

To: Leadership Board

On: 2 December 2020

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Best Value Assurance Report – Progress Update on Improvement Plan

1. Summary

- 1.1 On 31st August 2017, the Accounts Commission published the Best Value Assurance Report for Renfrewshire Council. The report provided an updated assessment of the Council and its performance, following on from its last audit in 2006.
- 1.2 Overall the report was positive, providing independent assurance to local residents and businesses on the extent to which the Council is achieving Best Value. At that time, Audit Scotland also provided direction on the key areas which the Council should focus its improvement activities on going forward. The report specifically included 7 recommendations relating to areas such as cross party working, community engagement, partnership working, financial sustainability, workforce planning and governance arrangements.
- 1.3 An action plan which set out the Council's proposed actions to progress these recommendations was approved by Council in September 2017.
- 1.4 This report provides an update on progress achieved to date in relation to each recommendation and any related actions. Initially progress against recommendations was reported to the Leadership Board on a 6-monthly basis, however given the significant progress achieved to date, this was amended to reporting on an annual basis as agreed with Audit Scotland.
- 1.5 The annual progress report also includes actions relating to best value which have been recommended by Audit Scotland within its Annual Audit Report. The recently published Annual Audit Report for 2019/20 prepared by Audit Scotland, found that the Council is continuing to make good progress in addressing the recommendations

from the 2016/17 Best Value Assurance Report. In their annual report, Audit Scotland identified potential risks due to the impact that COVID-19 has had on local authorities and recommended an action for the Council to implement on this basis.

- 1.6 The context in which the Council is operating and delivering services against, has changed significantly since the Best Value Assurance Report was published in 2017. In particular since the emergence of the pandemic in early 2020 the organisation as had to respond and adapt at pace to a fundamental level of change, and will be required to continue to do so into the longer term as the full impact of pandemic on the Council's financial position, the local economy and local citizens and communities is realised. The recommendations within the Best Value Assurance Report and linked improvement plan do remain very relevant, and the ongoing work with the Council's external auditors continues to support the organisation's ongoing improvement.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that members:
- Note the progress achieved in terms of implementing the BVAR improvement plan as detailed at appendix 1.

3. Background

- 3.1 The statutory duty of Best Value was introduced in the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. The audit of Best Value is a continuous process that forms part of the annual audit of every council. Audit Scotland reviewed the methodology used to audit Best Value in 2015, and introduced a new approach based on a 5-year programme of engagement and audit, intended to provide greater reassurance to citizens on the extent to which all local authorities are achieving Best Value. Audit Scotland were appointed as the Council's external audit team for this purpose.
- 3.2 Renfrewshire Council was the second of six Councils selected to receive a Best Value Assurance Report in Year 1 as part of the new approach, with the subsequent report published by the Accounts Commission in August 2017. The report included 7 specific recommendations, as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.3 Whilst the Best Value Assurance Report is published only once during a 5-year period, the Council's arrangements in terms of progressing and achieving best value are also considered within the Annual Audit Report published each year by Audit Scotland. A small number of recommendations have been made through the Annual Audit Reports, and progress against those pertaining to best value are tracked and reported within each update report to the Leadership Board.

4. Progress Update – Improvement Plan

- 4.1 Significant progress has been achieved in relation to the current improvement plan. A detailed update is provided in Appendix 1 which includes progress updates in relation to the original recommendations made by Audit Scotland in 2017 and in

relation to a small number of recommendations by Audit Scotland within their Annual Audit Reports thereafter.

- 4.2 The Annual Audit Report for 2019/20 was published in November 2020, and noted this progress, with Audit Scotland stating that: “The Council has an appropriate and effective best value framework in place... The Council continues to make positive progress addressing the recommendations contained in our 2016/17 Best Value Assurance Report”.
- 4.3 In the Annual Audit Report, Audit Scotland commented on progress in terms of a small number of recommendations which the Council is progressing on an ongoing basis which may be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the impact that COVID-19 may have on issues such as the Council's ongoing financial sustainability and ongoing work in terms of development opportunities for elected members and the Council's focus on community empowerment. Updates against each of the recommendations in relation to impact of COVID has been provided within Appendix 1 to this report.
- 5. Next steps**
- 5.1 The Head of Policy and Commissioning will continue to act as the link officer in terms of engaging with Audit Scotland on a regular basis around Best Value, through the shared risk assessment process and annual audit work.
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Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – the BVAR sets out how effectively the Council is using its resources and financial planning arrangements.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – the BVAR sets out the Council's arrangements for Organisational Development and Workforce planning.
3. **Community Planning** – the BVAR assesses how well the Council works with its partners.
4. **Legal** - none.
5. **Property/Assets** – none.
6. **Information Technology** – The BVAR provides examples of how well the Council is using new technology.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** –
 - (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the

recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. **Health & Safety** – none.
9. **Procurement** – none.
10. **Risk** - Shared Risk Assessment is a proportionate and risk-based approach to assessing Scottish Councils.
11. **Privacy Impact** – none.
12. **COSLA** - Welcomed the risk based and proportionate approach to audits.
13. **Climate Risk** – no risks, the paper notes that a Cross-party working group has been established.

