

# Angus Council

## Leadership of the development of new local strategic priorities

Best Value thematic work in councils 2022-23



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# Key messages

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- 1** In the new Council Plan, the council has set out a clear vision and priorities for Angus, which are well-aligned with the Community Planning Partnership's Community Plan. It has also identified success measures to monitor progress. When communicating the new Plan to the public, the council sent a clear message that it will have to make difficult decisions to achieve its vision and priorities.
- 2** The council continues to be committed to meaningful engagement with communities and has been working towards a council-wide approach to community engagement. Building on lessons learnt from Covid, it is now developing a targeted partnership approach with communities, shifting its focus towards prevention of issues. It is still at the early stages but will help the council involve communities more in service design and delivery.
- 3** The council priorities focus on reducing inequalities. It has been working closely with partners and communities to support post-Covid recovery and to address the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. The council has also committed to achieving net zero by 2045 and has started to review progress towards next steps.
- 4** The council has a Finance & Change Plan, which shows that the delivery of financial savings to balance future budgets is a significant challenge. The council's financial, workforce and asset plans are aligned to the Council Plan 2023-28. The council will need to continue to prioritise its use of resources to deliver its priorities and difficult decisions on how services are delivered will need to be taken.
- 5** The council has strong leadership with elected members, working well with each other and in partnership with officers. There is effective collaborative working between members and with members and officers towards the setting and achievement of the council's priorities.
- 6** The council has made satisfactory progress on recommendations reported in the 2022 BVAR. The continued development of the PLED programme is key to ensuring effective performance reporting against the Council Plan.
- 7** The council's improvement actions from this review are included at Appendix 1 of this report. It sets out the council's response to audit recommendations made.

# Scope of the audit

1. When discussing the Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022, William Moyes, then Chair of the Accounts Commission said: “Councils are operating in a complex and increasingly volatile, unprecedented and unpredictable environment. Strong leadership from councils is needed now more than ever, with new and returning councillors being able and willing to make difficult decisions about where and how to spend highly pressurised resources.”
2. This report concludes on the effectiveness of the council’s leadership of the development of the council’s strategic priorities, following the recent local government elections.
3. [The Accounts Commission’s Strategy \(2021-26\)](#) sets out its priorities to focus on inequalities, funding, communities and recovery. The Code of Audit practice sets out the Best Value work required to report on these priorities.

## Code of Audit Practice 2020 Best Value reporting requirements

### Best Value reporting – extract from the Code

87. The Accounts Commission’s approach to Best Value involves reporting on individual local government bodies and thematically across the local government sector through performance reports:

- As part of their integrated wider-scope annual audit work appointed auditors use a risk-based approach to assess and report whether the audited body has made proper arrangements for securing Best Value and is complying with its community planning duties, including reporting progress against previous Best Value findings and recommendations.
- The Accounts Commission also requires the Controller of Audit to report to the Accounts Commission on each council or Integration Joint Board (IJB) at least once over the five-year audit appointment on the body’s performance on its Best Value duty. This enables the Accounts Commission to make findings for improvement where appropriate. <sup>1</sup>
- The Accounts Commission reports nationally on thematic aspects of local government bodies’ approaches to, and performance in, meeting their Best Value and community planning duties. Local government appointed auditors report locally on any such Best Value thematic work prescribed by the Accounts Commission.

<sup>1</sup> The Controller of Audit will report the first tranche of council BV reports to the Commission between October 2023 and August 2024 on Moray, Falkirk, Dundee City, Orkney Islands, South Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Clackmannanshire and West Dunbartonshire.

4. This report covers the thematic aspect of the Best Value audit requirements. The Commission has directed auditors to report on the effectiveness of the leadership of the development of the council's strategic priorities.



5. In carrying out the work auditors have considered the following questions:

- How clear is the new council vision and its priorities?
  - How effectively have the views of citizens and communities been reflected in the priorities and decisions taken by the council?
  - How effectively do the council priorities reflect the need to reduce inequalities and climate change?
  - How good are the delivery plans and is there alignment of financial, workforce, asset and digital plans with the council's priorities?
  - Overall, how effective has the leadership been (political and officer) in setting clear priorities and a sustainable approach to delivering them?
6. An improvement action plan is included at Appendix 1 of this report. This sets out audit recommendations in key areas, and the council's planned response including responsible officers and dates for implementation.
7. The coverage of the work is in line with the expectations for council's arrangements for the seven Best Value themes in the [Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Best Value Statutory Guidance 2020](#).

