

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10:00am, Tuesday, 9 January 2024

Best Value Review Update

Executive/routine
Wards

1. Recommendations

1.1 To note the update.

Dr. Deborah Smart

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Report

Best Value Review Update

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report outlines the current status with Best Value recommendations made by the Accounts Commission in November 2020. This replaces more regular updates which were provided between the Best Value report being published and March 2023.

3. Background

- 3.1 The City of Edinburgh Council Best Value Assurance Audit Report (BVAR) was published by the Accounts Commission on 26 November 2020.
- 3.2 Since November 2020, regular updates have been provided to the Policy and Sustainability Committee and the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee.
- 3.3 In March 2023, the following was agreed:
- 3.3.1 To note the progress made to date to respond to the Best Value Assurance Audit Report recommendations.
 - 3.3.2 To agree that reporting on the Best Value recommendations would be through the relevant committee/body for each workstream with an overview of overall progress reported to the Policy and Sustainability Committee bi-annually.
 - 3.3.3 To refer the report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services to the Governance Risk and Best Value Committee for consideration and scrutiny.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The BVAR for the City of Edinburgh Council focused on five key areas: the Council's vision and strategic direction; performance and outcomes including public performance reporting; effective use of resources; partnership working and community engagement, and continuous improvement.
- 4.2 Previously a table outlined the progress every two months, these updates are still available and linked in section 10. However, in order to ensure a concise and

informative status is given, a summary of the current status has been detailed below for each recommendation.

4.3 **Best Value Recommendation:-** *As part of its Adaptation and Renewal Programme, the council should prepare sustainable medium and long-term financial plans, and detailed workforce plans, to support its strategic priorities.*

4.3.1 As reported to the Finance and Resources Committee on 21 November 2023, a financial plan is being developed to deliver the annual budget and integrate key processes into budget development, medium-term financial plan and the planning performance framework, with these underpinned by a service change programme comprising four key transformation themes aligned to the three priorities of the business plan. The Council is currently refreshing its People Strategy and the Workforce Plan will be developed alongside this which will consider the corporate position as well as toolkits for service workforce plans to support change programmes. The People Strategy is due for consideration by April 2024 and the Workforce Plan will be considered thereafter.

4.4 **Best Value Recommendations:** *- The council should implement a strategic approach to self-evaluation and continuous improvement. This should include better demonstrating how it responds to feedback and scrutiny findings. The council should further improve its performance reporting by making better use of performance measures and targets, particularly to demonstrate the impact of improvement work.*

4.4.1 The Planning & Performance framework reflects the Council's updated Business Plan and has been embedded into business as usual. The first Public Performance Scorecard is due to be reported to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee in January 2024.

4.4.2 The outstanding action from this recommendation is to implement a strategic approach to self-evaluation. Options and associated costs will be developed in 2024.

4.5 **Best Value Recommendation:** *- The council should further improve its performance reporting by publishing easily accessible, up-to-date performance information on its website.*

4.5.1 As set out in 4.4.1, the first Public Performance Scorecard is due to be reported to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee in January 2024.

4.5.2 In addition, the performance section of the Council's website has been updated and improved (accessed [here](#)). The addition of the Quarterly Public Performance Scorecard will further enhance the availability and accessibility of a broad range of Council Performance metrics.

- 4.6 **Best Value Recommendation:** - *To help them carry out their best value responsibilities, elected members should take advantage of the learning and development opportunities provided by the council.*
- 4.6.1 An initial 8 week training programme was developed for elected members following the local government elections. Each training session was delivered twice with an online and in-person option to allow members the best opportunity to attend at a convenient time. Sessions were also recorded and stored for future viewing on the member's section of myLearning Hub.
- 4.6.2 An ongoing training programme has been established to build on the induction training and ensure that continuous learning is available for elected members throughout the five years term. is intended to continue throughout the council term. External organisations such as the Improvement Service, Consultation Institute and Scottish Women's Budgeting Group have all delivered sessions, alongside subject matter experts within the council.
- 4.6.3 Mandatory training sessions for the quasi-judicial committees were repeated to expand the pool of qualified members and refresh the knowledge of those already trained.
- 4.6.4 A skills gap assessment was carried out with members to identify any topics they would find helpful for inclusion in the ongoing training programme. Newer members, now with the context of a years' service, also requested repeats of some of the induction sessions such as IT Skills and Capital vs Revenue.
- 4.6.5 The Standards Commission for Scotland Councillor's Code of Conduct training is mandatory for all elected members. All 63 councillors attended this training over 11 sessions offered.
- 4.6.6 Other mandatory training includes committee specific training (e.g. Planning, Licencing) and was attended by all relevant councillors. This training was also re-offered to build in contingency in skills of councillors which would then allow these councillors to attend these committees as a sub.
- 4.6.7 An ongoing training package has also been delivered on specific topics of interest, e.g. Climate, Poverty, Procurement, Budget Process.
- 4.6.8 The training has been delivered in various methods including presentations, briefings and talks.
- 4.7 **Best Value Recommendation:** - *In order to make community engagement an integral part of service improvement and delivery, the council should embed the lessons from effective community engagement activity and clearly communicate the results of, and the council's response to, community consultation.*
- 4.7.1 The Council has introduced and updated its Consultation and Engagement Policy and the Consultation Advisory Panel to provide control, reporting and expert advice on consultation and engagement activity to all services.

