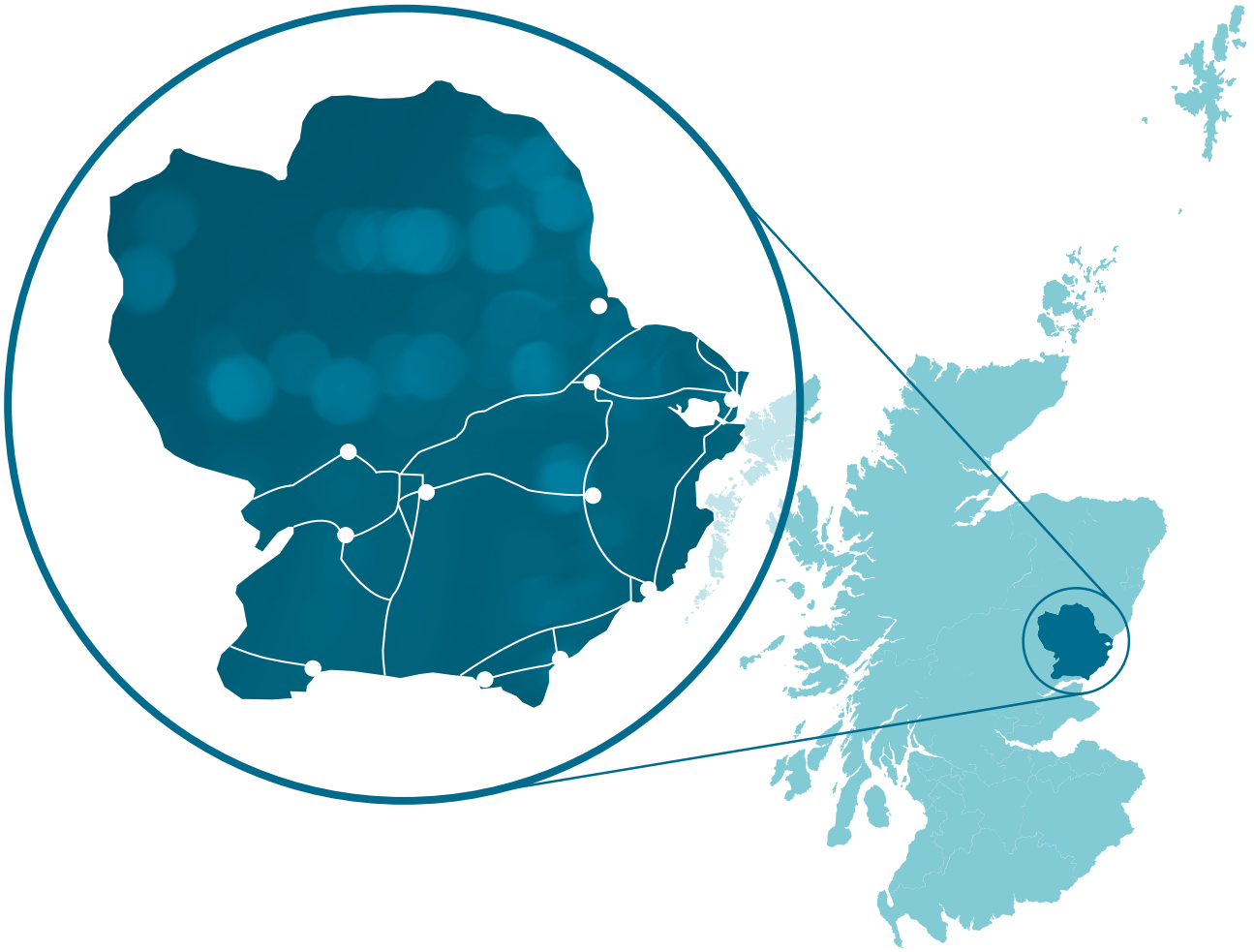
Best Value Assurance Report

Angus Council



ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Prepared by Audit Scotland
July 2022

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The Accounts Commission holds councils, health and social care integration joint boards and other local government bodies in Scotland to account and helps them improve. We operate impartially and independently of councils and of the Scottish Government, and we meet and report in public.

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- carrying out national performance audits to help councils improve their services
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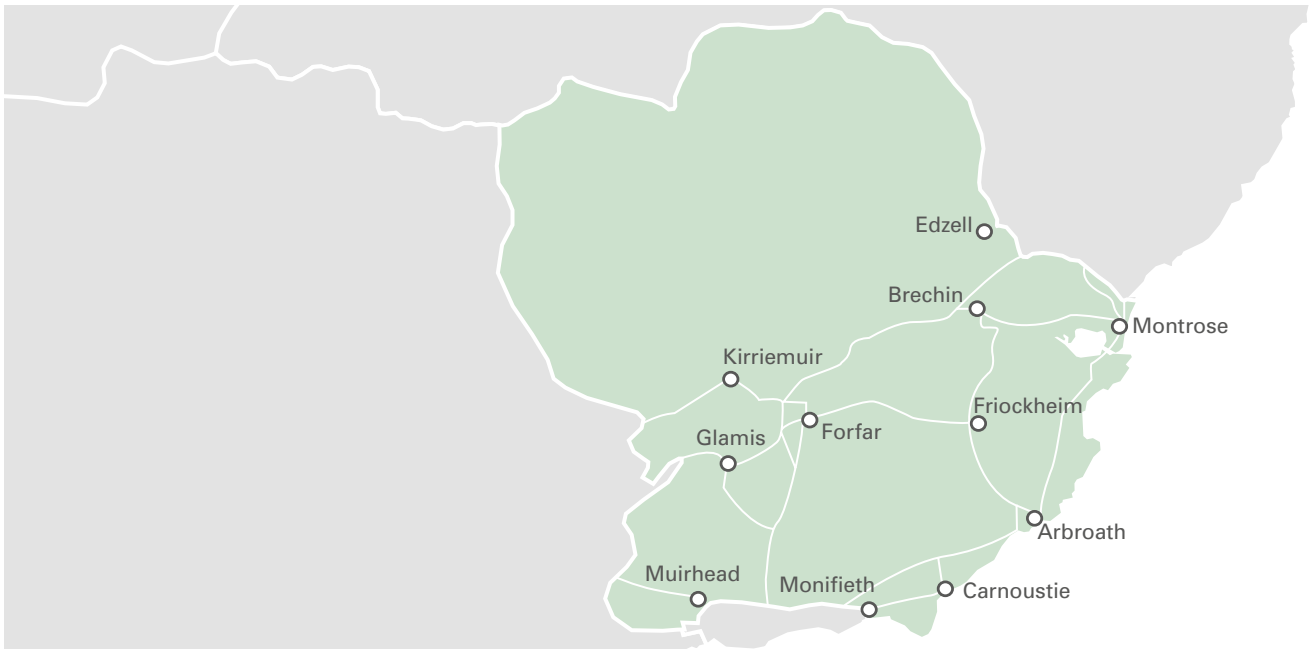