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# Council vision and priorities

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## The council has set out a clear vision and priorities for Angus, which are well aligned with the Community Plan

8. A council focused on achieving Best Value in how it operates will be able to demonstrate that elected members and officers have a clear vision and priorities for their area.
9. The Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022 says that Scotland's councils have had a pivotal role in supporting and working with communities as they respond to the impacts of Covid-19. Following the council elections in May 2021, councils will have reviewed their priorities.
10. In February 2023, Angus Community Planning Partnership (CPP) agreed a refreshed Community Plan for 2022-2030, identifying 11 priorities for the council and partners. It has a simpler and clearer structure than the original while retaining its vision, 'Angus is a great place to live, work and visit' and three over-arching themes:
  - Caring for our Economy
  - Caring for our People
  - Caring for our Place
11. In March 2023, Angus Council approved a new Council Plan for 2023-2028, making 30 commitments specifically for the council. This was alongside the budget for 2023/2024, Finance & Change Plan for 2023-2026 and Workforce Plan for 2023-2028. The new Council Plan adopts the Community Plan's vision and three over-arching priority themes and adds a council-specific theme, 'Angus Council is Efficient and Effective'. While the vision and four themes remain unchanged from the previous Plan, the new Plan presents a clearer alignment with the Community Plan, providing a sharper focus on how the council aims to achieve the vision which is shared with partners.
12. To renew the Community Plan, the council worked well with partners, holding a number of engagement sessions, including an annual partners' survey, a roundtable and workshops, all reviewing progress made with the Plan. Those sessions confirmed that the CPP vision and priority themes remained current and relevant. The Council Plan started with discussions with all elected members and with staff. The discussions resulted in retaining the vision and four themes for the council in the original Plan. The council then updated its commitments and refined success measures.
13. There was no public consultation specifically on the development of these Plans. However, the results of the local listening events and ongoing

engagement with communities as part of service design work fed into the process. The sessions with partners, staff and elected members were also used to understand local needs and identify further actions required.

### **The council highlighted significant challenges ahead when communicating the new Council Plan to the public**

**14.** When communicating the new Council Plan, the council sent a clear message about the challenges ahead to the public. It issued a media briefing in advance of its budget-setting meeting, highlighting that 'the scale of the problem for 2023/24 is unprecedented' and to deliver the priorities set out in the Council Plan, the council 'will have to make some very painful decisions'. With staff, the council held a number of sessions to discuss challenges the council is facing and opportunities going forward.

### **The council has identified performance measures to monitor progress with its priorities**

**15.** Our [Best Value Assurance Report](#) (BVAR, published in July 2022) highlighted that 'the council has an improving performance management framework but progress on embedding this has been slow'. In response, the council has been progressing the Performance-Led Council (PLED) approach. In both the Community Plan and Council Plan, the council has identified success measures with the associated targets, (where applicable) for the plan period (Year Three and Five for the Council Plan and Year Three, Five and Eight for the Community Plan). This was applied for each commitment across the over-arching themes. An annual performance report was presented to the Council in September 2023. We will monitor how effective the new arrangement is at enhancing performance management and reporting.

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# Citizen and community engagement

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## The council aims to work more closely with communities to deliver its vision and priorities

16. Recovery from the pandemic will require councils to work alongside their local communities more. There must be a focus on getting the services people need in place as pressures and stresses escalate and impact the day to day lives of individuals and communities.
17. Councils, with their community planning partners, have a responsibility to ensure that people and communities are able to be fully involved in the decisions that affect their everyday lives.
18. Early and meaningful engagement and effective collaboration with communities to identify and understand local needs, and in decisions that affect the planning and delivery of services should be a core part of determining a council's vision and priorities.
19. The new Community Plan highlights that 'the role of our communities remains central to the achievement of our shared vision'. The council and partners have committed to 'enable inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe communities across Angus'. The Council Plan adopts this CPP priority and is committed to:
  - engage with communities to support their ambitions to deliver on local aspirations
  - maximise funding opportunities and grants to the Third Sector and communities to support their ambitions to deliver services
20. To monitor progress, the council will annually report on the four success measures related to these two priorities, including the number of community groups receiving capacity building support to deliver services in the community and the amount of funding distributed to third sector.

