

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Director of Strategic Change and Communities
to Audit and Governance Panel
of 24 January 2024**

Subject: Best Value Action Plan 2023 – Progress Update

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the progress toward delivering the Council's Best Value Action Plan 2023.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Panel:

2.1.1 scrutinises the content of the Best Value Action Plan 2023 update report; and

2.1.2 considers the progress through the narrative set out within [Appendix 1](#).

3. Background

3.1 The Accounts Commission's approach to Best Value has evolved since Best Value was introduced 20 years ago and is now fully integrated within annual audit work. Best Value at the Council will be assessed comprehensively over the period of the audit appointment and will include an annual evaluation of the Council's approach to demonstrating improvement in the effective use of resources and public performance reporting.

3.2 In addition to the annual work on Best Value, thematic reviews as directed by the Accounts Commission are undertaken and in 2022/23 the focus was on the effectiveness of Council leadership in developing new local strategic priorities following the elections in May 2022.

3.3 The Council's thematic report was based on fieldwork carried out between January and March this year and the report was considered by Audit and Governance Panel on 28 June 2023 and subsequently, by Cabinet on 29 August 2023. The Council's final report on the annual audit was considered by Audit and Governance Panel on 27 September 2023.

3.4 An augmented action plan based on the recommendations from Audit Scotland was approved by Audit and Governance Panel on 4 October 2023 with progress to be reported on a quarterly basis.

4. Proposals

4.1 Progress towards the actions and the accompanying narrative is attached as [Appendix 1](#).

4.2 In summary, 13 of the 21 actions are complete and a further 7 are on target. A revised due date is noted for one action (Agree revised structure for Sustainability and Climate Change Team).

5. Legal and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Not applicable

7. Human Resources Implications

7.1 Not applicable

8. Risk

8.1 Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations

8.1.1 There are no risks associated with adopting the recommendations.

8.2 Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations

8.2.1 Rejecting the recommendations would result in reputational damage and criticism from Audit Scotland, the Accounts Commission and the Scottish Government.

9. Equalities

9.1 The proposals in this report allow scrutiny of performance. The report does not involve proposals for policies, strategies, procedures, processes, financial decisions and activities (including service delivery), both new and at review, that affect the Council's communities and employees, therefore an equality impact assessment is not required.

10. Sustainable Development Implications

10.1 ***Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*** - This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme or strategy or document otherwise described which could be considered to constitute a plan, programme, policy or strategy.

11. Options Appraisal

11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

12. Link to Council Plan

12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to delivery of all the Council's strategic objectives and strategic outcomes.

13. Results of Consultation

13.1 There has been no public consultation on the contents of this report.

13.2 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Martin Dowey, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Strategic, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

13.3 Consultation has also taken place with members of the Best Value Working Group, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

Background Papers **Report to Audit and Governance Panel of 28 June 2023 – [Best Value Thematic Work in South Ayrshire 2022/23](#)**

Report to Cabinet of 29 August 2023 – [Best Value Thematic Work in South Ayrshire 2022/23](#)

Report to Audit and Governance Panel of 4 October 2023 – [Best Value Action Plan 2023](#)

Report to South Ayrshire Council of 7 December 2023 – [Accounts Commission's Findings on Best Value in South Ayrshire](#)

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Date: 12 January 2024

Best Value Augmented Improvement Action Plan 2023

Generated on: 18 December 2023

Recommendation 1 - A balanced view of progress against the council plan priorities should be reported regularly to members. A timetable for performance reporting to elected members should be a priority. Performance reports should include details or links to planned improvement actions. The council should ensure it fully complies with the new Statutory Performance Information Direction

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Officers will review new reporting format to ensure that it reflects the Accounts Commission's Statutory Performance Information Direction.	Kevin Anderson	100%	30-Aug-2023	30-Aug-2023	30-Oct-2023 Reporting format options to be circulated to CLT. All options under development take cognisance of the Account Commission's Statutory Performance Information Direction. new status update --

Recommendation 2 - To ensure the effective delivery of local outcomes, the council should publish the remaining Place Plans

