of improvement

⁴ West Dunbartonshire Council: Joint inspection of services to protect children and young people, The Care Inspectorate.

⁵ The full range of indicators are available on the Improvement Service website – www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/

compared to the national picture is mixed. Nationally, the council performed particularly well in:

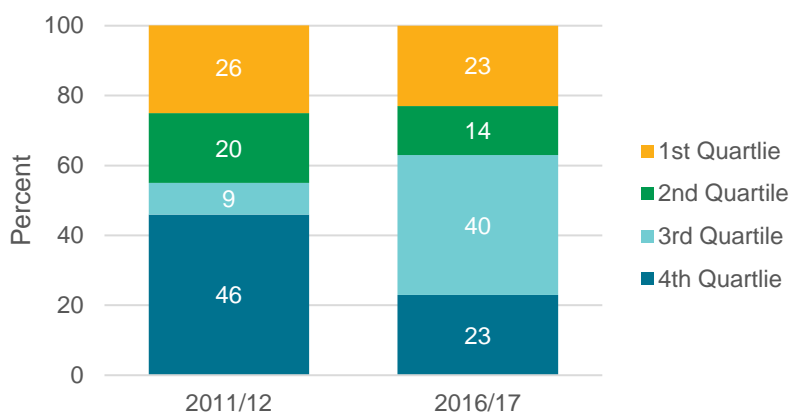
- improving attainment levels for pupils from the most deprived areas (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quartiles 1 & 2)
- providing energy-efficient council housing.

44. The indicators in which the council performed less well compared to other councils include the following:

- The percentage of procurement spent on local small and medium enterprises. The council identified that it awarded the lowest percentage of procurement to local small and medium enterprises in its family benchmarking grouping. This has now been included as a target indicator in the 2017/22 strategic plan and is monitored under the 'growing economy' outcome.
- The proportion of social work spend on self-directed support (SDS) spend for adults. Although the proportion of adults receiving funding for SDS increased from 1.6% to 2.4% between 2011/12 and 2016/17, the council performs below the Scottish average. This is a priority area for the Health and Social Care Partnership.

Exhibit 8

Comparing West Dunbartonshire Council's performance over time



Note: Measuring council performance involves considering how all councils are performing, from lowest to highest for each indicator. From this it is possible to see how one council compares to all councils. Relative performance against other councils is divided into four equal bands, or quartiles. The first quartile contains the best-performing councils for that indicator and the fourth quartile contains the poorest performing councils.

Source: Audit Scotland and Local Government Benchmarking Framework, Improvement Service, April 2018

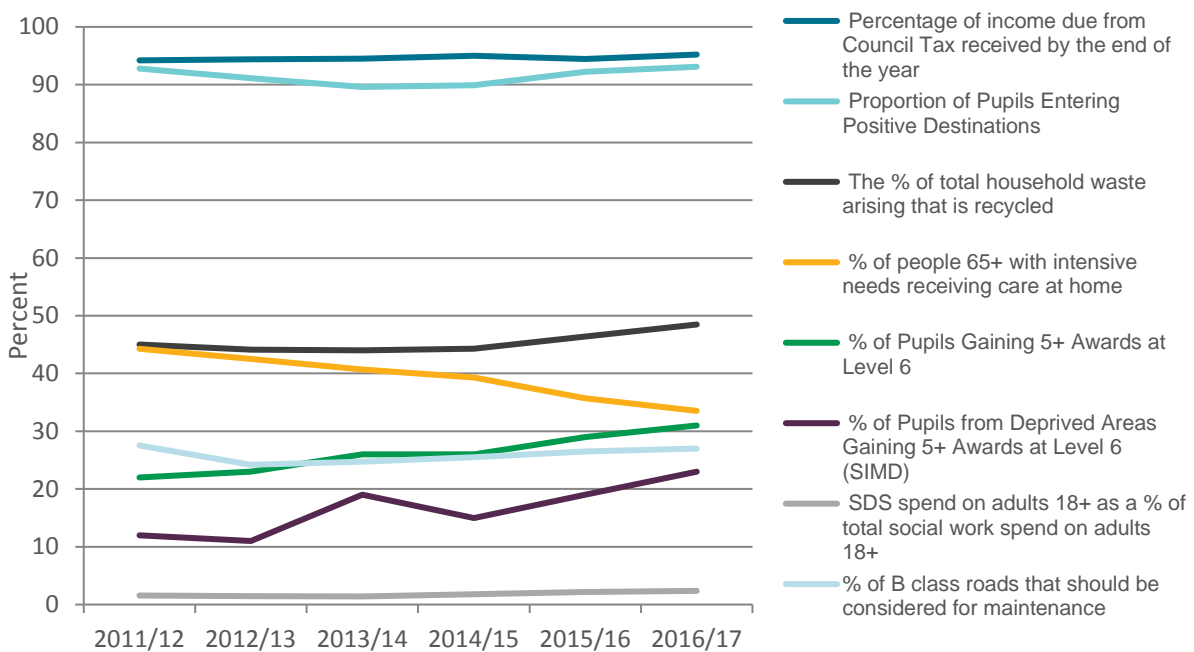
45. The Accounts Commission's report, [Local Government in Scotland: Performance and Challenges 2018](#), selected eight measures from the LGBF likely to matter to the public. These include performance measures on services that are not all covered by the council's own strategic priorities, giving a wider review of the council's performance. [Exhibit 9](#) shows that over the last five years, performance has been stable in four indicators, improved in three and declined in one. The indicators with the greatest improvements were educational attainment and the proportion of adults receiving funding for SDS, which we discuss above. The percentage of household waste recycled by the council consistently performed above the Scottish average, rising from 45% to 49% between 2011/12 and 2016/17. This indicator is ranked third highest in its family grouping and the council has prioritised it for further improvement in the 2017/22 plan.

46. The percentage of people aged 65 and over with intensive needs receiving care at home declined from 44% in 2011/12 to 34% in 2016/17. This indicator is monitored by the HSCP, which has set a target of 35% by March 2018.

Exhibit 9

West Dunbartonshire Council's performance against selected indicators from 2011/12 to 2016/17

West Dunbartonshire Council's performance has been stable in four and improved in three of the eight indicators over the last five years.



Note: roads considered for maintenance reported every two years instead of annually

Source: Audit Scotland and Local Government Benchmarking Framework, Improvement Service, 2016/17

Resident satisfaction has increased significantly over the last five years

47. The council runs a monthly telephone survey of residents asking how satisfied they are with the council's services. One hundred residents each month, representative of the demographic profile of West Dunbartonshire, are contacted by phone and asked to give their views on key council areas. The survey began in 2013 and asks the same five key questions about resident views of West Dunbartonshire Council every month. This gives the council consistent trend data over time.

48. [Exhibit 10](#) shows that all questions have shown improvement over the five-year period.

Exhibit 10

Residents' satisfaction with the council

Question	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% change since 2013
WDC is efficient and well run	58%	79%	87%	90%	90%	+32%
WDC services are value for money	63%	82%	84%	81%	91%	+28%
WDC takes account of residents' views	53%	72%	75%	67%	59%	+6%
WDC communicates well with its residents	57%	77%	76%	72%	69%	+12%
I would speak highly of the Council	45%	70%	78%	72%	74%	+29%

49. The statement 'WDC takes account of residents' views' has shown the least improvement, with six per cent change from 2013. The council recognises that support for this statement was reported at 75% in 2015 and has deteriorated in 2016 and 2017. This, in part, was as a result of the council's decision in these years not to hold a budget consultation. The council held a budget consultation in 2018.