## The council is working towards a consistent approach to community engagement

21. The [BVAR](#) acknowledged that 'the council and its partners are committed to meaningful engagement with communities', using 'a range of approaches' and the council has continued to build on this. The recent example includes co-creating a combined community hub and library in Monifieth with communities.



**22.** However, the BVAR also highlighted that ‘a council-wide approach is not yet in place’. In response, the council has made progress. It has now developed a Communication, Engagement and Consultation Policy. To support the implementation of the policy, the council:

- has created a new engagement portal site and staff training modules.
- has adopted a national template (VOICE) to standardise an engagement process.
- is planning to appoint an Engagement Ambassador from each service.

**23.** The council is also considering how best it can involve communities in the budget-setting process, including participatory budgeting, and support communities in the Community Asset Transfer process. It is at the early stages of embedding all these pieces into practice but together this will help the council engage communities more effectively.

### **The council is developing a targeted partnership approach with communities, building on lessons learnt from Covid**

**24.** The [BVAR](#) recognised that ‘strong existing partnerships enabled the Angus Community Planning Partnership to respond quickly to the challenges to the Covid-19 pandemic’. It featured the establishment of the effective Humanitarian Assistance Angus Response Team (HAART) leading to a ‘leaner responsive body called the ‘Angus Response Collaborative’.

**25.** From this foundation, the council is developing a targeted, preventative approach with communities and aims to make significant savings through efficiencies and greater focus of resources to address need. There is an underlying recognition that ‘as our budgets reduce significantly in real terms, our services change significantly and the demands on the council increase, we must work more closely with communities to target our resources.’ The Community Plan reflects this shift of focus towards a preventative approach, committing to ‘tackling problems, identifying issues before they become a problem’.

**26.** To achieve this, the council will be conducting a service design exercise, building on the initial service design initiatives (carried out in 2021/22), in areas such as child poverty (Paragraph 32). This will help the council identify needs, gaps in services currently available and opportunities for more joined-up working across the council/ with partners as well as realising further savings. Engagement with communities will be part of this to consider what future services will look like and allow communities to shape service design and delivery.

**27.** The lessons learnt from Covid also resulted in the CPP simplifying its governance structure. In February 2023, the CPP Board agreed to remove the Strategic Group, integrating its function into the Board. The aim is to cut

down the time commitment and provide more opportunities for partners to get involved.

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# Reducing inequalities and tackling climate change

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## The councils' priorities include a focus on reducing inequalities

- 28.** Council priorities are expected to reflect the Best Value expectations that all activity should contribute to tackling poverty, reducing inequality and promoting fairness, respect and dignity for all citizens, alongside a focus on sustainable development, including climate change.
- 29.** The Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022 report says that the impact of the pandemic and service disruption have been felt most strongly by those already experiencing inequality. Councils have worked hard and adapted to maintain service delivery but those most in need of support are still being affected. Councils must evaluate these impacts so that recovery and renewal supports those most affected and addresses inequalities.
- 30.** The Community Plan has a strong focus on reducing inequalities, which is supported by four specific commitments under 'Caring for our People':
- Reduce inequalities in all our communities
  - Provide the best start in life for children
  - Create more opportunities for people to live well and achieve their personal goals
  - Improve physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- 31.** The Council Plan adopts those commitments and identifies council-specific actions, such as maximising the uptake of universal support available for families and protecting those in our communities who are at risk.
- 32.** The [BVAR](#) highlighted a number of council initiatives to address inequalities across different communities. Working with partners and equality groups, the council has continued to take actions as reported in its latest Equalities Mainstreaming Report for 2023-2025. The examples include:
- Angus Disability Forum, which the council chairs, has been involved in policy design and delivery, recently their input increased accessibility to the council website.
  - The council and partners remain committed to reducing gender-based violence via the multi-agency Angus Violence against Women Partnership, involving partners, the third sector and women's groups. Also, building on the successful delivery of Glen Clova pilot

project, which support women, delivering a trauma responsive and personalised service, the council has approved funding of £169,000 to continue to fund the activity for 2023/24 in its budget meeting in March 2023.