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Ongoing dialogue with elected members on the details of the Place Plans to be used to advance place-based activity.	George Hunter	70%	31-Mar-2024	31-Mar-2024	27-Nov-2023 A new Place Plan Officer has been recruited and is progressing through our current place plans , progressing key actions and working towards a refresh of historical plans

Recommendation 3 - There should be a clear process introduced that is sufficiently resourced to ensure these crosscutting priorities are given the necessary consideration. Measures should be set for monitoring progress for cross cutting themes. In particular how the council will measure that it is reducing inequalities

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Continue to develop Integrated Impact Assessment Tool	Kevin Anderson	100%	30-Sep-2023	30-Sep-2023	24-Nov-2023 New Integrated Impact Assessment agreed by Cabinet in September 2023. IIA to be rolled out to the Strategic Change and Communities directorate over Nov/Dec 23 with full rollout to the Council and HSCP during 2024

Recommendation 4 - The plans to reintroduce a corporate approach to self-evaluation need to be progressed. The council's self-evaluation should include an understanding of its performance in relation to other councils

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Officers and members to re-establish approaches to self-evaluation across the council using How Good Is Our Council (HGIOC) to develop a framework to support ongoing evaluation for improvement.	Kevin Anderson	100%	31-Dec-2023	31-Dec-2023	24-Nov-2023 Following an options appraisal of the tools available, The Best Value Member/Officer Working group has agreed to adopt the Improvement Service's Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF) and integrate self-evaluation into the service planning process. The Improvement Service have agreed to support the Council to do this and a series of meetings and training sessions are planned in the run up to service plans being updated in Spring 2024.

Recommendation 4 The Council should make sure that its transformation work is fully aligned and integrated to its covid recovery planning work and improve its approach to its Strategic Change Programme by: • Adding greater detail about individual projects • Setting clear timelines for each project • Developing a benefits realisation tracker to assess whether the Council has achieved its aims. (paragraphs 123 and 124)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
The council should make sure that its transformation work is fully aligned and integrated to its Covid-19 recovery planning work and improve its approach to its strategic change programme	Kevin Anderson	100%	20-Jun-2023	20-Jun-2023	30-Oct-2023 Updated and refocused strategic change programme agreed by Cabinet in June 2023 .

Recommendation 5 The council should improve performance reporting by: • setting targets for its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) • including a summary of performance against KPIs in its performance reports to members • increasing the frequency of reports to elected members • making performance reports more accessible to the public

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
The council should improve performance reporting	Kevin Anderson	100%	20-Jun-2023	20-Jun-2023	30-Oct-2023 New Performance Management Framework aligned to the Council Plan 23-28 was approved by Cabinet in June 2023. Improving the accessibility of performance information has been carried over and is a stand-alone action in this plan

Report Reference - As part of the impact assessment approach, it is intended that an increased and ongoing level of climate change expertise and support will be made available to policymakers from an early stage as they develop policies. (Para 82 & 83

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Agree revised structure for Sustainability and Climate Change Team to ensure support is available to policymakers.	Kevin Anderson	76%	31-Dec-2023	31-Mar-2024	18-Dec-2023 Draft structure agreed at service level however delays in job evaluation process have pushed the timescale on. Once finalised the proposed new structure will be presented to members for approval .

Report Reference - As the Strategic Change programme progresses with delivering projects, officers from the team will be developing ways for council staff to suggest and bring forward project ideas. The use of corporate communication channels to promote examples of good practice will be considered to help publicise how officers and project teams have worked collaboratively to deliver change. (Para 110)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Develop method to encourage council staff to suggest project ideas and promote successful projects.	Kevin Anderson	50%	31-Mar-2024	31-Mar-2024	24-Nov-2023 The Strategic Change team have been prioritising the communication aspect of the Programme, including increasing the frequency of Learning Events, and sharing best practice and knowledge from current projects. This will help with the objective to develop ideas from staff that can be turned into projects and deliver business change. Wider changes around the programmes governance are taking

					place at CLT level and any changes will reflect the need for employees to have opportunities to contribute.
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Report Reference - Capital investment has also been committed, including £1 million in each of the 8 wards across South Ayrshire over the next four years to make infrastructure improvements to benefit communities. These investment decisions have been influenced using the information collated as part of the council's engagement with its communities as part of its place planning. The identified projects have been linked to the new Council Plan's priorities. The proposed projects will be considered by the Council in June 2023. The council has committed to regular monitoring of the projects to ensure transparency with its investment decisions. (Para 94)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Agree monitoring process for Ward Capital Investment Process and outcomes.		100%	30-Sep-2023	30-Sep-2023	31-Oct-2023 Paper presented to Cabinet in September 2023