50. The council feels that having robust and consistent resident satisfaction data allows services to improve and learn from the feedback. It also acts as a regular temperature check of satisfaction levels among residents. The data from the survey complements a suite of management information and performance indicators which allow long-term analysis of resident satisfaction overall.

Part 3

Is the council using its resources effectively?



The council has effective arrangements in place for financial planning that include a long-term financial plan.

The council has a good record of delivering within its service budgets. However, the council has a cumulative funding gap of £13.8 million over the next three years to March 2021 that it needs to fill. Service reform needs to continue.

The council's capital plan has grown since 2015 to £109 million in 2017/18. However, there is a high level of slippage every year, with over 43% predicted for 2017/18.

The council has demonstrated good practice and approved a detailed organisation-wide, five-year workforce plan and individual service specific workforce plans.

The council has effective financial management and a good process in place for financial planning

51. Since our previous Best Value report in 2007, the council has worked hard to develop its financial planning. The council now has a long-term financial strategy that projects budget gaps to 2028. The strategy identifies budget pressures and provides clear links to the council's strategic objectives. Given that financial settlements are only made annually, it is difficult for the council to plan with absolute certainty. To address this, the council has included scenario planning and a risk assessment of the likely impact of any changes in assumptions. The council's annual revenue estimates supplement the long-term strategy and show the projected movement in budget gaps as a result of changes in strategy.

52. In March 2018, a report to the council updated the general services revenue estimates for 2018/19 to 2020/21. This identified a projected budget surplus for 2018/19 of £0.671 million and cumulative budget gaps of £7.091 million and £13.8 million for 2019/20 and 2020/21 respectively.

53. In March 2018, the council approved its revenue budget for 2018/19. The budget includes a three per cent increase in council tax, which will yield £1.35 million of additional income, in 2018/19, increasing to £1.65 million by 2027/28.

54. Since 2013, the council has been refining and improving its budget consultation procedures and the way it consults online to encourage more people to get involved in budget decisions. The council also involves representative groups across the community as it sets its budget. This year, the council received over 2,700 responses to its budget consultation. The results of the consultation were presented to the council before the budget was approved on 5 March 2018.

55. At the March 2018 council meeting, members frequently referred to the results of the budget consultation. There are examples where the budget proposals had

been revised to take into account the views demonstrated in the consultation. For example, one of the proposals presented was to reduce devolved school budgets by either five or ten per cent. From the consultation, only 31% and 35% of respondents agreed with the respective reductions. Respondents expressed the view that this option contradicted the ambition to close the attainment gap and the general consensus was that reductions should not be made to education budgets. Due to this, this preferred savings option was not taken forward as part of the budget agreed in March 2018.

56. The council continues to develop how it reports financial performance against its budget and we found evidence in council papers of improvements in this area. Budget monitoring reports to councillors cover all services and give a breakdown to individual budget heads for each service. The reports describe the service, the reason for any variance, any mitigating action and the expected outcome. The reports are informative, comprehensive and easy to read.

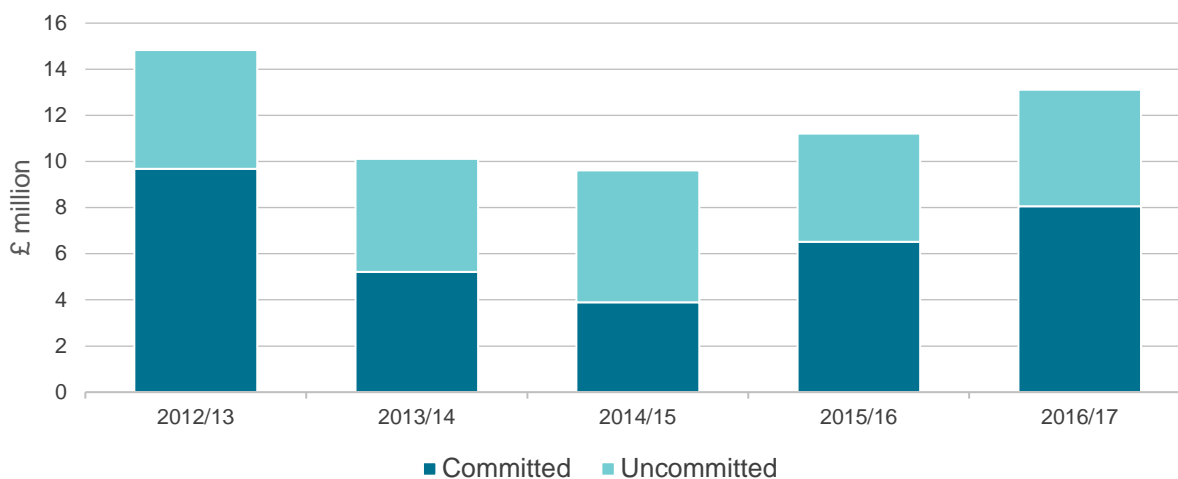
The council has a low level of usable reserves. This means there is limited scope to use reserves to close the funding gap

57. The council's level of reserves is in line with its financial strategy to maintain a reserve of two per cent of net expenditure to safeguard assets and services against financial risk. This equates to a minimum required reserve level of £4.1 million at 31 March 2017.

58. The general fund balance is the largest usable reserve and accounted for £13.1 million (53%) of usable reserves at 31 March 2017. [Exhibit 11](#) below analyses the general fund reserve over the five years to 31 March 2017.