2,182 square kilometres

Area

115,820

Population
(mid-year 2020 estimate)

28

Elected members **2017**
10 Independent
9 Scottish National Party
8 Conservative and Unionist
1 Liberal Democrat
0 Labour

28

Elected members **2022**
7 Independent
13 Scottish National Party
7 Conservative and Unionist
0 Liberal Democrat
1 Labour

7,695

Council houses
(March 2021)

72.3%

Employment rate
(2020/21)

£313.4 million

2022/23
Revenue budget

£43.2 million

2022/23
Capital budget
(including £16.1m housing revenue account)

Commission findings

1. The Commission accepts the Interim Controller of Audit's report on Best Value in Angus Council and we endorse his recommendations.
2. We are pleased with an impressive pace of improvement demonstrated by Angus Council since our previous Best Value reports in 2016 and 2010.
3. There has been strong leadership by elected members, working well with each other and in partnership with officers. With a new council in place following the May 2022 elections, we urge 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.
4. To help this, we underline the Interim Controller's recommendations that the council put its performance management framework fully in place and introduce its vitally important long-term financial planning framework.
5. We commend the council in how it has continued to serve the people of Angus well in the face of the pandemic, not least its focus on tackling the exacerbating effect on inequalities experienced in communities. A strong record of collaboration with its partners, including progress with locality planning, is a good basis for the council to engage more fully with its communities, which it identifies as needing to develop. We also urge continued attention on those areas that the council itself recognises as requiring improvement, including housing and the Council Plan priority of economy.
6. The Commission encourages the council to maintain its positive momentum by addressing the Interim Controller's recommendations. The Interim Controller will monitor and report progress through the annual audit.

Audit approach

1. The statutory duty of Best Value was introduced in the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. The audit of Best Value is a continuous process, reported each year through the Annual Audit Report. The Controller of Audit also presents a Best Value Assurance Report to the Accounts Commission at least once during the five-year (currently extended to six-year) audit appointment for each council. The council's recent Best Value audit timeline is outlined in the Appendix (page 52). This is the first assurance report on Angus Council and it reflects on the council's progress since the Best Value audit report 2016.

2. This report seeks to provide the Commission with assurance on the council's statutory duty to deliver Best Value. We are looking for councils to demonstrate Best Value by showing that they are continuously improving how they deliver services. The pace and depth of this improvement is key to how well councils meet their priorities in the future. Depth of improvement is the extent to which services implement improvements across a council.

3. Our work covers many Best Value themes in the statutory guidance but does not cover them all. Our audit approach is proportionate and risk based, and it reflects the context, risks and performance of the individual council. It also draws on the information from audit and scrutiny work we have carried out in previous years, as shown in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1

Assessing Best Value across the audit appointment period

Best Value characteristics	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Performance, outcomes and improvement		✓	✓		✓	
Vision and leadership			✓			
Governance and accountability	✓		✓			
Effective use of resources	✓					
Partnership and collaborative working						✓
Working with communities				✓		
Sustainable development	✓					✓
Fairness and equality				✓		
Best Value Assurance Report						✓

Source: Audit Scotland

4. The 2020/21 Annual Audit Report was the starting point for our work. In keeping with this approach, we did some initial work to identify risks and council initiatives to build into the scope of our audit. This included:

- reviewing previous audit and inspection reports and intelligence
- reviewing key council documents and committee papers
- reviewing media coverage, including local press and relevant social media platforms
- meeting with senior officers.

5. Exhibit 2 shows the key areas of focus for our audit. The detailed audit work on these areas then included:

- document review and analysis of performance and outcomes data
- interviews with elected members and senior officers
- other discussions with staff and partner organisations.

Exhibit 2
Key areas of focus for our audit

Key areas of focus
How the council plans the use of its resources to support the delivery of its priorities, including reducing inequalities and ensuring sustainability. This includes the effectiveness of service planning, financial planning, asset management, workforce planning and digital/ICT strategy.
How the council works with partners to tackle its specific challenges (eg, ageing population; services across seven burghs and rural areas).
How the council encourages and supports community engagement, in setting its priorities and the delivery of services. This includes the effectiveness and impact of public engagement.
How the council's self-assessment framework drives continuous improvement and drives the council's Change Programme.
How effectively the council assesses its outcomes and performance and reports them to both elected members and the general public.

Source: Audit Scotland

Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the audit approach

6. Most of the desk-based work for this report was done between January and March 2022. Owing to Covid-19 restrictions the audit team held all interviews with key officers, elected members and partners remotely. Despite the restrictions on the on-site fieldwork, we were able to gather sufficient evidence to support the audit judgements in this report.

7. The pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to organisations across the country. It is still not known what long-term impacts these will have on populations and on the delivery of public services, but they will be significant and could continue for some time. The scope of our work covers the current impact of Covid-19 on the council where it is known.

Follow-up of the findings in this report

8. This is the final year of the current audit appointment. In the next audit appointment, the audit of Best Value will be integrated into the annual audit of the council, rather than requiring a separate Best Value Assurance Report. The council's auditors will follow up on the findings from this report and carry out more detailed audit work on Best Value characteristics as appropriate.

Acknowledgement

9. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and assistance provided to the audit team by all elected members, officers and other stakeholders during the audit.

Key messages

1 The council has demonstrated a good pace of improvement since the last Best Value report in 2016. It has reshaped services and is an organisation that is focused on its priorities, working well with partners and keen to learn from good practice.

