NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

8th March 2022

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Title:	**Best Value Assurance Audit Recommendations Update**
Purpose:	To advise on progress against our Best Value Assurance Audit Recommendations
Recommendation:	That the Audit and Scrutiny Committee: (a) Note the update to our Best Value Assurance Audit recommendations; and (b) Agrees that recommendation actions can be deemed as complete with no further update necessary.

1.   Introduction

1.1   North Ayrshire Council's Best Value Assurance Report published in June 2020 presented the findings of the Best Value Audit undertaken in February and March 2020 (prior to the first Covid-19 coronavirus lockdown). The previous Best Value Audit took place in 2011.

1.2   The Best Value Assurance Report 2020 was extremely positive and demonstrated significant improvement since the previous Best Value Audit in 2011. It provides substantial assurance that North Ayrshire Council complies with its statutory obligations to secure Best Value.

1.3   The Commission commended the significant progress made since the 2011 Best Value report:

1.4   *"The core of this progress has been a good sense of self-awareness: The Council has been clear on how and where it can improve, has a well-defined strategy, and shares with its partners a strong vision for North Ayrshire. This strategic direction is reinforced by a record of collaboration: between Elected Members and officers; in engaging with staff in improvement; and in the empowering approach taken by the Council in its relationship with its communities."* (The Accounts Commission).

1.5   The Commission stated this is particularly encouraging due to the challenging demographic context of deprivation and demography in North Ayrshire.

1.6   The findings of the Best Value Audit were presented to Council on 23rd September 2020.

2.   Summary of Key Messages

2.1   A summary of key messages as at March 2020 are as follows:

2.2   The Council has a strong culture of continuous improvement. It has significantly improved and continued to make progress since the last Best Value report in 2011. Council priorities, plans, actions, and outcomes are clearly linked. Staff play an active role in identifying and driving improvement and the Council is delivering improvements for communities and residents.

2.3   There is a strong culture of collaborative working at North Ayrshire Council. Elected Members and officers work well together, and the Council works effectively with a wide range of partners including the Community Planning Partnership (CPP), the Integrated Joint Board (IJB) and private business. There is joint ownership of, and commitment to, delivering agreed strategic priorities. The Council Plan, the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan and local community plans are all clearly aligned and focused on addressing North Ayrshire's key challenges.

2.4   Despite significant economic and demographic challenges, the Council is performing well and is a frequent award winner and early adopter for national pilots. Performance management arrangements are clearly focused on priority areas and data is used to drive improvements.

2.5   The Council's arrangements for financial planning and management are good overall and it has significantly improved its asset management and procurement arrangements since the last Best Value Report. While the Council has made clear progress with its transformation agenda, including setting aside money to fund projects, its savings plans fall short of the estimated funding gap.

2.6   The Council is committed to community empowerment and is recognised by the Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) as a sector leader. The Council's approach is focused on embedding community empowerment in every-day business. The Council works well with a wide number of communities and groups including young people and tenants.

3. Recommendations

3.1 There are four recommendations arising from the 2020 Best Value Audit, these are summarised below.

Recommendation 1

The Council should fully develop and deliver detailed transformation plans to meet the current estimated funding shortfall. To achieve this, it should ensure sufficient arrangements are in place to support, monitor and deliver the expected outcomes. This includes:

- Developing the transformation themes into projects and further developing the governance arrangements to ensure the Council has the skills needed to implement the next stage of transformation.
- Developing a robust benefits realisation tracker to assess whether the Council has achieved its aims.

Current Status

The Transformation and Renewal Programme continues to be progressed. The broad outline of the programme was included in the Budget report to Council on 4th March 2021. The Governance structure which supports the programme is in place through Transformation Boards, aligned to the Council Plan themes of Inspiring Place, Aspiring Communities and A Council for the Future, as well as through the Executive Leadership Team. All the individual projects / activities have been assigned to individual owners and a new Sustainable Change Programme for 2022/23 and beyond (rather than Transformation and Renewal programme) was discussed by the ELT in November 2021 with further discussions in January 2022 prior to the start of the new financial year.

A new monitoring framework to track progress has been developed. This provides a medium to long term (10 years) framework which is split across agreed budget programme activity (approved on 4th March 2021) and budget pipeline activity i.e. projects / activities which continue to be progressed and developed. The impact on how this activity addresses the anticipated budget gap is also reflected in the framework. Importantly, the framework also captures any workforce implications for delivery and also the full time equivalent impact of any anticipated savings as well as capturing the anticipated key outcomes.