Exhibit 11

Analysis of general fund over the last five years

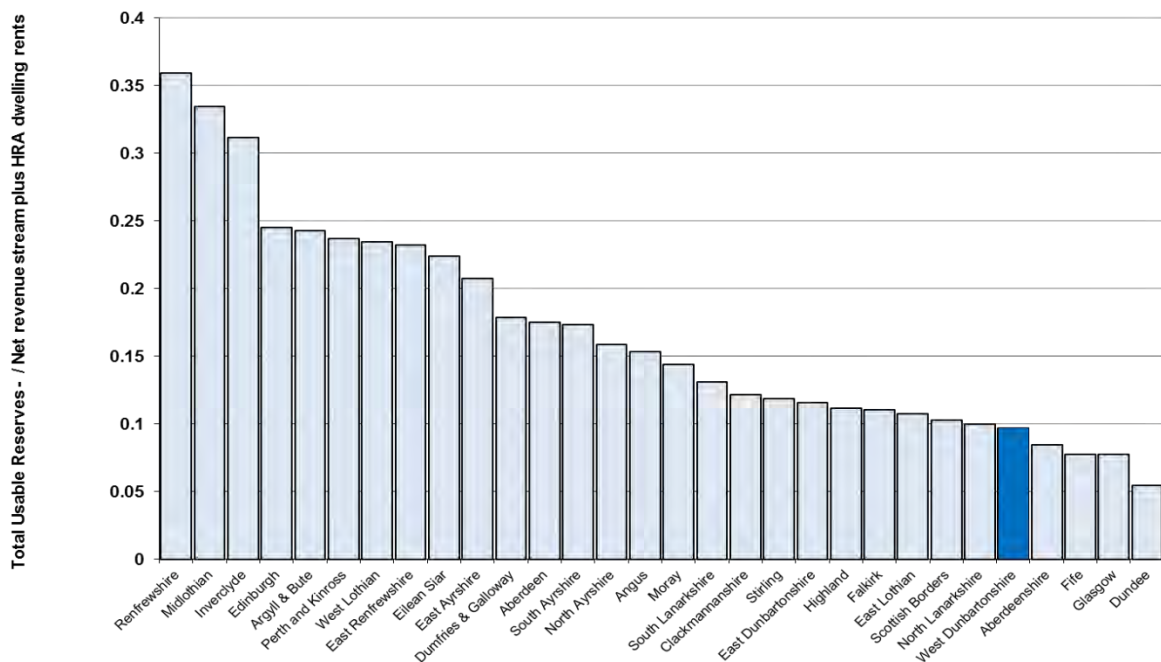


Source: Audited financial statements

59. The level of usable reserves increased during 2016/17 from £22.3 million to £24.7 million. Despite this increase, as demonstrated in [Exhibit 12](#) below, the council has a low level of reserves as a proportion of net revenue stream including housing rents compared with other local authorities and is in the lowest quartile in Scotland. This means that there is limited scope for the council to use reserves to close any funding gap. The council recognises this and has no plans to use reserves to close the funding gaps and it is concentrating on identifying savings.

Exhibit 12

Usable reserves as a proportion of net revenue stream including housing rents



Source: 2016/17 audited financial statements

The capital programme is not being delivered on time. Each year there is a high level of slippage against the council's capital plan

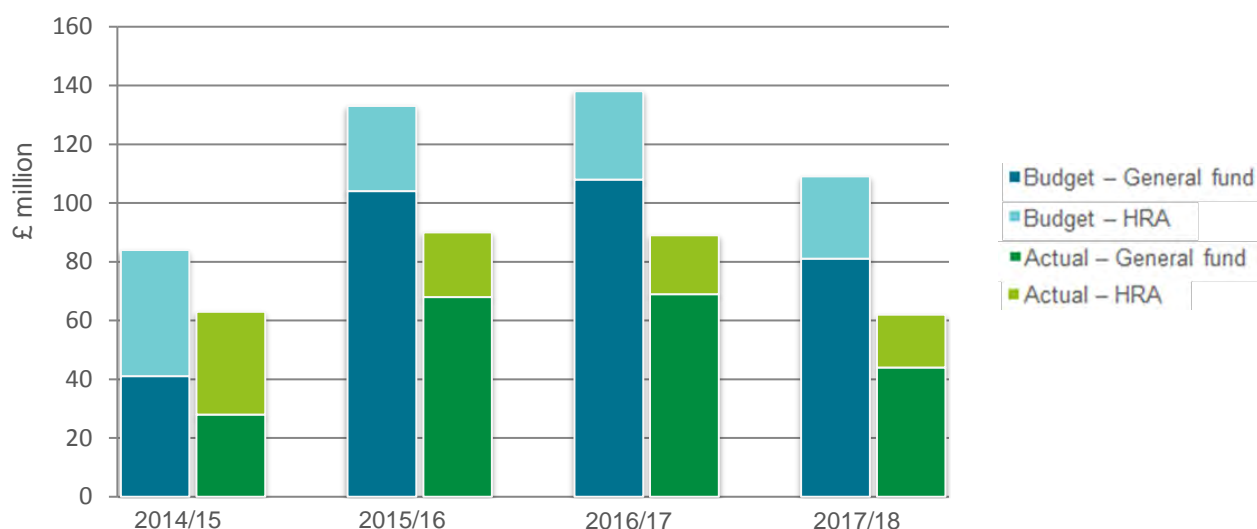
60. The council has comprehensive asset management plans in place, linked to the council's strategic objectives. The plans set out the resources required to invest in the council's assets including schools, offices and land.

61. In 2015, the council substantially increased its capital budget levels for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). [Exhibit 13](#) illustrates this increase. The planned General Fund capital expenditure for each of the years 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 was over 100% higher than the 2014/15 budget. The council's capital plan since April 2015 is considered ambitious, with a total gross general fund capital budget for the three years to 31 March 2018 of over £300 million.

62. However, this programme is not being delivered on time and high levels of slippage have been reported against the capital programme over a number of years. This is not a unique problem; capital slippage has long been identified as a common problem in councils. Audit Scotland's [Local Government in Scotland, Financial Overview Report 2016/17](#) stated that "consistent levels of capital slippage across the country suggest that councils are setting unrealistic budgets." However, the level of slippage in West Dunbartonshire has been a concern over a number of years as [Exhibit 13](#) illustrates.

Exhibit 13

Capital expenditure compared to budget (General Fund and HRA)



Source: Audited financial statements and council budget reports

63. Capital slippage for the financial year to 31 March 2018 is projected as £47 million against the budget of £109 million. This represents 43% of the annual capital plan. Our audit focuses on the general services capital projects. But the same principles apply to the HRA capital plan, which is also forecasting 37% of slippage against its plan for 2017/18.

64. Members regularly receive comprehensive capital monitoring reports. There is clear disclosure of the progress of each major project with reasons for variances over £0.5 million. At present, covering reports reference slippage as “favourable underspends”. This should be reviewed given the levels of slippage and the impact of this on delivering key council projects.

65. The council has recognised that its capital programme is an area for improvement and has made some changes. In the last six years, post-project reviews have been introduced to learn lessons after a project is completed. The council believes that the high levels of slippage are due to optimism bias included within projects and that some slippage is strategic and opportunity driven.

66. To identify the causes of the slippage, we reviewed three significant projects which are currently in progress. [Exhibit 14](#) shows the nature of the slippage on these over their lifetime to date. This shows that scheduling the work and costs between financial years is not accurate and that the completion date is consistently falling into future years. This in turn affects the costs associated with that project. Two of the three projects we reviewed are projected to cost more than their original budgets. This has an impact on the council’s ability to deliver on its strategic priorities.