- The council and partners have adopted a service design approach to reduce child poverty. Engagement with around 500 people with real-life experience identified further actions to be taken. This includes better linking in the council and partners' services and improving accessibility to service such as DWP, housing, revenues and benefits/welfare rights.

## **The council and partners have been working closely to address poverty and inequalities in the post-Covid recovery and cost-of-living crisis**

**33.** The council and partners have been working together to support post-Covid recovery and to address the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. In September 2022, the council updated its Recovery and Renew Strategic Framework to incorporate actions in relation to the cost-of-living crisis. The Framework, originally developed in 2021 during the pandemic, sets out priority areas to be addressed in line with the previous Council Plan, covering four overarching themes (Economy, People, Place and Our Business). To provide targeted support to local businesses and low-income families, the council has set a focus on five areas for the allocation of the Scottish Government's Local Authority Covid-19 Economic Recovery (LACER) funding of £1.7 million:

- Child poverty
- Fuel poverty/Cost of living
- Food poverty
- Climate change/Transport poverty
- Town Centres

**34.** Examples of the partnership actions include the delivery of six cost-of-living roadshows across the council area. The events were well-attended, attracting over 600 people. Working collaboratively with more than 20 stakeholders, including partners, the third sector and communities, those roadshows effectively helped low-income families find out what support is available to aid their living costs, including income and disability benefits, bills and allowances, housing and travel.

## **The council continues to develop its approach to equalities**

**35.** The council introduced a joint Equality Impact Assessment/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment in January 2021 to ensure any policy development is compliant with equalities legislation. Since then, it has taken steps to ensure assessments are conducted consistently. This includes:

- Putting new guidance and training in place for staff/ elected members
- Appointing Equality Impact Assessment Champions from each service/ elected members
- Presenting results of the assessments alongside budget proposals/ new policies at the relevant committees and publishing them as part of the committee papers, with the process overseen by Senior Practitioner (Equalities)

**36.** The council is currently reviewing how the assessments are presented to the committees and is planning to digitise the whole process. As part of this, it is exploring ways of integrating children's rights and other human rights considerations into the current assessments.

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## Recommendation 1

The council should further develop its approach to equality assessment to ensure overall consistency and allow effective delivery of priorities in the Council Plan

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### In the new Council Plan, the council is committed to achieving net zero by 2045

**37.** Around two-thirds of councils have formally declared a climate emergency, and COSLA's Blueprint for Local Government states that climate change is a 'greater threat than COVID'. The Scottish Government has recently published guidance on public sector leadership on the global climate emergency to help public bodies in leading climate action. Addressing the climate emergency and setting actions to achieve net zero will need to be a key element of councils' recovery and renewal from the pandemic.

**38.** In March 2020, the council adopted the Scottish Government's national net zero targets for its regional emissions, aiming to achieve a 75 per cent reduction by 2030, 90 per cent by 2040 and net zero by 2045. The Community Plan recognises that 'addressing climate change is now a key priority for the partnership', committing to 'take action to address climate change to ensure communities are sustainable.' To meet this end, the Council Plan specifies four council actions:

- Take action to mitigate against climate change by delivering our Transition to Net Zero Action Plan 2022 to 2030 and leading on the delivery of a Sustainable Energy Climate Action Plan [SECAP] for Angus to reduce area wide emissions
- Reduce our energy use through a reduction in our property estate coupled with good management to reduce wasting energy

- Deliver efficient waste services and encourage more recycling and cleaner streets
- Enhance and restore Angus Biodiversity, corporately and with a range of stakeholders.

**39.** At its budget setting meeting in March 2023, the council agreed to invest £1 million from uncommitted General Fund reserves to help accelerate progress with those actions already committed.

**40.** The council has made good progress in areas such as nature restoration to enhance biodiversity, working closely with partners, experts, landowners and communities. However, it also recognises that more needs to be done, acknowledging that as a smaller council, limited capacity has been one of the issues. For example, the council and partners could work together better at the CPP level, taking a more joined-up and integrated approach. To address area-wide emissions, the council led the development of the SECAP, involving partners, businesses, the third sector and communities. While the Plan provides a clear direction of travel, the council needs to sustain commitments from those stakeholders to work towards its target.