2 The council and its partners have a clear vision for Angus. There is strong partnership working and collaboration. Partners across Angus worked well together to deliver services to those most in need during the Covid-19 pandemic. The council is looking to learn from others how to engage effectively with communities on the service redesign required.

3 The pandemic has increased existing inequalities, hitting the most disadvantaged groups hardest. Reducing inequality is a priority for the council and it is engaged in a range of local projects to provide support and increase opportunities for its most disadvantaged citizens.

4 The leader of the council and chief executive provide effective leadership. Officers and members have constructive working relationships. Effective arrangements are in place to support decision-making and public scrutiny. Elected members have worked together to make difficult decisions to deliver financial sustainability.

5 Angus Council has effective financial management and medium-term financial planning but has yet to fully develop its long-term financial plan. 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.

6 Annual performance reports are used to inform elected members and the public of progress against council priorities. These reports are improving year on year, but performance reporting needs to be more frequent to help drive improvement. Clearer links between performance data and the impact of improvement actions is also necessary.

7 Progress in embedding a council-wide performance management framework to drive improvement activity has been slow. Covid-19 disrupted progress. Further change is needed if the council is to realise its ambition to be a performance-led council.

8 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.

9 The Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicators for 2021/22 show a mixed picture, with good performance in areas such as waste management alongside the need for improvement in the key area of housing. The proportion of indicators in the top quartile is the highest since 2016/17.

10 Across the majority of areas the people of Angus are more satisfied with their council services than the Scottish average.

11 The Angus Health and Social Care Partnership is a key partner for the delivery of health and social care services. Good progress has been made in shifting care from hospitals to community and home-based care settings, but changes in the demand for care and recruitment challenges are resulting in unmet need. New models of service delivery are being introduced, but further change is needed to ensure services remain financially sustainable.

Part 1

Does the council have clear strategic direction?

The Community Plan sets out the strategic direction for the council and its partners.

The leader of the council and chief executive provide effective leadership.

Elected members have made difficult decisions to deliver financial sustainability.

Officers and elected members have constructive working relationships.

The council is looking to learn from others how to engage effectively with communities on the more radical service redesign that is now required.

The local context

10. Angus is in the east of Scotland between Dundee and Aberdeenshire. It extends from the east coast to Perth and Kinross on the west, and into the Angus Glens (and Cairngorms National Park) to the north.

11. The population of Angus is approximately 116,000. Most people (75 per cent in 2017) live in the seven towns of Montrose, Arbroath, Forfar, Kirriemuir, Brechin, Monifieth and Carnoustie. The rest of the population is spread across rural areas. Connectivity across Angus (in terms of both transport and digital access) is a key priority for the council and its partners.

12. Many people living in Angus commute to work outside Angus, principally in Dundee and Aberdeen. While the gross weekly wage for people working within the Angus council area is below the Scottish average, residents who commute outside this area typically earn higher wages.

13. Angus has some affluent areas alongside pockets of deprivation, particularly in Arbroath, Forfar and Brechin. Rural communities too often experience hidden poverty. Reducing inequality, particularly child poverty, is a key priority for the council and its partners.

14. Angus has a mixed economy with key sources of employment including agriculture, engineering, food and drink, oil and gas, and tourism. Manufacturing is

a significant element of the economy, employing 14.5 per cent of Angus workers, well above the Scottish average of 7.2 per cent. The Tay Cities Deal aims to encourage innovation, investment, and employment in the area, focusing on clean, low-carbon growth and agricultural technology (paragraph 121).

15. Life expectancy in Angus is higher than the Scottish average: 82.3 years for women and 78.5 years for men in Angus, compared with 81.0 years for women and 76.5 years for men in Scotland.

16. Between 2018 and 2028, Angus Council's population is projected to decrease by 0.8 per cent. In comparison the projected increase for Scotland as a whole is 1.8 per cent. Within Angus, more people are expected to live longer, with a projected increase of 30.3 per cent in those over 75 over the same period. This leads to additional impacts and pressures across health and social care services.

17. In the previous Best Value report, published in 2016, the Accounts Commission reported that the council should increase the pace and depth of change. Since then, the council has changed significantly, restructuring and decreasing in size (six per cent net reduction in staff numbers) and delivering significant savings (£45.4 million since 2016: two per cent of gross expenditure and 3-4 per cent of net expenditure each year).

The Community Plan sets out the clear strategic direction, priorities and outcomes which have been agreed for delivery with community planning partners

18. The Community Plan 2017–2030 (previously known as the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan) sets out a clear vision for Angus. The Community Plan has three cross-cutting themes: economy, people and place. In addition to the vision 'Angus is a great place to live, work and visit' the plan sets out three local priorities: reducing child poverty, improving mental health and wellbeing, and improving accessibility and digital connectivity. These priorities are reflected in local outcome measures (Exhibit 3, page 13).

19. The Community Plan is being reviewed after five years of operation including two years of the Covid-19 pandemic. The review started with a workshop in November 2021 and sign-off is due in June 2022. Community engagement sessions in March 2022 are informing the revised plan. As part of this review the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) will consider the impact of Covid-19 on priorities. As we have seen across Scotland, Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on populations with existing inequalities. This will be an important area for the CPP partners to address. Partners have agreed to keep the current three priorities and add a fourth, climate change.

Exhibit 3

Angus Community Planning Partnership Community Plan 2017–2030 strategic priorities

National Objectives	**Wealthier & Fairer**	**Smarter**	**Healthier**	**Safer & Stronger**	**Greener**
Our Vision	*Angus is a great place to live, work and visit*				
Our Priorities	Reducing Child poverty Improving mental health and well-being Improving accessibility and connectivity				
Our Cross-Cutting Themes	**Economy**	**People**	**Place**		
Our Local Outcomes	an inclusive and sustainable economy a reduced carbon footprint attractive employment opportunities more opportunities for people to achieve success an enhanced, protected and enjoyed natural and built environment the best start in life for children safe, secure, vibrant and sustainable communities a skilled and adaptable workforce improved physical, mental and emotional health and well-being				

Source: Angus Community Plan 2017-2030

The council and its community planning partners aligned their strategic plans with the Community Plan

20. The council's strategic priorities are set out in its Council Plan which is aligned to the Angus Community Plan 2017-2030. In 2017, the council revised its strategic plans to align its strategic priorities and budget strategy with its community planning outcomes. This helps ensure that its programme of transformational change is focused on key service delivery as well as the need to achieve the necessary savings. The planning and policy framework for Angus is shown in (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4

Angus planning and policy framework to deliver on the National Outcomes

Source: Angus Council Plan

21. The 2021-24 update of the Council Plan introduced the 'Strategy on a Page' summary of the council's overall purpose. This was co-produced with employees and targets activity around the four themes of Eliminate, Reduce, Raise and Create (Exhibit 5, page 15).