Exhibit 14

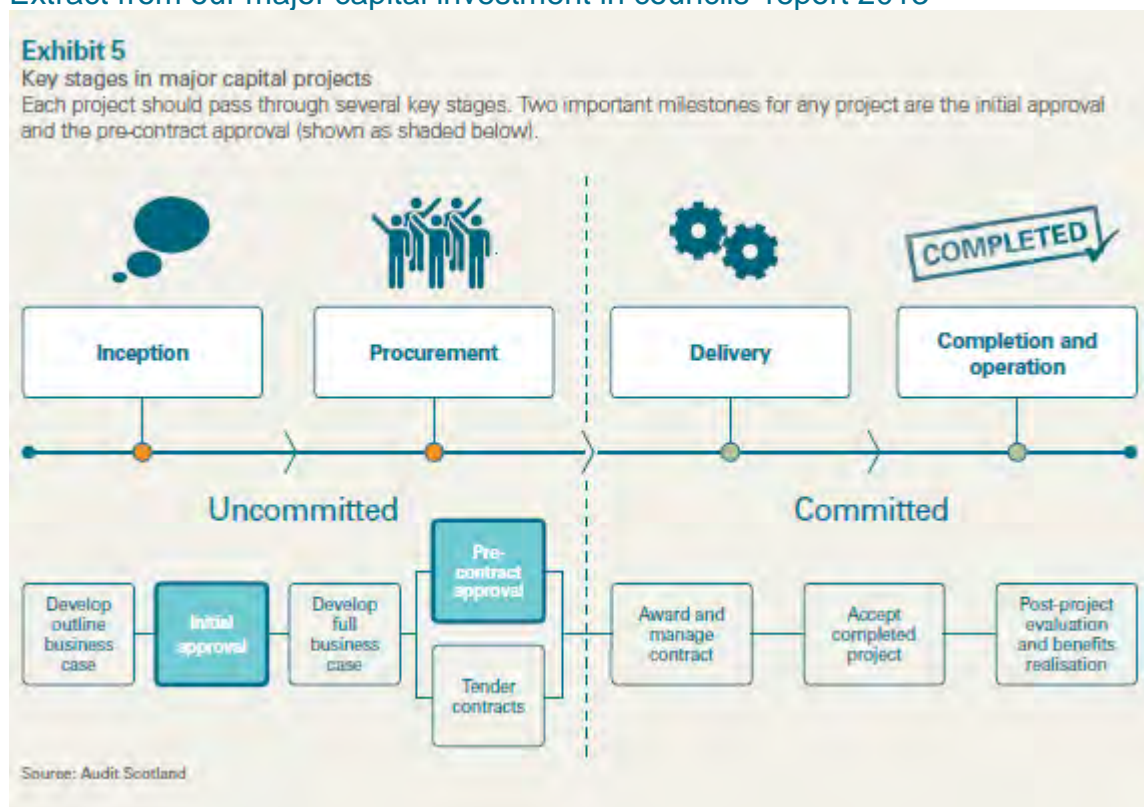
Extracts of capital projects performance to March 2018

Capital Project	Cost Scheduling	Completion Timescale	Additional Implications
Queens Quay (£15.620 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original plan in February 2015 showed phased expenditure to be completed by 17/18. In the first two years, 88% of the costs were to be completed and 22% of costs in the final year. As at 5 March 2018, only 24% of the costs have been incurred and 76% of costs are still to be incurred. No impact on overall costs, which remain at £15.62m. 	<p>Initial completion by 31 March 2018 (within the (2017/18 budget)</p> <p>Re-phased completion to 1 November 2018 (within the 2018/19 budget)</p> <p>Given the scale of the project and costs remaining, we consider this timescale ambitious.</p>	<p>This has had an impact on “replace elderly care homes” capital project which has incurred slippage.</p> <p>This has had an impact on “local economic development” capital project which has incurred slippage.</p>
Office Rationalisation (£21.702 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original plan in February 2014 showed phased expenditure to be completed in 2017/18. As at 5 March 2018, expenditure has slipped into 2018/19. Initial planned project costs of £18.67m. Revised project costs £21.81m (increase of £3.14m; part of this increase relates to additional work undertaken at Bridge Street which would allow implementation of modern working practices). 	<p>Initial completion by June 2017 (within the 2017/18 budget)</p> <p>Re-phased completion to 2018/19.</p>	<p>Capital receipts to be received upon completion from sale of site were anticipated to be £3.7m. This has not yet been received.</p> <p>Recurring savings of £1m not yet being fully realised.</p>
Replace Elderly Care Homes and Day Care Centres (£27.463 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original plan in February 2013 showed phased expenditure to be completed in 2016/17. As at March 2018, 50% of the costs are still to be incurred and the project has slipped into 2020/21. Initial planned project costs of £20m. Revised project costs of £27.463m (an increase of £7.463m). 	<p>Initial completion by 2016/17</p> <p>Re-phased completion to 2020/21</p>	<p>Additional costs incurred for residents due to move in and any costs associated with the maintenance of existing buildings.</p>

67. In reviewing these projects we considered the Accounts Commission report *Major capital investments in councils* published in 2013. It says 'for most major projects completed within the previous three years, councils' early estimates of the expected costs and timetable were inaccurate'. [Exhibit 15](#) is an extract from this report. The Accounts Commission report is accompanied by a *Major capital investment in councils: good practice guide* to help councils improve how they manage and deliver their capital projects.

Exhibit 15

Extract from our major capital investment in councils' report 2013



68. The council has issued project management guidance which references the Accounts Commission report. To date, the council's guidance has not been effective in reducing levels of slippage. We recommend that the council uses the Accounts Commission good practice guide as the basis of a self-assessment to identify areas where its capital management could improve.

The council has a high level of borrowing. However, its long-term financial plan takes this into account

69. The 2016/17 Annual Audit Report demonstrated that the council's net borrowing as a proportion of net revenue stream, including housing rents, was the highest in Scotland. At 31 March 2017, the council's total borrowing was £383.5 million. This included long-term liabilities for Public Private Partnership (PPP) finance contracts that will run up to 2038/39. Over the remaining life of the contracts, the council expects to pay £272 million in annual repayment and service costs. These costs are reflected in the council's financial plans. The borrowing is used for capital projects such as enhancing and upgrading the school estates, Clydebank leisure centre and replacing elderly care homes and day care centres. The council receives Scottish Government revenue support funding of £7.3 million annually for PPP which amounts to £160 million over the remaining contract term. The council's borrowing figure includes debt associated with both the HRA and the council's PPP assets, which not all Scottish authorities have.

The council has a detailed organisation-wide, five-year workforce plan and individual service specific workforce plans.

70. The council has approved a detailed organisation-wide, five-year workforce plan in 2017. This includes a narrative about the future workforce and actions required and a profile of the current workforce in each directorate at 1 April 2017. This profile includes numbers of staff at each grade, age and gender profile, length of service, turnover and absence analysis. This is further broken down in the corresponding service specific workforce plans with a similar narrative and profiling for each service area. The area-specific plans also set out the future service context and assumptions, the additional workforce capabilities that will be required, potential gaps between future demands and future supply and how they plan to address any gaps.

71. The organisation-wide plan and the area-specific plans state that the council will require to make at least three per cent year-on-year savings over the lifetime of the workforce plan and that it will not be able to avoid workforce-related savings. These workforce-related savings will impact differently in individual service areas. Appendix A of the council's workforce framework states that workforce plans should "forecast workforce numbers..., the expected shape of the workforce and costs over the planning period". The workforce plans do not currently include this level of detail and further development by the council is recommended.

72. The council is working to reduce staff absence, and is making some progress. Sickness absence days per teacher reduced from 6.8 in 2015/16 to 5.8 in 2016/17, which is below the Scottish average of 6 days, but higher than the council's target of 5 days. However, while absence days for other non-teacher employees declined to 11.6 it remains higher than the Scottish average of 11 and the council's target of 7 days.

73. The council is taking positive steps to understand and continually improve staff absence rates. It is developing and implementing a wide range of policies, schemes and employee-centred initiatives aimed at creating a positive, engaged workforce. This includes implementing an Employee Wellbeing Strategy, a Carers Policy, a Bereavement Scheme and an Enhanced Leave Scheme.