**41.** The council has started to review progress made with its two plans ([paragraph 38, first bullet](#)) towards next steps. The outcomes will be reported to the council in November. The council is facing significant financial challenges, which means that opportunities for further investment are limited. It will require realistic plans and improved partnership working. We will continue to monitor how effectively the council will plan and take actions to achieve its target.

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# Alignment of delivery plans

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## The council has aligned its strategic plans with the Community Plan and needs to develop its directorate service planning arrangements

- 42.** Making the best use of public resources is at the heart of delivering Best Value. With clear plans and strategies in place, and with sound governance and strong leadership, a council will be well placed to ensure that all of its resources are deployed to achieve its strategic priorities, meet the needs of its communities and deliver continuous improvement.
- 43.** As noted paragraph 10 the Angus Community Planning Partnership agreed a refreshed Community Plan for 2022-2030, identifying 11 priorities for the council and partners. The Community Plan sets out the clear strategic direction, priorities and outcomes which have been agreed for delivery with community planning partners.
- 44.** In March 2023, the council approved a Council Plan for 2023-2028, making thirty commitments specifically for the council.
- 45.** The Council Plan adopts the Community Plan's vision and three overarching priority themes and adds a council-specific theme, 'Angus Council is Efficient and Effective'. While the vision and four themes remain unchanged from previously, the new plan presents a clearer alignment with the Community Plan, providing a sharper focus on how the council aims to achieve the vision which is shared with partners.
- 46.** The council are using the implemented Performance Led council (PLED) approach to demonstrate how it will deliver its priorities through its directorates. PLED Stages 1 and 2 are now complete for all services and are becoming adopted practice. Stages 3 & 4 are in progress with a Data Maturity Assessment having recently been completed. Detailed service plans are essential to demonstrate how the council deliver on the priorities set out in the Council Plan. The service plans within PLED in some instances have been reported to members formally (e.g. Education) with others just being considered as part of the Council Plan reporting arrangements.

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## Recommendation 2

To reflect good practice, the council should ensure detailed service plans are publicly available which clearly and comprehensively demonstrate how services will deliver the priorities set out in the Council Plan.

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## **The budget and saving plans are aligned to Council Plan priorities. The council need to ensure more community engagement to allow it to meet its participatory budgeting targets**

- 47.** The council has well-established budget setting process with member-led working groups that develop annual budgets with help from officers. The council's budget proposals are aligned to its strategic priorities and objectives. In March 2023 the budget was approved alongside the Council Plan, the Finance & Change Plan 2023-26 and the Workforce Plan 2023-28.
- 48.** The council has established a corporate approach for ongoing opportunities for participation and engagement with the public – including Participatory Budgeting (PB). Following an evaluation of the PB process up to March 2022, a change in approach was made for 2022/23 onwards. This moves away from PB grants, to identifying areas of mainstream budget that can have greater community influence in how they are spent. The approach is now finalised and ready to be rolled out to services.
- 49.** There was no specific engagement and consultation with the public on the development of plans and budgets in 2023/24 as was undertaken in previous years. This was due in the main to the significant changes in the budget approach in 2023/24 where the finance and change plan was developed in conjunction with the Council Plan and workforce plans but was also affected by the work required to balance the budget in the face of huge inflationary pressures. The PB approach highlighted in paragraph 48 will be used for future years budget setting processes.

## **The council are taking an innovative approach when considering how services will be delivered in the future but is yet to develop its long-term financial planning framework.**

- 50.** The council has delivered significant financial savings in recent years through its change programme, including comprehensive service reviews. Now increasing financial pressures mean even more radical change is required to the range and scale of services and how they are delivered.
- 51.** The Finance and Change Plan 2023-26 is an accessible summary of the financial challenges the council faces and the plans in place to address these in the medium term. The Finance & Change Plan approved in March 2023 sets out very challenging targets for the savings which need to be made over the next 3 years to keep the council's finances in balance. The amount of the savings required and the speed at which they need to be made is a concern to elected members and senior officers and will impact significantly on the services the Council is able to provide.
- 52.** The change plan proposals for change are focused on:
- Organisation Design/Service Changes
  - Increased Cost Recovery



- Preventative Activity Delivered through a Targeted Partnership Approach
- Customer Service Change

**53.** The council aim to develop a long-term financial plan framework by September 2023, setting out the main factors and pressures affecting the council's financial position. A financial resilience assessment and financial sustainability assessment will be part of this long-term framework.