- 4.7.2 The Council has provided externally accredited training from the Consultation Institute to key colleagues across departments at both practitioner and advanced practitioner levels. Executive briefings on consultation have also been offered to elected members. This is being supported by a professional network where colleagues can raise issues and share good practice.
- 4.7.3 The Council has developed a forward plan for consultation and engagements which highlight to colleagues, leaders and community councils known future activity.
- 4.7.4 Key performance indicators have been introduced to all major consultation activity to demonstrate how well participants feel they have been consulted.
- 4.7.5 The action outlined in 4.7 was previously closed by the committee.

4.8 **Best Value Recommendation:** - *In order to make community engagement an integral part of service improvement and delivery, the council should support community groups to complete asset transfers.*

4.8.1 There has been an increase in activity on community asset transfers (CAT) since the last update in March 2023. There has been one CAT recently completed, with two others due to complete by the end of November 2023. The Council has received a greater number of initial enquiries from community bodies over the last 9 months and the focus of the requests have reflected the current cost of living crisis and for the groups providing support to the community. The Council continues to provide guidance to applicants and help identify organisations and resources that will assist them in their CAT journey.

4.9 **Best Value Recommendation:** - *The council should work with the Edinburgh Partnership Board to implement its new governance arrangements, effectively involve community representatives and deliver improved outcomes for communities.*

- 4.9.1 An engagement plan for the Edinburgh Partnership's Empowerment Strategy was presented to the Board at its September 2022 meeting.
- 4.9.2 The Edinburgh Partnership Board continues to work to strengthen its governance arrangements. At the partnership meeting in June 2023 the board agreed to a Transformation and Improvement Programme to run in 2023/24.
- 4.9.3 The Council and the Edinburgh Association of Community Councils have agreed an improvement plan which looks at the relationship between the two bodies and seeks to improve communication and engagement. This work has improvement actions that run until 2024 which includes for example community council boundaries and elections.

4.10 **Best Value Recommendation:** - *The Council should work with the Edinburgh Partnership Board to produce progress reports with clear targets, accountable leads and links between the actions taken and the impact on performance.*

4.10.1 The Edinburgh Partnership Board approved the revised LOIP at its meeting in March 2022 and following this it was circulated and approved by Partnership member bodies. Work was then carried out by the LOIP delivery group on how the LOIP is delivered. The LOIP Annual report was subsequently approved June 2023.

4.10.2 Quarterly reporting of the priorities within the LOIP is in place, with progress on actions being escalated to the Board as appropriate.

4.10.3 Work is currently being taken forward to develop a new integrated performance framework. This has been informed by the Parliamentary review of community planning and will also take account of the findings of the Edinburgh Partnership survey of residents, recently completed. This will allow new KPIs to be developed to support the work of the Partnership.

5. Next Steps

5.1 A further report will be submitted in 6 months' time.

6. Financial impact

6.1 There is no financial impact as a result of this report. All improvement actions will be individually costed and will be required to be managed through existing revenue budget allocations.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

7.1 There is no equality and poverty impact as a result of this report.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

8.1 There are no climate and nature emergency implications as a result of this report.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

9.1 Each workstream has differing compliance, governance and consultation requirements. Further information can be provided on these matters if requested.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 [Best Value Assurance Audit](#) – City of Edinburgh Council, 10 December 2020
- 10.2 [Best Value Assurance Audit – Update](#) – Policy and Sustainability Committee, 21 March 2023

11. Appendices

- 11.1 None.