74. Many of West Dunbartonshire Council's staff are long-serving and staff turnover is relatively low. Consequently, the council has an ageing workforce and it can be difficult to attract new talent. To help develop the leaders of the future and develop staff more generally, the Organisational Development and Change team have introduced The Skills Passport and a range of associated learning opportunities. This sets out mandatory learning for staff at various career milestones and allows them to plan their ongoing development ([Exhibit 16](#)). Passports are dated to encourage and support continuous learning and development.

Exhibit 16

The Skills Passport and examples of the training and learning requirements for staff at different grades

For:	Validity	Example of Training or Learning
New Staff	6M	Induction, Equality & Diversity, Data Protection, ACHIEVE values
Employees	3Y	Approach to Change, Attendance Management
New Managers	3Y	Be the Best at Managing People, People Management Framework
Experienced Front Line Managers	3Y	Managing Safely, Recruitment & Selection, Focus, Engage, Deliver
Experienced Middle Managers	3Y	Inspiring Leaders, Project Management, Business Continuity Management
Senior Managers & Leaders	3Y	Coaching Collaborative, Leadership Exchange

Source: West Dunbartonshire Council 2018

Part 4

Is the council working well with its partners?



The council and its community planning partners have a history of working well together

The health and social care integration is starting to lead to improved outcomes for the community.

The council actively pursues shared arrangements with other bodies to regenerate the local area and make services more efficient.

The council has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to pursuing different approaches to deliver services. The council must now review business cases and decisions because of changing conditions.

The council and its community planning partners have a history of working well together

75. The Leader of the council is Chair of the West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership. As we discussed in Part 1, the council's strategic priorities help deliver the Community Planning West Dunbartonshire's (CPWD) Local Outcome Improvement Plan. These priorities have also influenced the local fire and police plans for West Dunbartonshire.

76. Five Delivery and Improvement Groups lead on delivering each of the CPWD strategic priorities. These officer groups develop action plans, building on partners' existing plans and strategies. The plans detail the actions partners will take collaboratively to improve outcomes under each of the five strategic priorities. CPWD meetings are well attended by elected members, officers and partners.

77. West Dunbartonshire has the highest reported incident rate of domestic abuse in Scotland. This requires a partnership response and CPWD is taking forward a range of initiatives to try to address this problem. Examples include the following:

- Increasing identification of domestic abuse through health and social care services
- Re-establishing multi-agency risk assessment conferences
- Doing prevention work with young people
- Contributing to national discussions about potentially expanding the Caledonian system perpetrator programme. This is an approach funded by the Scottish Government which works with convicted offenders and offers help to women and children

- Continued leadership of the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership as it contributes to the West Dunbartonshire Licensing Board Overprovision Policy.

Health and social care integration is starting to deliver new ways of working

78. Councils and NHS Boards work together to provide services through partnerships managed by Integration Joint Boards (IJBs). The IJBs develop strategic plans on how to deliver health and social care services. Councils and health boards delegate budgets to fund the IJB plans.

79. West Dunbartonshire IJB was established in July 2015. The IJB partners' view is that the IJB has built upon the mature and constructive health and care partnership already in place before the IJB was set up. The partnership agreed a Strategic Plan for 2016-19, which includes national and local commitments and priorities. The Chief Officer of the IJB is also one of West Dunbartonshire Council's strategic directors.

80. We found evidence that the IJB is progressing well with implementing new models of care. For example, in 2017, the Care at Home Service was awarded the Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) Award for the 'Best example of collaboration in an integrated setting'. As well as a core service, it created an integrated out-of-hours care at home and district nursing service to respond more effectively to risks and avoid unnecessary hospital admissions. As a result, more elderly people are living independently at home. Evidence of this can be found in the IJB's 2016/17 annual performance data including:

- A reduction in emergency hospital admissions (aged 65+) from 282 per 1,000 population in 2014/15 to 263 per 1,000 population in 2016/17
- A reduction in the number of acute bed days lost to delayed discharges from 5802 in 2014/15 to 3047 in 2016/17
- An increase from 55% in 2014/15 to 66% in 2016/17 in the number of people whose levels of independence were improved
- The vast majority of clients agreeing or strongly agreeing that the Care at Home service made them feel safer in their home (97%) and that their contact with Home Carers has improved their quality of life (98%).

The council actively pursues shared service arrangements with other bodies to regenerate the local area

81. The Economic Development Strategy 2015-20 supports the council's priority to achieve a strong local economy and improved employment opportunities. The Strategy includes a number of projects reflected in this report, such as Exxon site (City Deal), office rationalisation, Queens Quay and the district heating network at Queens Quay. The projects are reported and monitored through the Strategic Asset Management Group. Efficiencies, both financial and non-financial, from these programmes are then reported to the Change Board.

Queens Quay

82. The Council has entered into a joint venture with Clydeside Regeneration Limited (CRL) to develop the previous John Brown Shipyards, now known as Queens Quay. The development will comprise of 1,200 new homes (200 of which are social homes), retail and commercial facilities, a health centre and a council care home. A separate project for a district heating network is also on site. We discuss this further in Case Study 3.

83. Under the terms of the agreement, the council will invest £15.6 million into core infrastructure. In return, it will receive a share of the money raised from selling the development plots.

84. Initially, it was expected that work would start on site during 2015 and be complete in 2017/18. The council decided to delay this project to allow for the alignment of infrastructure works and the addition of the DHN on the same site. Work started in late 2017 and is expected to be completed during 2018/19. This is an ambitious programme of work to rejuvenate the area and create additional jobs, and is in line with the council's strategic plan.

The council is developing an innovative and ambitious district heating network

85. The Queens Quay development includes an innovative district heating network (DHN). (Case study 3).

Case study 3 Queens Quay – District Heating Network

In November 2016, the council approved funding of £6 million for a district heating network (DHN) at the Queens Quay. This was subject to funding from the Scottish Government under their Low Carbon Infrastructure Transformation Programme (LCITP), which was granted in May 2017. This innovative project will result in water extracted from the River Clyde through heat extraction pumps and directed to businesses and homes via insulated pipes.

The council commissioned its partners, Clydeside Regeneration Limited (CRL) to carry out a feasibility study into this project. The study has also had three rounds of investment scrutiny. In addition, the council organised a regular mentoring programme with Danish experts in district heating. The design work was completed in July 2017 and procurement of a network operator and water-source heat pump provider is progressing.

The council and its partners have identified potential customers including West College Scotland, Clydebank Property Company and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde. To ensure long-term control over the expansion and investment of the DHN, a Municipal Energy Supply Company (ESCO) will be established to be 100% owned by the council. The development of the network has been planned to allow further expansion.

The primary aim for the DHN is to achieve targets for reducing carbon emissions for West Dunbartonshire Council and directly contribute to the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 targets. This will be achieved by using the renewable resource of river water as an alternative to fossil fuel. The reduced heat tariff will also help address local fuel poverty issues and will generate revenue for the council.

Source: LCITP funding application, council committee papers November 2016

The council has developed strategic and outline business cases to support its City Deal project and understands it faces challenges delivering it

86. City Deals provide city regions with the opportunity to deliver infrastructure, innovation and employment projects to improve their economic performance. Both the UK and Scottish governments have provided funding and councils contribute additional finance. In 2014, West Dunbartonshire Council became one of the eight local authorities included in the Glasgow City Region City Deal. West Dunbartonshire Council is one of the smallest involved in the City Deal but has an equal partner role and plays an active role in the governance structure. It is represented on all sub-groups and takes the lead on the Housing and Equalities portfolio.