Report Reference - From review of the update to Panel, on average 45 per cent of members were noted as attending the 11 briefings since August 2022. There is a need to improve the accuracy and relevance of the attendance figures. (Para 168)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Improve accuracy of recording attendance figures at member briefings.	Catriona Caves	50%	31-Mar-2024	31-Mar-2024	28-Nov-2023 Attendance figures are reviewed as to subject matter and appropriate audience, and online training access is recorded

Report Reference - In future the council is to demonstrate in budget papers how it is aligned to the council's priorities. (Key message 8)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Align future budget papers to the Council Plan.	Tim Baulk	50%	31-Mar-2024	31-Mar-2024	24-Nov-2023 All budget documentation makes reference to the new council plan priorities. For each resource pressure (additional funding request) and efficiency measure (savings proposal) an appropriate council priority has to be selected to ensure that Members are aligning any budget decision being made to the priorities provided in the Council Plan. The final

					budget documentation agreed by Council will include this information to ensure clear and direct links to the Council plan.
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Report Reference - South Ayrshire Council should use the LGBF data alongside its engagement with its communities to assess its local performance and priorities. (Para 50)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Update Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) report format to take account of the recommendations from Audit Scotland.	Kevin Anderson	50%	30-Jun-2024	30-Jun-2024	24-Nov-2023 Ongoing discussions with ELT on how LGBF data will be presented to members and used by services to drive improvement activity

Report Reference - The council developed a Community Engagement Strategy in 2020, but there is no evidence of the council assessing whether it has improved community engagement Whilst publishing the results of each consultation provides transparency and feedback on the needs of citizens, the council could take this a step further by evidencing how the results of these surveys have impacted on the decisions taken by Council. (Para 56)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Assess the impact of the Community Engagement Strategy noting how feedback has influenced outcomes.	George Hunter	75%	31-Mar-2024	31-Mar-2024	27-Nov-2023 • Thriving Communities continue to develop new initiatives to promote community engagement across South Ayrshire this includes additional resources through the UKSP Fund. Following on from the completed action plan that accompanied the Community Engagement Strategy, Community Engagement and Empowerment is noted as a key priority in the Community Learning and Development Plan 2021-24. The mid-term progress report was presented at Service, Partnership and Performance Panel and in October 2023 Education Scotland carried out an external progress review of the CLD Plan. Key achievements following the Community Engagement Strategy and CLD Plan include the enhanced and dedicated support for community councils. This support includes upskilling Community Councillors, Elected Members and staff on their roles and responsibilities as Community Councillors while providing opportunities for Community Councillors to engage with partners such as Police Scotland.

					<p>Through engagement with our external finding officer local communities have been able access a range of funding opportunities that has allowed them to be empowered in their local community, this includes £100,000 allocated through LACER fund to empower communities to support with the cost of living.</p> <p>An evaluation of the Place Plans for Girvan and North Ayr that were published in 2020 has been carried out, the action plans show progress against key priorities from the local community. Ward Capital funding allocations has provided an opportunity for local residents to influence decision making.</p> <p>Work in Wallacetown continues to develop through the coordinator, Thriving Communities officers and local residents.</p> <p>South Ayrshire communities' day is planned for May 2024.</p>
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Report Reference - The council has committed to updating the MTFP annually, with the next review due to take place in October 2023 (Para 100)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Review the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)	Tim Baulk	100%	30-Nov-2023	30-Nov-2023	05-Dec-2023 The MTFP was approved at Cabinet on 28th Nov 2023. The budget strategy contained in the document will be used as the basis of the budget setting process for 2024/25 and beyond.