22. This continues the council's focus on priorities by identifying areas where it needs to invest or do more and where it could reduce or stop activities or deliver them more efficiently.

The leader of the council and chief executive provide effective leadership and a clear strategic direction

23. Angus Council has been controlled by a coalition administration between the Conservative Party, the Liberal Democrat member and six independent members since the 2017 local government elections. Although the composition of the administration group has changed, overall it has remained relatively stable since the last elections.

Exhibit 5
Angus Council's Strategy on a Page

Eliminate

Child Poverty
Eliminate children living in poverty through work with partners & business to intervene early, create economic opportunity, while also reducing costs and increasing income for people.

Barriers to Access
Eliminate barriers to accessing the right services at the right time, ensuring the availability of early support for individuals, families and businesses.

Inefficiency
Eliminate inefficiencies within activities, making the best use of resources and technologies, leading to a higher level of consistency and productivity.

Reduce

Climate Change
Reduce the impact of climate change by being a major contributor to achieving Scotland's national climate change goals, as leaders in clean growth, environmental stewardship and sustainability.

Duplication
Reduce unnecessary duplication and focus on areas of greatest need.

Bureaucracy
Reduce unnecessary bureaucracy wherever it is found, and it is legally permissible to do so.

Raise

Opportunities for Lifelong Learning
Raise opportunities for lifelong learning for all children, young people, adults, and the workforce, to enable progression in their learning.

Customer Service
Raise the quality of customer service through developing communication channels, underpinned by technology, which continues to provide opportunities for people to engage.

Wellbeing
Raise and promote the wellbeing and safety of communities and the workforce.

Create

Equity
Create equity by focusing services on those who need them most.

Stronger Partnerships
Create stronger partnerships through collaboration in the planning and delivery of services which benefit the people of Angus. This will include enabling and empowering community leadership.

Inclusive Culture
Create an inclusive culture by trusting and empowering employees, as well as ensure equality in the workforce.

Source: Angus Council Plan 2021-24

24. Officers and elected members work well together and understand their respective roles. This allows for constructive and professional working relationships. Following the 2017 elections, senior officers worked with elected members on an induction training programme. Subsequent training included developing and delivering a council-wide approach to decision-making focused on council priorities, rather than one based on political party or individual ward priorities. It will be important to retain this approach to decision-making with new council members following the May 2022 elections.

Members have made difficult decisions to deliver financial sustainability

25. The council has had to achieve significant savings to deliver a balanced budget and maintain financial sustainability. The Change Programme includes a range of projects to deliver savings and efficiencies across the council to ensure it meets current and future financial challenges. It also includes areas of investment designed to deliver service improvements. The Change Programme is integrated into the budget-setting process and is approved by the council each year as part of its budget setting meeting.

26. Some of the Change Programme savings options have been contentious and the council has had to make tough decisions. Following the 2017 election, strategic reviews of recycling centres and car parking charges were discussed and debated at length, with report recommendations rejected in favour of alternatives that delivered less savings. Since then the council has made difficult decisions to make financial savings and make best use of resources. This includes the decision to demolish and replace the former sheltered housing in Edzell with new energy-efficient social housing to meet the needs of current and future residents. This initially received negative reactions on local social media but is being progressed with ongoing engagement with the local community. The council will need to make further hard choices if it is to achieve financial sustainability in an increasingly constrained financial landscape.

The council has streamlined its management structure, decreasing senior management and increasing middle manager capacity

27. The council's management has been streamlined to achieve a small, flatter structure. Each council service has a director supported by service leaders (the equivalent of heads of service). The management structure is kept under review and adjusted as needed. For example, the combined post of director of finance and legal (created in 2018/19) was split into two posts after a year, as these services needed more director capacity than one person could deliver. In June 2021, the portfolios were further revised when the director of communities retired. The new portfolio created a standalone Vibrant Communities team and brought the Economic Development service into the renamed Vibrant Communities and Sustainable Growth Service. Streamlining the management structure has delivered necessary savings, but reduced capacity.

28. We are satisfied that the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) has the skills and expertise to deliver the council's strategic objectives and improvement plans. The CLT is supported by service leaders with a good understanding of how their service contributes to the Council Plan objectives. When the council streamlined its management structure it recognised the need to invest and support leadership skills. In addition to the training and personal development needs identified

through staff performance appraisals, the council's leadership, middle managers and first line managers forums provide opportunities for managers to meet and discuss strategic issues.

The council's committee structure supports effective scrutiny

29. The decision-making structure of the council has been in place since before May 2017. The committee structure includes two service committees (Communities and Children and Learning), the Policy and Resources Committee, Scrutiny and Audit Committee, Development Standards Committee, Development Management Review Committee and Civic Licensing Committee.

30. This structure provides effective scrutiny of decisions. Members have the opportunity for debate, treat each other with respect despite political differences and understand the respective roles and responsibilities of each committee. We have observed, through attendance at committees and review of committee reports, that officers act on elected members' feedback. This has resulted in improvements to committee reports to support scrutiny and decision-making. The committee structure and meeting arrangements work well.

31. If elected members want more detailed information to inform their decision-making they may form a member officer group. This is effective and has been used in several areas, including recycling centres and flood risk management. Likewise if the Scrutiny and Audit Committee wishes to examine an area in more detail than is practical in a committee meeting, it will convene a scrutiny panel.