87. West Dunbartonshire Council is currently developing one infrastructure project as part of the City Deal: the Exxon Site at Bowling. Funding totals £27.9 million over the next seven years (£24.1 million in grants from the UK and Scottish governments and the remaining £3.8 million to be contributed by the council). The project includes a proposal to create an industrial and commercial development at the site. It also includes plans for a new road to provide an alternative route into and out of West Dunbartonshire.

88. The main aim of the City Deal project supports the council's priority to generate additional employment opportunities in West Dunbartonshire and increase the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the area. This aims to improve job density, which is extremely low within West Dunbartonshire at 0.55 per head, compared with the Scottish average of 0.8 per head. Job density shows the ratio between the total jobs to the working-age population. This is lower than the City Deal Region and the Scottish national averages. The project should help address the average length of unemployment, which is the longest within the City Deal region.

89. The council approved the strategic business case in June 2015, which was subsequently approved by the City Deal Cabinet in August 2015. An analysis of the socio-economic conditions within West Dunbartonshire was then summarised in the form of a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats). This allowed the council to understand the local West Dunbartonshire context in relation to the regional Glasgow context. The strategic business case also contains a high-level options appraisal.

90. The council approved the outline business case in February 2017, which was subsequently approved by the City Deal Cabinet in April 2017. It contains detailed options appraisal based in three parts:

- location for a sizeable economic investment site
- options for using the site
- options for access to the site, including sensitivity analysis to assess the impacts of potential changes.
- It also outlines how the project fits with national, regional and local policies and strategies.

91. Progress to date includes meetings with Exxon to formally agree terms for acquiring the site. Discussions are also taking place with Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) about an appropriate solution to flood prevention within the site. Discussions have also begun with the owners of adjacent sites which may be required to deliver the project.

92. The final business case is projected to be completed and reported in December 2019. It is expected that infrastructure work will begin on the site in early 2021 and be completed in early 2024.

The council has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to pursuing different approaches to deliver services.

93. West Dunbartonshire Council has actively pursued opportunities over the years for sharing services or information with other public sector bodies, specifically neighbouring councils. We outline some of the varied examples below.

94. In 2015, a shared IT data centre was set up with East Dunbartonshire Council. This has enabled the council to achieve small cost efficiencies that are now taken into account in budgets, and to share information on disaster recovery and performance monitoring. The two councils currently share the IT helpdesk. Both councils expect to share more services as they each explore new opportunities. The council has, for the third year, provided internal audit services to Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. The 2016/17 fee for this service was

£14,000. The arrangement was agreed in 2015/16 for a period of three years, and there is an option for it to be extended for a further 24 months.

95. In 2016, when the council's resilience officer left, the council joined the Civil Contingencies Service (CCS). This is a joint committee operated by Renfrewshire Council, which includes East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde councils. This service has operated since 2009 and helped improve councils' resilience. An exercise was completed, following the recent weather disruption, to learn lessons and identify best practice. Staff were praised by councillors for going above and beyond their duty and it was recognised at a council meeting that this was due to effective partnership working and communication with the CCS.

96. In 2017, senior officers from West Dunbartonshire and Stirling Councils met to discuss the potential for shared services. West Dunbartonshire has a well-established and effective corporate communications service. Stirling Council had identified this as an area requiring support due to absence, and the two councils agreed that West Dunbartonshire would lead on a project to work with Stirling's communications team. Achievements to date include creating and recruiting Senior Communications posts, establishing the team's first operational plan, introducing new processes for media statements and press releases and supporting the Council's budget consultation.

Shared Services Joint Committee – Inverclyde & East Dunbartonshire Councils

97. In December 2016, a Shared Services Joint Committee (SSJC) was established between West Dunbartonshire, East Dunbartonshire and Inverclyde Councils. The committee is developing a shared road and transport service, with a view to expanding this model to include other services in the future. West Dunbartonshire Council currently holds the position of the committee's Vice-Chair.

98. The three councils discussed a detailed business case in August 2017. They originally discussed a model in which the lead authority would, over time, become the employing authority for the workforce. The trade unions, however, expressed concerns over this model. The councils revised proposals are based on employees remaining with their existing councils. Through this process, differences emerged between the preferred approach for each of the three councils. As a result, East Dunbartonshire Council declined to join this model – called a Lead Council shared service – but said it would collaborate in strategic partnership.

99. In March 2018, West Dunbartonshire Council presented a revised detailed business case to the council to reflect the changes. Members continue to support a shared services approach. Due to the geographical constraints and prolonged timescale to arrive at the current stage, council requested a member's seminar prior to making any decision. The report was subsequently considered and agreed at Council on 28 March 2018. Cross-boundary working, which is key to this arrangement, remains an issue the councils need to negotiate on.

100. This project demonstrates the challenges of sharing services where the workforce is required to work across council boundaries. Although progress has been slower than hoped, we consider it good practice that members review the benefits of the partnership as the business model changes.

Part 5

Is the council demonstrating continuous improvement?



The council is demonstrating continuous improvement in delivering services. It maintains a steady pace of change that has led to improved outcomes in priority areas.

The Strategic Improvement Framework provides a structured approach to driving continuous improvement. However, the council has a funding gap of £13.8 million for the three years to 31 March 2021, and the council must continue to reform services.

The council is progressing innovative and ambitious projects which will help regenerate the local area.

The council has managed its office rationalisation project well and, in the process, is regenerating Dumbarton town centre.

The council has a Strategic Improvement Framework that provides a consistent and effective approach to ensuring continuous improvement

101. West Dunbartonshire Council's Strategic Improvement Framework, which delivers the transformation agenda of the Council, drives continuous improvement and prepare its services for the future. The Strategic Improvement Framework was agreed in 2016. It replaced the previous Strategic Planning and Performance Framework.

102. The framework says that the council will deliver continuous improvement by:

- setting clear outcomes and priorities
- self-evaluation
- benchmarking and improving services and planning
- managing, monitoring and reporting on its performance
- being externally assessed and accredited.

103. [Exhibit 17](#) details the main documents and policies relating to the key elements of the Improvement Framework. The senior management team's Performance and Monitoring Group and Change Board (see [Exhibit 6](#)) support the framework.

Exhibit 17

The key elements of the Strategic Improvement Framework

Outcomes	Self-evaluation	Benchmarking, service improvement and planning	Performance reporting	Scrutiny and external assessment
Single outcome agreement	Employee survey	Local government benchmarking framework	Strategic priority indicators	Investors in People and Investors in Young People
Strategic plan	Self-evaluation and continuous improvement	Asset management strategy	Strategic planning and performance framework	Customer service charter
Code of good governance		Workforce plan	Development plans	Citizens' panel
		Strategic budget		Service plans and strategies
		Personal development plans	Be the Best	Best Value
		People management framework		Scrutiny and inspection
		Equalities monitoring		
		Risk management strategy		
	Change framework			

104. The council has a self-evaluation framework and a three-year rolling programme for services to carry this out. All council services not subject to an external assessment, such as that carried out by the Scottish Housing Regulator or Education Scotland, are part of this programme. The Performance Monitoring and Review Group agreed the timing of the self-evaluations based on risk assessments of each service. Service areas that have already completed a self-evaluation include customer services, planning and building standards, ICT infrastructure and libraries.