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### Recommendation 3

As recommended in the Best Value Assurance Report, the council should develop its long-term financial planning framework.

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#### **The council's workforce plan is aligned to its corporate priorities and the potential changes required in delivery of service through its change programme although the council has yet to develop directorate workforce plans**

**54.** The Workforce Plan 2023-28 approved alongside the Council Plan and Finance & Change Plan in March 2023 provides a strategic workforce overview. The council acknowledges that services currently provided and the way they are provided may change over the next few years as the council works more closely and effectively with partners, stakeholders and communities with the council being a facilitator rather than a sole provider of services. The plan sets out how the council will review the workforce in line with changing ways of working; and retain and develop its employees to meet current and future workforce requirements and changes to service delivery.

**55.** Workforce pressures and shortages will impact on the council's ability to deliver services, so it is essential that there is ongoing monitoring to support the council in taking any necessary steps timeously. The plan includes a workforce action plan that involves undertaking a skills audit of the council's workforce and highlights issues at a directorate level where action is planned. The plan also includes specific actions including:

- Implement a digital skills development strategy
- Implement a data skills programme
- Develop trauma informed awareness and skills in our workforce
- Develop IT systems which provide managers with the data required to enable effective workforce profiling and planning
- Identify likely future gaps in workforce and introduce a programme of development to prepare for filling these gaps.

56. These actions feed into service planning arrangements for directorates through PLED including action around recruitment, retention and succession planning. The council acknowledges the need to develop its Directorate workforce planning arrangements. Officers indicated that this is scheduled to commence later this year.

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## Recommendation 4

The council should develop its Directorate workforce planning arrangements to ensure sufficient focus on recruitment, retention and succession planning as service delivery transforms.

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### **The council has a well-developed framework for considering and approving capital projects in line with council priorities. The council should continue to ensure that any capital slippage is not impacting adversely on its ability to deliver services.**

57. The Capital Strategy 2023/24 along with a report on the Long-Term Affordability of Capital Investment plans was approved along with the Council Plan in March 2023 and is based on the 5-year investment framework developed and maintained by the Policy & Budget Strategy Group (PBSG).
58. The framework is in place to allow for existing investment needs to be identified, new capital investment proposals to be brought forward, an affordable and sustainable capital programme to be determined and ongoing delivery to be monitored. Any capital project bids should connect with what is in the directorates asset management plans and also reflect the council's corporate priorities and objectives.
59. The Capital Project Monitoring Group review capital project progress on an ongoing basis. Slippage is still being seen in capital programmes with a 20% underspend against a general fund budget of £29.6m in 2022/23 (underspend estimated to be £6.1 million). Monitoring reports to members are detailed in relation to under/overspends in each area and the reasons for delay. The main areas of slippage are where projects have been delayed for specific reasons into future years and as such officers consider there to be no impact on the council's infrastructure available to deliver services.

### **A digital strategy is being reviewed and updated to ensure it aligns with council priorities**

60. The 2022 BVAR highlighted that *the council has a "digital first" ambition to ensure services are easily accessible on a 24/7 basis. This is linked to the digital strategy, which in turn is aligned to the councils four priorities. The strategy is reviewed annually with the next update due in May 2022.*
61. The March 2021 Digital Strategy was not reviewed in May 2022 and is extant with officers currently reviewing and updating the strategy. The

council should take this opportunity to ensure the refreshed strategy reflects the new Council Plan and priorities. This is to be considered by members later this year.

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## **Recommendation 5**

The digital strategy requires to be updated and approved by members to ensure it reflects the current Council Plan and priorities.

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# Leadership

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## **The council has strong leadership with elected members, working well with each other and in partnership with officers.**

**62.** Effective leadership from councillors, the chief executive and senior officers, is key to councils achieving their objectives and providing clear strategic direction. The complex local government environment means collaborative leadership, working with partners, communities and citizens to improve outcomes is more important than ever.

**63.** Leaders should demonstrate behaviours and working relationships that foster a culture of cooperation, and a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation. Good conduct and behaviours when working together are crucial. Working relationships between members and between members and officers should be constructive and productive. Councillors should show a commitment to agreed council priorities and work together to achieve them.