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Appendix One – Progress achieved against the Best Value Assurance Report Improvement Plan.

Audit Scotland Recommendations	What we will do	When will we do this by?	Who is leading on this?	Progress Update –December 2020
1. Councillors should improve cross-party working, given the financial challenges that exist and the important decisions that will need to be made in the future.	Continue to embed Cross Party Sounding Board and identify opportunities for all elected members to work together on issues of common interest and importance for the Council and the Renfrewshire area.	Ongoing	All elected members	<p>Our external audit team from Audit Scotland have made no further recommendations for the Council to improve cross-party working, other than to note the governance arrangements which were put into place during the pandemic, such as the Emergencies Board.</p> <p>Key actions undertaken to address the BVAR recommendation to date include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The establishment of a cross party sounding board in 2017, which has met on a number of occasions to consider issues such as the Council Plan, Community Plan and the review of local governance. - In June 2019, a climate emergency was declared by the Council. Elected Members from the Cross-Party Sounding Board agreed to establish a Climate Emergency Working Group which reported its recommendations to Council on climate change in February 2020. Furthermore, at the Leadership Board in September 2020, it was agreed a sub-committee of the Leadership Board would be established in order to ensure the continued oversight of the climate change response by elected members. The report set out a Terms of Reference, meetings and membership arrangements for a Climate Change sub-committee which met for the first time in October 2020. - In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council established an Emergencies Board to provide and oversight of decision making during the crisis response. The board was established on a cross party basis and operated very effectively for a period of approximately 6 months. Regular communications and briefings were also provided to elected members to highlight current data and information in relation to COVID.

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Following the restart of policy boards in August/September, a fortnightly cross party briefing was also established to ensure that regular COVID specific information was provided to elected members. This has been much valued as levels of restrictions and community transmission escalated during October and November 2020.
<p>2. Councillors should take advantage of the training and development opportunities that the council provides to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their role effectively.</p> <p>2b. Councillors have not made the most of the training and development opportunities available to them. There is a risk that elected members do not have the necessary training to carry out their role effectively. <i>(recommendation from previous</i></p>	Undertake a review of the current training and development programme through engagement and consultation with elected members, to identify potential opportunities to further support attendance and participation levels.	31 December 2017	Chief Executive All elected members	<p>Progress in terms of the provision of development opportunities for Elected Members continues to be reviewed by Audit Scotland, most recently commenting in their Annual Audit Report 2019/20 that - officers and Elected Members should work together to ensure that training provided reflects new ways of working, is flexible and can adapt to provide the necessary resources and support for elected members to access and complete training.</p> <p>Key actions undertaken to address the BVAR recommendation to date have been noted below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a full review of the training and development programme in consultation with elected members, changes were subsequently made to the training and development programme. This has included the use of external speakers, offering twilight sessions and delivering focused weeks of training and development once a year. • This year's scheduled development week had been due to be held in April but was cancelled due to COVID-19. However, a regular programme of briefings and training is available throughout the year for Elected Members on pertinent subjects and are arranged as and when required. • The Improvement Service also recognise that not all elected members will make use of the learning opportunities offered regardless of the support available. To make it easier for elected members to access CPD training resources at a time and place of their choosing, the full range of Improvement Service workbooks are now available in the online Members' Library.

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<i>Annual Audit Report)</i>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elected members are supported to develop own PDPs and continued to be consulted upon the topics for annual training week. <p>Over and above formal training opportunities, it is important to note the significant change to working arrangements that was supported by all elected members during this initial phase of the COVID19 pandemic. All elected members transitioned to working at home and to chairing and participating in meetings using the Microsoft Teams meeting platform. This is now being used for all Council and policy board meetings and for some community meetings such as the Local Partnerships. Individual training and support was offered and provided to all elected members to support this change.</p>
3. The council should review its governance arrangements to ensure they provide for a relationship with Renfrewshire Leisure Limited (RLL) that is clear, independent, and more easily understood by the public.		June 2018 (subject to publication date of Audit Scotland's national review report – scheduled for Spring 2018)	Chief Executive	<p>Audit Scotland has made no further recommendations for the Council to address in relation to governance arrangements for Renfrewshire Leisure.</p> <p>Key actions undertaken to address the BVAR recommendation to date have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Previously the Business Plan was considered by the Leadership Board as an exempt paper, this is no longer the case. The business plan and various update reports are submitted to Leadership Board on a regular basis. In September 2018, two officers from Renfrewshire Council were appointed as observers to Renfrewshire Leisure Board meetings by the Leadership Board. The two officers are the Head of Policy and Commissioning and the Head of Finance. In 2019, the Leadership Board approved proposals to change the composition of the membership of the Renfrewshire Leisure Board, with a further update agreed in September 2020 . Due to the pandemic Renfrewshire Leisure's Business Plan for 2020/21 (which was approved by the Renfrewshire Leisure Board in March 2020) was not able to be formally submitted to the Leadership Board for formal sign off, due to the suspension of policy board meetings.