105. The model uses a self-evaluation checklist for services. Evidence is provided to support the evaluation and areas for improvement and best practice examples are included.

106. After self-evaluation, the service reviews its annual service plan and delivery plans to include:

- improvement actions identified
- external scrutiny recommendations
- customer and employee feedback
- relevant benchmarking data.

107. We found evidence of service action plans being developed following self-evaluation. For example, actions following self-evaluation of the library service included a number of staff development actions, improving communication with staff, implementing branch improvement plans and implementing a regular programme of branch visits.

108. As stated in the self-evaluation framework the service policy, planning and performance business partners support strategic leads to review the outputs from each evaluation. Where a significant improvement project is identified, the service's policy, planning and performance business partner works with the management team to scope this as a project and link into the Organisational Development and Change team for a more comprehensive plan of support. This is then scheduled in to a work programme for continuous improvement.

109. At a corporate level, the service policy, planning and performance business partners are responsible for collating the findings from the self-evaluation exercises

to understand how performance compares between different services areas. The Performance and Monitoring Group is responsible for reviewing the outcomes of self-evaluation in different service areas and the strategic lead delivery plans. This is to understand how different service areas can learn from each other, share good practice and continuously improve.

Scrutiny has improved and is effective in the council

110. Our 2007 Best Value report said that scrutiny in the council needed to improve. Service scrutiny arrangements have been outlined earlier at paragraph 30. The audit committee is responsible for financial scrutiny. The membership, remit, delegated powers and arrangements for meetings of committees are detailed in the standing orders.

111. From our review, it is clear that the audit committee includes elected members from different parties and its remit covers scrutiny of all council service areas. Membership of the audit committee was refreshed following the elections in May 2017 and there are several new members. There is evidence that these members understand their scrutiny role and are providing appropriate levels of challenge. There have been lay members on the committee since 2012. The current lay member is a qualified accountant and this adds an additional level of financial scrutiny.

The Council has innovative and ambitious programmes to regenerate West Dunbartonshire

112. A strong local economy is one of the council's strategic priorities. Regenerating the area is seen as key to this, by providing long-term benefits to the West Dunbartonshire area. In addition to the projects we have already discussed in this report, the council has prioritised other local regeneration sites:

- Clydebank town centre and waterfront
- Dumbarton town centre and waterfront
- Exxon site, Bowling
- Lomondgate and the Vale of Leven Industrial Estate.

113. The projects are sustainable and the council has assessed the long-term impacts and benefits. It has also considered future cash-flows and carried out sensitivity analysis and feasibility studies. While some benefits will be realised in the long term, they have already started to have an impact on the local area.

The council managed its office rationalisation project well and there is evidence the project is contributing to regenerating Dumbarton town centre.

114. The council is in the final stage of its office rationalisation programme. The outline business case for rationalising the offices was initially completed in 2011. The council refreshed the outline business case in 2014 and presented seven options, including one to do nothing. The council's main aim was to achieve efficiencies by rationalising the council offices and introducing modern working practices which would allow flexible working and enhance the work-life balance of employees.

115. The first stage was completed in March 2015 and the fifth and final phase at Church Street is to be completed by mid-2018.

116. The decision by officers and members to build new offices in Dumbarton town centre has been the key factor in reaping wider benefits through this project. We found evidence that this is helping to regenerate the town centre. This has

attracted external investment into the area and units which have been vacant for many years are being taken up. The council also made the strategic decision to retain the façade of the Old Academy Building as it was building the new council offices. This allowed it to obtain heritage funding for restoring the site.

117. The council recognised that a project of this size can impact adversely on employees and has managed this well. A change champions group was set up which included a member of staff from each team that was due to relocate. These “change champions” kept their colleagues informed about the relocation process. The operational development team put additional measures in place to help staff feel ready for their phased moves, such as service assessments, action plans and readiness checkers. The council also gauged how staff were feeling using a system they called temperature barometers. These helped the council assess and deal with any areas of concern. The following areas scored low at various stages of the process:

- Lack of communication early in the process.
- Visibility of managers during the process.
- Confidence in the move toward the end of the process.

118. The teams addressed these areas with mitigating actions including;

- signposting to various information on the intranet which gave the contact details and responsibilities of the “change champions”
- reiterating the importance of managers being seen by and talking to staff, and leading by example
- roadshows with IT and data protection experts and people who have already relocated to address any staff concerns.

119. The Scottish Futures Trust has highlighted the way the council has continued to monitor the project as good practice. After relocating to their new premises, the change champions became part of a staff forum group. This group collect and analyse information on the impact of the move in areas such as absence, work-life balance and expenses to ensure the benefits are being maintained. As part of this work, the team has been able to identify skills gaps throughout the organisation and is currently in the process of drafting a new learning and development plan.

120. The office rationalisation project was a capital investment of £19.1 million and projected savings of £1 million a year (over 40 years). Given the project has experienced some slippage, and is not fully concluded, these savings have not yet been fully realised. The council expected to complete the phased moves by June 2017. However, it now expects them to be completed by 2018/19. The council’s capital plan assumes capital receipts from the sale of current sites at £3.7 million.

121. Overall, the council has managed this process well and ensured that it considered and took staff needs into account. The additional impact of helping regenerate Dumbarton town centre will have wider and sustainable benefits to the local area.

Some staff are finding the pace of change challenging. But the council is taking positive steps to try to address the issues and should continue to monitor and review its actions in this area

122. The council performs an employee survey every two years, with 34 questions covering 6 categories. In 2017, it issued the survey to all council staff and 53% responded. This was a higher response rate compared to previous years. The 2017 survey shows that employees:

- understand their role (92%)
- are supportive of each other (84%)
- are proud of what they deliver (85%)
- feel motivated to help the council succeed (82%).

123. There have been improvements in a number areas compared to previous years but respondents remain less positive about feeling appreciated and valued for the work they do (57%), having regular one-to-one meetings which focus on their development (59%), or being asked their views when change is taking place which directly affects them (46%). The survey found no evidence of bullying or harassment that we had identified as a concern in our 2007 Best Value report.

124. The council's office rationalisation and introduction of modern working practices to allow more flexible working have required staff to adapt and work differently. The council's view is that these changes are leading to some of the less positive survey results. The council is taking steps to understand and address these issues. Following each staff survey, the council convenes focus groups with each service area to improve their understanding of the issues arising. This informs an organisational improvement plan which is reported on regularly between surveys and the detail of service specific actions in Strategic Delivery Plans.

125. The Organisational Development and Change team is implementing a number of initiatives to help develop employees. These initiatives include what the Improvement Service referred to as an innovative Approach to Change (Focus, Engage and Deliver), corporate project management standards, Work Place of the Future and the Skills Passport. We discussed the Skills Passport in Part 3 of this report.

126. A committed and dynamic workforce was a priority for the council in the 2012/17 strategic plan. But the council missed all three performance indicators around staff absence and satisfaction in this area. A committed and skilled workforce remains a priority in the 2017/22 strategic plan. The council has recently put in place additional initiatives to try to address staff absence and satisfaction. The council should continue to monitor and review its actions in this area.