**64.** In May 2022, local government elections were held across Scotland. Twenty-eight councillors were elected to represent the eight wards of Angus Council. Following the election, Angus Council is now led by an SNP / Independent coalition administration group. No single party has an overall majority for the council.

**65.** The Council is supported by the following main committees:

- Children and Learning
- Civic Licensing
- Communities
- Development Management Review
- Development Standards
- Policy and Resources
- Scrutiny and Audit

**66.** The Chief Executive is supported in the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) by the Depute Chief Executive, Director of Legal and Democratic Services, Director of Infrastructure and Environment, Director of HR, OD Digital Enablement, IT and Business Support, Director of Finance, Director of Children, Families and Justice, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, Director of Strategic Policy, Transformation and Public Sector Reform,

Director of Vibrant Communities and Sustainable Growth and the Chief Officer of Angus Health and Social Care Partnership.

67. Officers and elected members work well together and understand their respective roles. This allows for constructive and professional working relationships.

### **There is an ongoing programme of training and development for elected members**

68. Leaders need to be skilled in effective strategic thinking, decision-making and collaborative working and able to learn lessons from new ways of working. Councillors and officers must be clear on their roles in setting the vision and planning for its delivery.
69. Following the 2022 elections, senior officers worked with elected members on a comprehensive induction training programme. Subsequent training and briefings have been undertaken on a regular basis. Recent requests from members for training have included PLED and the Power BI reporting tool which will support analysis of performance data.

### **There is effective collaborative working between members and with members and officers towards the achievement of the priorities**

70. The initial development of priorities for the Council Plan started with discussions with elected members across the parties to obtain council-wide agreement of the key issues for the council going forward. These discussions formed part of the budget setting process to allow an understanding of the impact of decisions that contribute to the achievement of the priorities set.

### **The council's leadership demonstrates a collective support for self-evaluation and continuous improvement**

71. Our [Best Value Assurance Report](#) (BVAR, published in July 2022) highlighted that 'the council has an improving performance management framework but progress on embedding this has been slow'. In response, the council has been progressing the Performance-Led Council (PLED) approach. As part of the first two stages in the PLED approach each service has completed a self-assessment through the How Good Is Our Council (HGIOC) framework (or equivalent self-assessment process) to drive improvement.
72. The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) data from the Improvement Service is used to demonstrate how the council compares to others and how lessons could be learned. The latest LGBF data was reported to members in June 2023 giving a high-level appraisal of how the council was performing in relation to comparators.
73. At a high level the 2021/22 LGBF data on the council, published by the [Improvement Service](#) in early 2023, shows that the council's performance against the 2021/22 LGBF continues to be mixed. There is good and

improving performance in some areas but also scope for improvement in others. The data shows that 33% of the council's indicators are in the top quartile however 29% are in the bottom quartile. The report to members highlights the best and worst performing indicators by rank, and those with the greatest improvement or deterioration over a five-year period.

**74.** Due to the time lag in the LGBF information being available, members are directed to reports where performance has already been considered in the respective areas (e.g. Annual Performance Report considered in September 2022). The LGBF data is used by services as part of PLED to provide trend analysis for performance data and highlight areas where performance improvement is required.

### **The council has made satisfactory progress on recommendations reported in the 2022 BVAR. The continued development of the PLED programme ensuring effective performance reporting against the Council Plan is now key**

**75.** The 2022 BVAR concluded that the council has strong leadership by elected members, working well with each other and in partnership with officers. The council was urged that this leadership - supported by effective decision-making and scrutiny - be maintained to face the significant financial challenges ahead and the continuing need to make difficult decisions about service delivery.

**76.** In response to the BVAR the Council approved a Best Value Action Plan in September 2022. Progress of the improvement plan has been reported to members in June 2023 highlighted that four out of eight actions were complete. The council has yet to complete its implementation of the PLED programme which will improve the use of performance information and better demonstrate the impact of improvement actions with phases 3 and 4 of the process planned to be implemented by 31 December 2023. Revised timescales were also agreed for the remaining outstanding actions including:

- Angus Health & Social Care Partnership to ensure financial planning is aligned with Strategic Plan: target date for completion is extended to 31 August 2023
- Develop a Place Strategy for Angus which will help to prioritise service delivery: target date for completion is extended to 31 October 2024
- Develop long-term financial planning framework: target date for completion is extended to 30 September 2023.