Report Reference - The council has in place an ICT Strategy 2021-2023 and a Digital Strategy 2019-2022. Going forward there will be one combined strategy, originally planned for March 2023. Both current strategies have an action plan to be delivered over their lifecycle. A final report on the outcomes of the strategies will be provided to elected members in due course to allow visibility and scrutiny of the actions taken over this timeframe. (Para 124 & 125)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Provide elected members with a final report on the outcomes of the ICT Strategy 2021-23 and the Digital Strategy.	Tim Baulk	100%	30-Nov-2023	30-Nov-2023	18-Dec-2023 New Strategy approved by Council on the 7th of December.
Consider opportunities for further cross-party collaboration to help deliver on the Council Plan		100%	30-Nov-2023	30-Nov-2023	18-Dec-2023 The Best Value Working Group have agreed to encourage all Member Officer Working Groups to align to the Council Plan. The annual ward capital funding will be agreed collaboratively with all ward members.

Report Reference - The council should now monitor the effectiveness of the new governance structure to ensure that the openness and transparency of decision making, and scrutiny is maintained. (Para 149)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Arrange training with members of Audit and Governance and Service and Partnership Performance Panel	Catriona Caves	100%	31-Oct-2023	31-Oct-2023	27-Nov-2023 Training was completed and very well received-consideration will be given to the same workshop being incorporated in Members Training to assist with scrutiny each five-year terms because of the importance of this role in the Council and the number of new members. The training provided foundation training for less experienced members and the business training a very good level of more detailed training.

Report Reference - The council should review the content of the performance section of its website to ensure it meets the requirements of the new SPI direction. (Para 32)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Review content of the Council Performance and Best Value web pages		100%	30-Sep-2023	30-Sep-2023	30-Oct-2023 Work has been carried out to complete the refresh of the layout of the public performance reporting webpage – there are now 5 tiles which people can navigate on the following areas: South Ayrshire Council Performance Reporting (this section includes Council performance and Service Performance), Benchmarking (LBGF information and my 'mylocalcouncil' access), External Audit (Audit Scotland Reports), Community Planning Partnership (link to the CPP webpage and access to annual progress reports for the LOIP) and Best Value (Assurance Report, Progress Updates and Self Evaluation)

Report Reference - The next update of the LTFO is due to take place in October 2023. The council has committed to updating future iterations of both the MTFP and LTFO in line with the financial environment it is operating in at the time, together with the council's priorities. (Para 105)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Update Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP)	Tim Baulk	100%	30-Nov-2023	30-Nov-2023	24-Nov-2023 The three-year Medium Term Financial Plan and ten year long term financial plan have been combined in to one five-year Medium Term Financial Plan. This 5-year MTFP will be presented to Cabinet for approval on 28th Nov 2023.

Report Reference - Work will take place during 2023 to refresh the LOIP to identify a new set of priority areas for it from April 2024 onwards. The council's revised priorities and service delivery plans are being considered when developing the new LOIP (Para 24)

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Ensure clear strategic links between the new LOIP and existing Council Plan	Kevin Anderson	100%	31-Mar-2024	31-Mar-2024	24-Nov-2023 Similarly to the Council Plan 23-28, the draft LOIP priorities use Place and Wellbeing as high-level strategic themes. These themes have been used to develop priority

					areas for each Strategic Delivery Partnership to advance. The draft priorities were agreed by the Community Planning Executive in November 2023 and consultation is planned during the first quarter of 2024. The new LOIP will be presented to the Community Planning Board in April 2024 for approval
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Cannot group these rows by Desired Outcome

Action	Managed By	Progress	Original Due Date	Current Due Date	Latest Note
Align Place Plan development with localities and advance participatory budgeting approaches to place via Community Planning	George Hunter	60%	31-Dec-2023	31-Dec-2023	<p>27-Nov-2023 • SAC have recruited a new Place Planning officer who is supporting place planning. A review of the plans that were published for North Ayr and Girvan has been carried out and information has been shared with ward members. Officers from Planning, Community Planning and Thriving Communities are developing guidance and plans that will support local communities with place plans and less formal action plans.</p> <p>Through the UKSP Fund Participatory Budgeting will be launched in spring 2024, this is a collaborative approach between Community Planning, HSCP and SAC. External funding opportunities through PBIF, Coastal Communities and UKSP Fund supports local communities to access funding that assists with local priorities.</p>