Recommendation 2

The Council must evolve workforce planning across all services, and clearly align service workforce plans to the transformation projects, in order to:

- Identify the numbers, cost and skills of the current and desired workforce.
- Effectively facilitate the transition from the current workforce composition to the desired workforce.

Workforce planning discussions recommenced in 2021 and have been updated at six monthly intervals for the majority of services. These meetings ensure that workforce planning is aligned with challenges, service reviews and the transformation agenda. In addition, the monitoring framework for transformation has been implemented and includes workforce information linked to transformation activity.

Heads of Service have two workforce planning meetings, Workforce Plan and Workforce Costs. The Workforce Plan covers the workforce demographics, transformation, PESTLE analysis and service review activity which helps shape the desired future workforce. The Workforce Costs meeting provides information on absence costs, overtime, vacancies etc. as well as key information that Heads of Service need to inform their planning in relation to their current and desired future workforce.

Recommendation 3
The Council should work with locality partnerships to make clear what the intended impacts are of locality plans and make them publicly available.

Extensive work was undertaken in 2020 and 2021 on the refresh of locality partnership priorities. This led to five locality partnerships agreeing their ongoing priorities at their June 2021 meetings. A focus of this work was devising priorities which target local inequalities, as a result they are now clearer on the impact they want to achieve, e.g. Kilwinning moving from "traffic and parking" to "alleviating poverty and promoting equality of access to opportunities". Work on the refresh of the Arran Locality priorities will continue into Quarter Four 2021/22 taking into account the development of the Island Plan.

Once the plans to support each locality's priorities are agreed, these will be published on the Community Planning website. This will add to the existing wide range of locality partnership information available such as meeting papers which include local progress updates, the current locality partnership priorities and impact summaries.

Recommendation 4
The Council should review its Public Reporting online portal, North Ayrshire Performs, to make it more user friendly and accessible.

We have replaced our North Ayrshire Performs portal with a new Performance Dashboard developed in-house by the Corporate Policy, Performance and Elections Team and launched on 28th February 2021.

The dashboard provides a much more user friendly and accessible way for our residents to access our performance data. We reviewed the information available to ensure it is as concise and relevant as possible; that it contains a link to the LGBF Benchmarking Tool; and includes our contact details. We ensured the layout is in line with our corporate and Annual Performance Reporting branding and can be updated with any changes.

The dashboard is available from our performance pages within our North Ayrshire Council website www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/performance and linked to within our six monthly Council Plan performance reports.

Due to the innovative way we are presenting our information, we have been approached by several councils in Scotland including Midlothian Council and Aberdeenshire Council as well as Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council in Northern Ireland, to provide demonstrations and advice. We have worked closely with the GIS and Analytics Team to provide support on more technical areas such as Power BI licensing and integrating Power BI with performance management systems.

As the dashboard was developed inhouse we have full control of its evolution and will continue to make improvements based on general feedback as well as learning from the informal network being established through our demonstrations.

4. Proposals

It is proposed that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee: (a) Note the update to our Best Value Assurance Audit recommendations; and (b) Agrees that recommendation actions can be deemed as complete with no further update necessary.

5. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

<u>Financial</u>

5.1 There are no financial implications.

<u>Human Resources</u>

5.2 There are no human resource implications.

<u>Legal</u>

5.3 This report confirms the arrangements for the Council's compliance with its duties under the Local Government Act 1992 and the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 and commitment to improving public performance reporting.

<u>Equality/Socio-economic</u>

5.4 There are no equality/socio-economic implications.

<u>Environmental and Sustainability</u>

5.5 There are no environmental and sustainability implications.

<u>Key Priorities</u>

5.6 This report helps to demonstrate the Council's delivery of its strategic priorities.

<u>Community Wealth Building</u>

5.7 There are no community wealth building implications.

6.   **Consultation**

6.1   Feedback from the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) informed the content of this report.

Aileen Craig
Head of Service (Democratic)

For further information please contact **Isla Hardy, Team Manager (Policy and Performance)** email IslaHardy@north-ayrshire.gov.uk.

Background Papers
North Ayrshire Council Best Value Assurance Report