**77.** Within the completed actions was the establishment of a corporate approach for ongoing opportunities for participation, engagement with the public – including Participatory Budgeting. Officers highlighted that the process was not used within the 2023/24 budget process but is now planned for the 2024/25 budget with the council creating a new engagement portal site (paragraph 22).

## Service performance

**78.** The 2022 BVAR concluded that the council's performance has improved or been maintained across three of the four key priority areas within its Council Plan. But in its priority area of the local economy, where many indicators do not have performance information available, there were already challenging performance issues before March 2020. We will report on the council's most recent service performance in the 2022/23 Annual Audit Report. We will aim to reflect on 2022/23 service performance reported by the council as part of its Annual Performance Report.

# Appendix 1

## Improvement Action plan

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
<p><b>1. Equality assessments</b></p> <p>The council is currently reviewing how the assessments are presented to the committees and is planning to digitise the whole process. As part of this, it is exploring ways of integrating children and other human rights considerations into the current assessments.</p> <p><i>Risk – equality assessments are inconsistent and do not consider all relevant aspects.</i></p>	<p>The council should further develop its approach to equality assessment to ensure overall consistency and allow effective delivery of priorities in the Council Plan.</p>	<p>The new digital process for EIAs, FSDs and children’s rights will be finalised, then piloted and in place for the end of October 2023.</p> <p>Senior Practitioner – Equalities</p>
<p><b>2. Service plans</b></p> <p>The council are using the implemented Performance Led council (PLED) approach to demonstrate how it will deliver its priorities through its services. Detailed service plans are essential to demonstrate how the council deliver on the priorities set out in the Council Plan. The service plans within PLED in some instances have been reported to members formally (e.g. Education) with others just being considered as part of the Council Plan reporting arrangements.</p> <p><i>Risk - there is a lack of clarity and accountability over how the priorities set out in the Council Plan will be delivered.</i></p>	<p>To reflect good practice, the council should ensure detailed service plans are publicly available which clearly and comprehensively demonstrate how services will deliver the priorities set out in the Council Plan.</p>	<p>The Council will provide an appropriate level of service plan information, linked to the current Council Plan priorities, as part of its budget setting papers for FY 2024/25 (February/ March 2024).</p> <p>Service Leader (Governance &amp; Change)</p>



### 3. Long term financial planning

The Best Value Assurance Report recommended that the council should develop its long-term financial planning framework. The council extended the completion date for this to September 2023.

*Risk - the council is unable to demonstrate its long-term financial sustainability.*

The council should develop its long-term financial planning framework.

The Council's first Long Term Financial Planning Framework was considered at the meeting of the Council on 7 September 2023.

Director of Finance

### 4. Directorate workforce plans

The Workforce Plan 2023-28 approved alongside the Council Plan and Finance & Change Plan in March 2023 provides a strategic workforce overview. The plan sets out how the council will review the workforce in line with changing ways of working, retain and develop its employees to meet current and future workforce requirements and changes to service delivery. However, workforce planning at a Directorate level has yet to be developed.

*Risk - there is a lack of clarity and accountability over how the council's workforce will deliver services.*

The council should develop its Directorate workforce planning arrangements to ensure sufficient focus on recruitment, retention and succession planning as service delivery transforms.

Workforce planning sessions are underway with Service Leaders and Directors. They are focused on improving our use of people data, identifying likely requirements and actions needed to ensure resilience and development of services. Directorate plans will be completed January – March 2024.

Leader of HR ,OD and Business Support

## 5. Digital Strategy

The Best Value Assurance Report highlighted the council's intention to annually update its digital strategy. This review has not been undertaken in the last two years with a review planned for later this year. The current digital strategy therefore pre-dates the approved Council Plan.

*Risk - the council does not have appropriate strategies in place to support delivery of the Council Plan*

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The council should update its digital strategy to ensure it reflects the current Council Plan and priorities.

A new digital strategy is currently being prepared and will be ready to be considered by committee by the end of the calendar year, 2023.

Service Leader, Digital Enablement and IT

# Angus Council - Best Value thematic work in councils 2022-23

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