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In September 2020, an update to the Leadership Board set out the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Renfrewshire Leisure. Outlining both the operational and financial disruption experienced and how the organisation adapted to these changed circumstances. • Three new Independent Directors were recently appointed to the Renfrewshire Leisure Board over the summer 2020 • Regular monitoring meetings have continued to be held between Renfrewshire Leisure and the Head of Policy and Commissioning. • Improvements in the reporting of performance information relating to Renfrewshire Leisure have been made as part of the monitoring arrangements.
<p>4. The council should develop a detailed medium and long-term workforce strategy and plan and implement its organisational development strategy. Implementing both the workforce and organisational development strategies will be critical to managing how future services are provided.</p>	<p>Roll-out Performance Development and Review programme across the Council</p> <p>Implement new leadership and management development programmes</p> <p>Provide 6 monthly updates on the recently approved corporate workforce plan to elected members</p> <p>Implement new management arrangements to integrate existing HR,</p>	<p>Ongoing with six monthly updates to board.</p>	<p>Director of Finance and Resources (in consultation with CMT)</p>	<p>Audit Scotland has made no further recommendations in their 2019/20 Annual Audit Report for workforce planning.</p> <p>Key actions undertaken to address the BVAR recommendation to date have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular progress updates on the OD Strategy are provided to the CMT and Trade Unions. • The Council values were launched in June 2020 following an extensive consultation campaign. Key HR policies will be reviewed and updated, such as absence, flexible and home working policies, to reflect both the new values and the new ways of working. • In November, HR and OD team launched virtual training on the Council Values for managers across the Council. The training aids managers in thinking about how to incorporate the council values into their own work and that of their teams. Subsequently, all staff values training will be rolled out in January 2021. • Over 600 managers and leaders throughout the Council participated across the 'Leaders of the Future' and 'ASPIRE' programmes.

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	organisational development and programme management resources within one function to further strengthen the Council's approach to managing change			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These leadership programmes are being replaced with our new Lead to Succeed programme, which offers 3 different options linked to Chartered Management Institute (CMI) accredited qualifications at Levels 2, 3 and 5. These programmes will support leaders of all levels across the Council by combining a range of leadership topics recommended by CMI with additional content that centres around supporting the Council's recovery to COVID-19 and ongoing transformational change. These programmes will be delivered in a blended format to offer maximum flexibility and, while all participants will complete the same learning experience, those who choose to go a step further and complete the related CMI assessments will be fully supported to achieve the accredited leadership qualification. • A new People Strategy will be presented for approval in early 2021, underpinned by comprehensive workforce data. The strategy will integrate the Council's approaches to OD and workforce planning and align other key Council strategies and the Right for Renfrewshire Transformation Programme. The delivery and governance of the new integrated approach will now sit within services and senior managers, with HR & OD providing professional support to achieve planned outcomes. • A key focus of the strategy will be to deliver the required skills and organisational development programmes required to drive cultural and transformational change in the Council, whilst supporting COVID-19 recovery, new service models and new ways of working. • Workforce planning with the Health and Social Care Partnership is updated following Scottish Government guidance, and a refreshed one-year workforce plan will be in place by April 2021, with longer-term plans developed by April 2022. The HSCP recognises the impact that COVID-19 has had on the workforce and support for their health and wellbeing is central to the HSCP's objectives moving forward.