Since 2007, the council has significantly improved the way it manages and delivers services

127. West Dunbartonshire Council's Best Value audit timeline is set out at Appendix 1. Our 2007 report said that West Dunbartonshire Council had made limited progress in demonstrating Best Value and urgently needed to address weaknesses in the way the council was run. The council has significantly improved the way it manages services since then. [Exhibit 18](#) highlights the main improvements.

Exhibit 18**Comparing Best Value judgements, 2007 and 2018**

The difference in Controller of Audit judgements between 2007 and 2018 shows progress made by West Dunbartonshire Council

2007 Controller of Audit report	2018 Controller of Audit judgement	See report
More transparency and openness required in decision making process	The Council has a transparent and open decision-making process. It has improved the content of papers provided to members to support decision-making. There have also been developments such as the Strategic Plan, the Financial Strategy, Ten-year Capital Plan and the Workforce Plan. The council will be live-streaming some of its committees in the future, as set out in the 2018/19 budget.	Part 1
Staff morale problems and culture of bullying and harassment	We did not find any evidence of bullying or harassment. Improved staff morale, but some issues continuing to be addressed.	Part 5
Improvements required in community engagement	Evidence of improved engagement.	Part 4
Inadequate scrutiny regime	Evidence of effective and improved scrutiny.	Part 5
Inadequate levels of member training	The council has developed an induction programme for members and the good attendance level shows it has improved in this area. Officers follow up the induction programme to identify further training needs. We identified this approach as an area of good practice.	Part 1
Lack of effective leadership from senior elected members and officers and poor relationships among elected members and officers.	We found evidence of effective leadership. Changes to the senior officer team, including the appointment of the current Chief Executive in 2011, have played a key role in the improvements the council has made. Officers and councillors from all parties work well together for the benefit of the residents of West Dunbartonshire.	Part 1

Source: Audit Scotland, West Dunbartonshire Council: The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning, Accounts Commission, 2007.

The council is demonstrating continuous improvement in delivering services. It maintains a steady pace of change that has led to improved outcomes in priority areas

128. This overall judgement on the council's pace and depth of continuous improvement reflects the evidence we have reported throughout this report. In forming the judgement, the auditor has assessed:

- the council's arrangements for demonstrating how it delivers Best Value
- the rate of improvement in the council's priority services as reported by the council itself and the auditor's review of key performance indicators.

Recommendations



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.(paragraph 68)

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. (paragraph 71)

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. (paragraph 126)

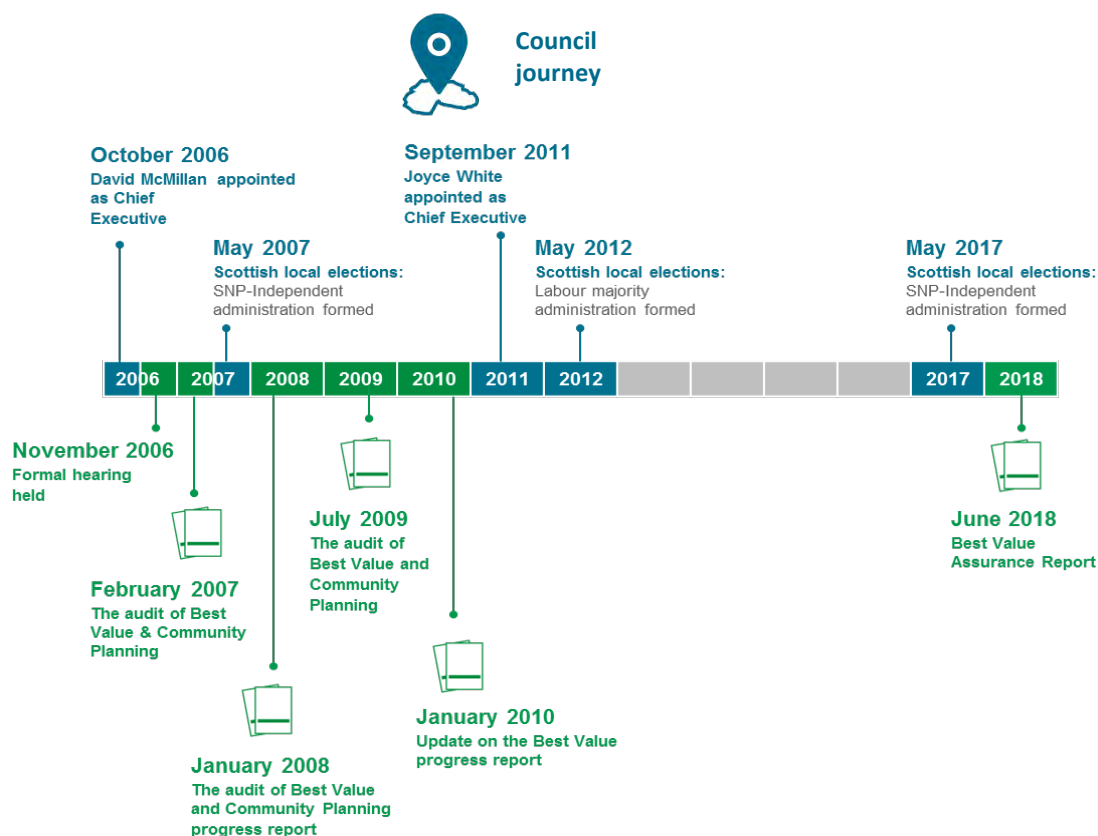
The Community Alliance (CA) brings together representatives from neighbourhood, interest and user groups. The council sees it as an important engagement link with the community but there are a number of challenges that it needs to address. The council should continue to offer help to further develop the role of the CA and help it reach its full potential. (paragraph 22)

Councillors should consider working in cross-party groups to address the financial challenges which exist and the important decisions required in the future. (paragraph 28)



Appendix 1

Best Value audit timeline



October 2006 – The audit of Best Value and Community Planning:

The Controller of Audit reported to the Accounts Commission in October 2006 that the council was not in a position to deliver Best Value. It also reported that there was an urgent need for effective leadership, the scrutiny regime was viewed as inadequate, and decision making was not open and transparent. A formal hearing was held in November 2006 to further inform the Accounts Commission's judgements on the council. Recommendations for improvement were then made in the Best Value report the Accounts Commission published in February 2007.

2008–10 – Progress reports (January 2008, July 2009 and March 2010):

The Commission requested a number of progress reports following the initial findings. The most recent of these was published in March 2010. The Commission welcomed the evidence that some positive steps had been taken in this time. However, insufficient progress had been made on priorities, such as strategic leadership and councillor and officer relations. The council had benefitted from peer support but was urged to use the support available in the local government community more effectively.

June 2018 – Best Value Assurance Report:

The Controller of Audit will present a Best Value Assurance Report to the Accounts Commission at least once during the five-year audit appointment for each council. This is the first of its kind at West Dunbartonshire. The report seeks to provide the Commission with assurance on the council's statutory duty to deliver Best Value, with a particular focus on the Commission's Strategic Audit Priorities.

West Dunbartonshire Council

Best Value Assurance Report

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