32. The council has learned lessons from two governance reviews of decision-making, both relating to the former Lochside Leisure Centre. This building was originally considered a council asset. Following a judicial ruling, it is now classified as a common good asset. The former leisure centre was declared surplus when the Forfar Community Campus, which has community leisure facilities, opened. A decision to demolish the building owing to structural defects was revisited following the public response on social media. Internal audit reviewed the governance of the decision-making process. Subsequently some elected members requested an external review, which was carried out by Azets and reported in March 2021.

33. Both reviews recommended: improving the options appraisals provided to support decision-making; better recording of the discussion and rationale for decisions when considering options for a potentially surplus asset; and developing an exit strategy for vacating assets. Following the reviews there is evidence of lessons being learned, particularly in improved options appraisal reports. Elected members have commented on this improvement.

34. Public scrutiny has improved since our 2018/19 Annual Audit Report concluded that scrutiny in public meetings was light and recommended additional training to support members. Elected members are now holding management to account at public meetings, asking more questions of officers and of partner bodies who present reports for scrutiny.

35. Briefings (i) are useful as they allow elected members to discuss and ask questions in more detail than in a public meeting. It is important, however, that elected members are also open to public scrutiny by asking questions in public meetings, which are minuted as a public record. We have observed elected

Briefing

Private meeting where elected members can discuss a topic in more detail than a formal meeting agenda allows for. This can be useful for exploring and understanding technical areas.

members making this point when asking questions in committee meetings held after briefing sessions.

36. Angus Council has appropriate governance arrangements in place and our attendance at committees has confirmed that the level of scrutiny and challenge is appropriate and supports sound decision-making.

The council adapted its committee arrangements in response to the Covid-19 pandemic while retaining decision-making by elected members

37. In March 2020, the committee structure was suspended and arrangements adapted to provide an emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The council established a Special Arrangements Committee to ensure elected member decision-making continued during lockdown restrictions, alongside a Special Education Committee for education-related matters. Retaining decision making by democratically elected members rather than full delegation to unelected officers was an important consideration. The Special Arrangements Committee met three times between April and June 2020 before the normal committee cycle was re-established, in a virtual environment, in August 2020.

38. The council was one of the first to hold public meetings virtually. Meetings are streamed to the public on YouTube and recordings are available after each meeting. Meetings are by invitation only, but the public can make a deputation to the council or a committee meeting. While all committee meetings continue to be held virtually, the council is currently discussing a hybrid model. The council agreed to hold in-person meetings in May and June 2022, subject to compliance with any government guidance. This was to ensure newly elected members were given the opportunity to occupy the same physical space as they build relationships.

The council has an effective training programme to support elected members

39. The council has a training programme to support elected members to perform their role effectively. This includes comprehensive induction for new elected members, and further ongoing training. Members receive briefings on technical areas and on important legal or policy developments. Members also have access to training through their political parties and the Improvement Service. The council worked with prospective candidates in advance of the 2022 local government elections, allowing them to find out about the role from current councillors.

Part 2

How well is the council performing?

Services were adapted to focus on those with greatest need during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The council has improved or maintained its performance across key priority areas in the Council Plan, except for Economy. Many of these indicators do not have up-to-date information, but challenging performance issues existed before March 2020.

The Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicators for 2021/22 show mixed performance compared to other councils. The proportion of indicators in the top quartile is the highest since 2016/17.

Housing services need to improve given the critical role they play in reducing inequalities, increasing sustainability and tackling climate change. The council has plans in place to address this.

Across the majority of areas the people of Angus are more satisfied with council services than the Scottish average.

The council is developing its approach to being a 'Performance Led Council'. Progress on embedding the approach has been slow and the pace must now be increased to drive improvement.

The council has worked to improve the quality of its annual performance report since its first publication in 2018. Gaps in the data make it difficult to form a complete picture of its performance.

The council adapted services to ensure they were delivered to those in greatest need during the Covid-19 pandemic

40. The Accounts Commission's Local government in Scotland Overview 2021 describes how the Covid-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on all aspects of society, including the economy, jobs and people's physical and mental health. Councils have been at the centre of the response to the pandemic, supporting communities through these difficult times including administering multiple Scottish Government support schemes.

41. During the Covid-19 pandemic Angus Council continued to deliver services through staff homeworking and using online and telephone services. School provision continued during lockdown, including the provision of school hubs for vulnerable children and children of key workers. Household waste collections and burials continued, as did planning and building warrants services, with some additional digital processes introduced. Many other frontline council services moved to emergency service delivery only for periods of time. Staff volunteered to be redeployed to ensure services continued.

42. The council has changed how it provides a number of services, redeployed staff and increased digitalisation. Through its Agile programme the council had already introduced mobile and homeworking for many staff, but other services needed digital solutions. It developed online education services, supplied digital equipment to support home-based learning and moved registration services online. The council also set up a centralised mail scanning and distribution service at the start of lockdown and introduced additional governance procedures for handling sensitive and confidential items.

43. Environmental Consumer Protection's role adapted to include investigating the source of local Covid-19 outbreaks and advising businesses on changing restrictions. The cross-boundary response to the outbreak at the 2 Sisters Food Group factory, which was located in Perth and Kinross but affected workers living in Angus, was commended by the First Minister.

The council has improved or maintained performance across key priority areas in the Council Plan, except the Economy where many indicators do not have up-to-date information

44. Angus Council's first annual performance report (APR) on progress against the Council Plan was published in 2018. We had reported in 2016 that it was the only Scottish council not publishing an annual performance report.

45. The Council Plan priorities are Economy, People, Place and Our Council. The APR is the main way officers report performance to members against council priorities. It includes performance information over the previous five years to show trends, with case studies providing evidence-based examples of impact. The most recent report was published in September 2021.

46. Gaps in the data make it difficult to form a complete picture of the council's performance. And while the APR details performance trends for the council's priority areas it does not clearly state what action the council will take to improve areas where performance has declined. The council recognises this and is currently reviewing the performance indicators it uses, so that they reflect

meaningful performance information that is readily available. The 2022/23 Council Plan, agreed in March 2022, includes performance targets for the year.