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During 2020, training offered has been more accessible, with many online courses available, on-demand and digital “bite size” training courses, focusing on supporting future transformational change.
<p>5. The council is continuing to review how it will achieve the savings required within the medium-term financial strategy. The council should prioritise how services need to be provided in future to meet these savings</p> <p>5b. The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced further financial challenges. With a projected deficit of up to £28 million. The risk is that the Council may not be able to deal with future financial challenges and deliver required savings without adversely impacting service delivery.</p>	Continue to implement the agreed medium term financial strategy which will focus on delivering required savings through the Better Council Change programme, debt smoothing and effective workforce planning.	March 2020 <i>(end date of Financial Outlook)</i>	Director Finance and Resources / Chief Executive (in consultation with elected members)	<p>Due to the financial impact that the emergency response to COVID-19 has had on local authorities, Audit Scotland has highlighted financial sustainability in their 2019/20 Annual Audit Report.</p> <p>Officers have continued to support the national COVID-19 costing exercise being coordinated through COSLA which is informing ongoing engagement with the Scottish Government as to the full cost across local government of responding to the COVID-19 emergency.</p> <p>In September 2020, an updated financial outlook was presented to Council, taking into account the updated impact of the COVID-19 emergency during 2020/21 and the requirement to adjust the Council’s medium term financial strategy arrangements.</p> <p>The adjustments are to ensure that the Council’s financial strategy is more appropriately positioned to respond to an increasing number of significant risks, uncertainties and indeed new demands arising from COVID-19. These include the risk of a second wave, the potential risk of having to live with COVID-19 and associated restrictions for longer than anticipated and supporting the major challenge of recovery across Renfrewshire’s communities and businesses.</p> <p>The Right for Renfrewshire transformational programme had been paused at the beginning of the pandemic to allow the Council to implement its emergency response. The programme is currently being remobilised and will continue to progress the existing plan of supporting the delivery of £25 million in savings over the period through to 2023.</p> <p>The BVAR action and the new 2019/20 action on financial sustainability will continue to be reviewed as part of our financial management arrangements and reporting to Council and Policy Board.</p>

Audit Scotland Recommendations	What we will do	When will we do this by?	Who is leading on this?	Progress Update –December 2020
<i>(recommendation from the 2019/20 Audit Scotland Annual Audit Report)</i>				
6. Community Planning partners need to plan their budgets and finances together to provide a clearer picture of the overall resources available.	Undertake a Strategic Financial Overview exercise on an annual basis with community planning partners.	Annual basis – March	Chief Executive / Director of Finance and Resources	<p>Audit Scotland has made no further recommendations in their 2019/20 Annual Audit Report for community planning resources.</p> <p>A key priority within Renfrewshire's Community Plan 2017-2027 is to develop a Community Planning Partnership that is sustainable and connected.</p> <p>Partners provide regular feedback on the financial outlook for their respective organisations and are alert to opportunities to continue to work together to deliver more efficient services which provide for better outcomes.</p> <p>Strategic Partnership Agreements have been developed with community organisations as the next step of this work, recognising the shared commitment to strengthen collaborative and partnership working, supporting mutual learning and identifying opportunities for further collaboration where appropriate.</p> <p>During 2019/20, Strategic Partnership Agreements were put into place by Active Communities and Paisley Community Trust.</p> <p>Community Planning Partners continue to work together on emerging policy priorities such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and the Climate Emergency.</p> <p>Specifically partners are working together to develop a Social Renewal Plan and Economic Recovery Plan for Renfrewshire. These plans are being developed in parallel through the community planning partnership and the Economic Leadership Panel and will set out how partners will work together to respond to the impact the COVID has had on local businesses, communities and residents. The plans provide an opportunity for partners to ensure that all resources available are used collectively to focus on shared priorities.</p>

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<p>7. The council and its partners need to continue to involve communities and work together on joint priorities and to strengthen partnership working. This will provide a positive base to ensure the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is fully implemented.</p> <p>7b. The locality plan identifies broad outcomes for improvement, but it does not refer to localities where action will be focused nor are clear timescales for achieving these set out <i>(recommendation from previous Annual Audit Report)</i></p>	<p>Finalise review of Local Area Committees in Renfrewshire</p> <p>Publish Renfrewshire's Community Plan 2017-2027</p> <p>Embed new governance arrangements for community planning in Renfrewshire, developing shared work plans and priorities in consultation with partners</p> <p>Develop locality plan arrangements in line with the requirements of Community Empowerment legislation, with particular focus on working with partners to engage with those people who are most impacted by poverty in Renfrewshire communities and people.</p>	<p>December 2017</p> <p>1 October 2017</p> <p>March 2018</p> <p>June 2018</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>Audit Scotland has made no further recommendations in their 2019/20 Annual Audit Report for progressing the Community Empowerment Act. An action on further developing locality planning was identified in last year's report, this is still being monitored by Audit Scotland and an update on this is also provided below.</p> <p>An area in which significant progress has been made is in relation to the development of new Local Partnerships which have now replaced Local Area Committees.</p> <p>During September 2020, the seven Local Partnerships made 167 funding awards totalling £349,605.30 to community groups to deliver on local priorities. These awards will help support community groups to deliver projects during the remainder of 2020/21. In addition, a second year of the Celebrating Renfrewshire Participatory Budgeting programme was undertaken during September and October 2020. This will enable young people to vote on the allocation of funding to projects in their area to benefit young people aged 12-25. 86 projects have applied for a share of £149,340 Local Partnership funding</p> <p>Due to the pandemic, the Local Partnerships were paused, and the strengthening of the locality plan work did not progress at the original pace intended. Sessions are being planned for January 2021 to resume locality level discussions on local priorities in light of COVID-19.</p>