47. Our review of the council's performance against its Council Plan priorities reveals a mixed picture. Key areas of improving performance over the five-year period include:

- Economy – more premises can access broadband (from 81 per cent to 92 per cent) which remains a priority area given the importance of digital connectivity.
- People – the percentage of looked-after children in both the family setting and within the Angus area has increased alongside an increase in the percentage of children accessing funded entitlement to early learning and childcare which is at 94 per cent.
- Place – overall performance is improving across six indicators including reducing the percentage of households experiencing fuel poverty (down from 33 per cent to 22 per cent) and increasing the proportion of waste being recycled (where Angus is ranked first in Scotland – paragraph 65).

48. Data is not available for ten indicators, five of which sit within the Economy portfolio. Covid-19 will have had a significant impact on this priority area and the council recognises this as an area to focus on in its post-pandemic recovery. Performance in some of these indicators, including new business survival beyond three years and new businesses coming into the area, was declining before the pandemic.

49. The council has seen a decline in the percentage of people employed in Angus (from 77 per cent to 72 per cent) and the council has set a challenging target of 78 per cent for 2021/22. Another area of improvement for the council is housing services (paragraph 70).

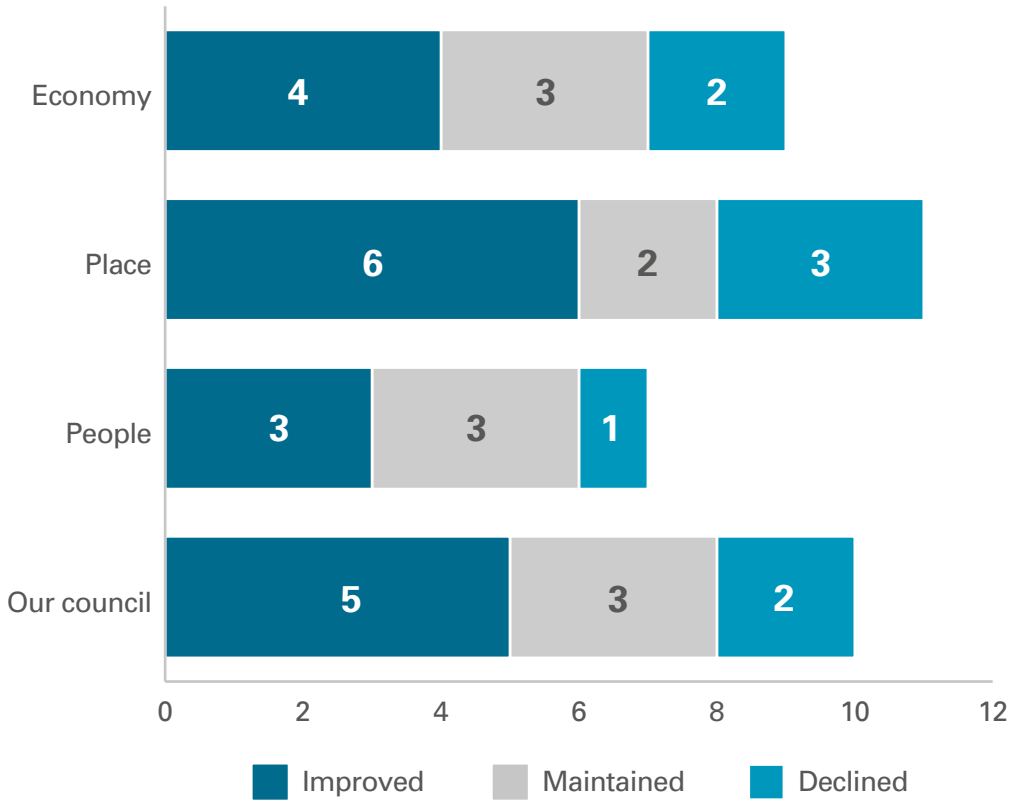
50. Overall the council has seen an improving trend in 18 of the 37 Council Plan performance indicators (49 per cent), with performance relatively static in 11 (30 per cent) and declining in eight (22 per cent), as shown in Exhibit 6 (page 22).

The council uses the Local Government Benchmarking Framework to evaluate its performance against other Scottish councils

51. Each year, the Improvement Service publishes its Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF). This brings together a wide range of performance information for all Scottish councils. It shows how well they are delivering services, the cost of services and residents' satisfaction. The LGBF contains a total of 101 performance, cost and satisfaction indicators across all council services to enable performance to be monitored over time.

52. The council uses the LGBF data to analyse and report its performance annually to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee, most recently in June 2021. The report sets out the council's performance under the LGBF service groupings and highlights areas where Angus's performance is significantly different from Scotland's national performance. It also explains to members the council's performance and the action proposed by individual services to improve

Exhibit 6
Council performance against its Council Plan performance indicators in 2020/21



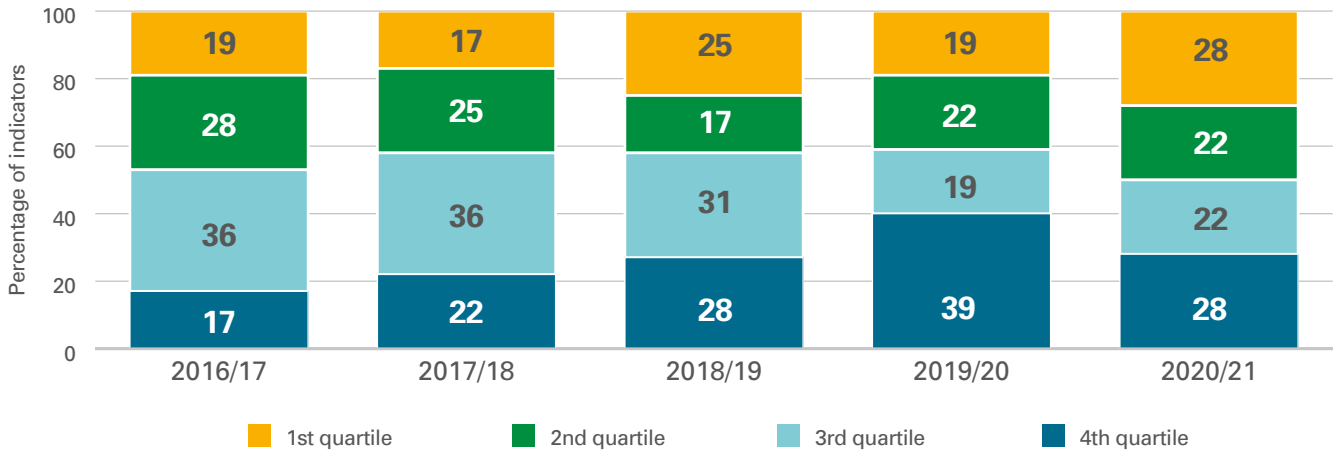
Source: Audit Scotland using Angus Council Annual Performance Report 2020/21

performance. The report also highlights that the council needs to explore the reason for the variation in its LGBF performance, which emphasises the importance of the performance-led council (PLED) programme (paragraph 59).

53. The LGBF allows relative performance to be assessed by dividing it into four quartiles, with quartile one representing top performance and quartile four representing poorest performance. Our performance analysis (Exhibit 7, page 23) compares mainly outcomes-based indicators between 2016/17 and 2020/21.

54. The council's performance against the 2020/21 LGBF continues to be mixed. There is good and improving performance in some areas such as waste management and recycling (paragraph 65), social care funding allocated using direct payments or personalised management budgets, the condition of operational council buildings and the time taken for planning application decisions. By contrast, there is poor performance in key areas such as housing (paragraph 70), road condition, proportion of people earning less than the living wage and town vacancy rates. The proportion of Angus Council's performance indicators in the top quartile is at 28 per cent, the highest over the five-year period.

Exhibit 7
LGBF quartile analysis for Angus Council



Notes:
1. The analysis is based on 36, mainly outcomes-based, indicators which were reported every year within the five-year period. The analysis excludes satisfaction and most cost-based indicators as high or low cost cannot be easily determined as positive or negative because these may be influenced by a council's priorities and local circumstances.
2. The LGBF 2020/21 data reflects the impact of the first year of Covid-19 on local government services.
3. Due to comparability issues, indicators related to education attainment have been excluded from this analysis.
4. The collection of some LGBF data included in the analysis was impacted by Covid-19 and the data for some councils in these indicators has been modelled.
5. Some columns may total to more or less than 100% due to rounding.

Source: Audit Scotland; Local Government Benchmarking Framework, Improvement Service, 2020/21

55. The council is aware of its strengths and areas for improvement across services. This includes using internal audit services to review rent arrears management and developing a housing service improvement action plan. The council used data to inform its response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This included regularly reviewing service delivery decisions to ensure resources were focused on priority areas. This has helped wider organisational understanding of the PLED principles by clearly demonstrating the value of data in informing decision. The council needs to further improve its self-awareness by fully implementing PLED.

The people of Angus are more satisfied with their council services than the Scottish average

56. The LGBF includes customer satisfaction data derived from the Scottish Household Survey. The LGBF data shows that service satisfaction has generally declined across Scotland. This is also the picture within Angus; however, in all but one area satisfaction levels are above the average for Scotland, as shown in Exhibit 8 (page 24).

Exhibit 8
Angus Council's performance against LGBF satisfaction indicators

Percentage of	Angus Council		Scotland
	2015-18	2017-20	2017-20
adults satisfied with local schools	77.0	74.5	71.8
adults supported at home who agree that their services and support had an impact in improving or maintaining their quality of life	83.5	85.6	80.0
adults supported at home who agree that they are supported to live as independently as possible	85.9	84.8	80.8
adults supported at home who agree that they had a say in how their help, care or support was provided	79.1	82.0	75.4
carers who feel supported to continue in their caring role	38.3	34.9	34.3
adults satisfied with libraries	76.0	77.2	72.4
adults satisfied with parks and open spaces	87.7	87.2	83.5
adults satisfied with museums and galleries	70.0	62.3	69.3
adults satisfied with leisure facilities	77.7	75.5	70.1
adults satisfied with refuse collection	81.7	80.7	74.3
adults satisfied with street cleaning	76.7	72.3	62.6

Source: Audit Scotland; Local Government Benchmarking Framework

The council is working to improve its performance management framework, but needs to increase the pace

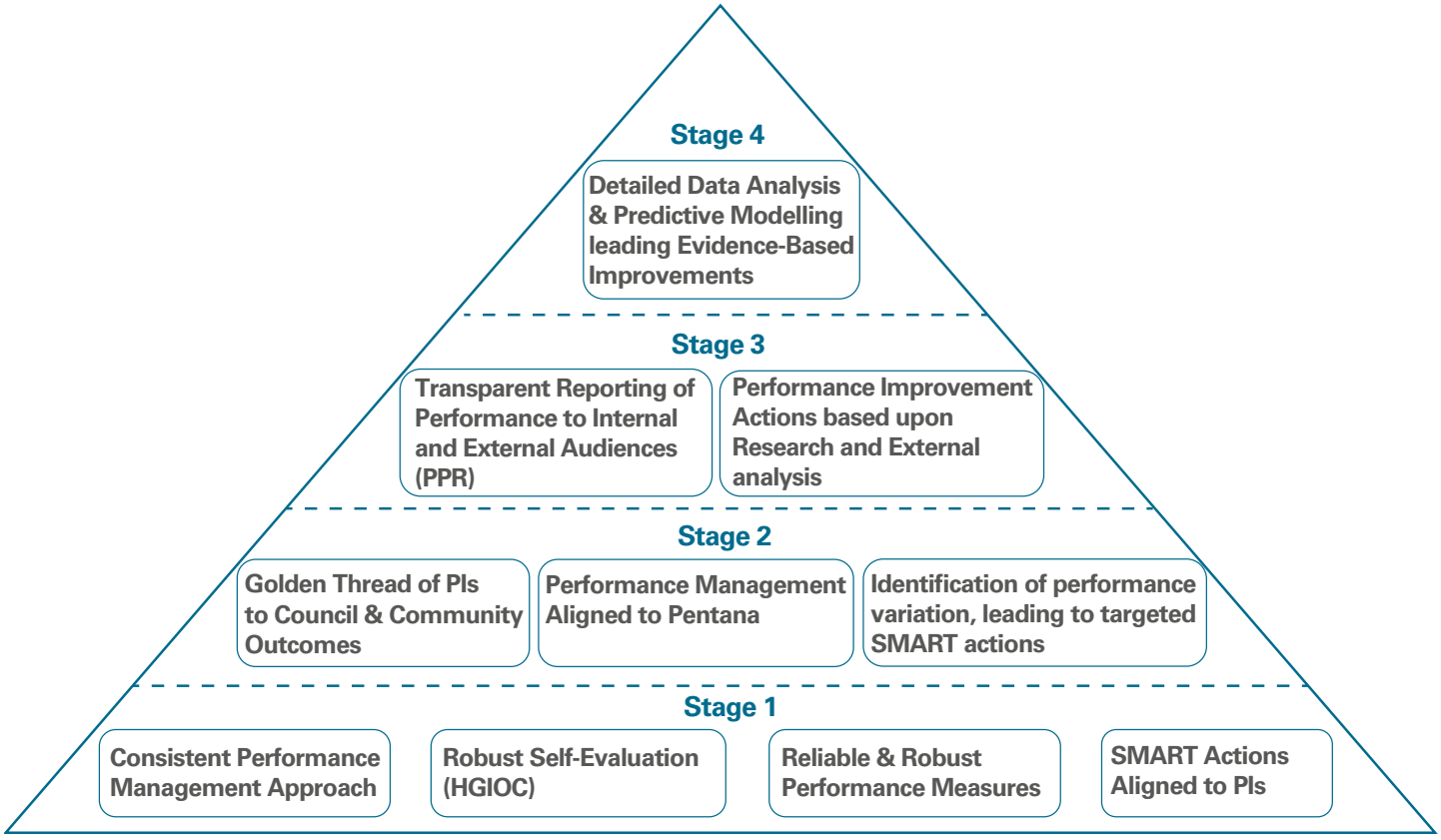
57. In 2018/19 the audit team concluded that the council was developing its performance management framework but that further work was needed to demonstrate links between council objectives and their achievement.

58. In early 2019 the council carried out a self-assessment of performance management arrangements, including how services were using its performance management system (Pentana). This review found inconsistent approaches to performance management between services, lack of support for staff to develop the necessary skills and unclear links between the council's new structure and Council Plan.

59. In response to these issues the council introduced its PLED programme in 2019. Initially this focuses on improving the consistency of performance management and data use across services. It will then progress to increasing its use of performance information to drive improvement. When fully in place the PLED process will align with and become part of the annual performance review and reporting cycle on the Council Plan priorities. The PLED approach has four stages as detailed in Exhibit 9.

Exhibit 9

Stages of the Performance Led Council (PLED) programme



Source: Angus Council

60. In its initial roll-out, the council is focusing on ensuring that all services have fully implemented stages 1 and 2 of PLED, which means that every service will:

- be using improved performance information, with robust performance indicators, actions and risks
- have completed self-assessment through the How Good Is Our Council (HGIOC) framework
- be making improved and consistent use of the Pentana system.

61. The council has an improving performance management framework but progress on embedding this has been slow. During 2020/21 the PLED programme was disrupted as its focus shifted to the immediate priorities of the Covid-19 response. The programme has restarted but the target date for completing the first two stages has now been moved from December 2021 to August 2022. In its most recent update in February 2022, the council reported that services were 49 per cent complete in putting the first two stages of the PLED programme in place.

62. Services that have well-established performance management arrangements have been quicker to implement the PLED programme. The most advanced services are Education and Lifelong Learning, Internal Audit and Governance and Change. Those with the furthest to go are Planning & Sustainable Growth, Vibrant Communities (created July 2021), HR & Business Support and Digital Enablement & IT. Effectively completing the first two stages is vital to provide the basis for services to fully embed the council's performance-led approach.

63. The council recognises it needs to improve its use of data to support more effective performance management and targeted improvement activity. It is developing a **Big Data** (i) project. This will support delivery of PLED and aims to improve productivity, identify new opportunities for transformational change and provide better-quality services to support the delivery of outcomes and priorities.

64. The council aims to develop its performance management information to enable real-time performance analysis by services. This is a positive step, but the council needs to fully implement the PLED programme to ensure that all services first focus on getting the foundations for effective performance management in place.

Big Data

Analysing large data sets to identify patterns, trends and associations that inform decision-making.

Environmental services performed strongly on waste recycling but roads condition and street cleaning require monitoring

65. The council's environmental services play a key role in delivering the Council Plan Place priority. Waste management, as part of wider climate change, is a priority for the council. Angus is ranked first among Scottish councils for household recycling in the 2020/21 LGBF, recycling 58 per cent of household waste compared with the Scottish average of 42 per cent.

66. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) has recognised Angus Council's focus on waste services by giving it the Service Innovation and Improvement award in February 2022 for its introduction of a four-day working week for waste services. The change in working patterns was part of the Change Programme to make more efficient use of waste collection vehicles and teams.

67. Customer satisfaction with refuse collection has remained strong and at 80.7 per cent is significantly above the Scottish average of 74.3 per cent. Satisfaction with street cleaning has decreased over recent years but at 72.3 per cent still compares favourably with the Scottish average of 62.6 per cent (Exhibit 8, page 24).

68. The condition of the area's roads has decreased over the past three years, coinciding with the decision to reduce spending on roads to support investment in other competing priorities. The council has included additional resource in the 2022/23 budget to ensure that performance is maintained at an acceptable standard.

69. We highlight, in the section on budget setting (paragraph 96), that the council accepts that its performance in areas it has identified as non-priorities will reduce but keeps these under review.

Housing services need to improve given the critical role they play in reducing inequalities, increasing sustainability and tackling climate change

70. Housing is a vital service that underpins the council's priorities of reducing inequalities and increasing sustainability by reducing carbon emissions. The council is investing to increase the supply of affordable housing and improve energy efficiency. However, the council's performance measures indicate a need for improvements in some areas of housing.

71. The council's performance in completing housing repairs first time and in recovering arrears are both in the bottom quartile. Its housing repairs and empty property re-let times have increased as a result of the pandemic, in common with other landlords, and this was exacerbated by one of its key contractors withdrawing from two responsive repair contracts. Rent arrears performance has declined as rates of poverty have increased and recovery actions were suspended and amended during the pandemic.

72. In response the council is conducting a review of housing delivery arrangements which cuts across various service areas. Positive measures have already been taken to resolve the issues with responsive repair contracts, in consultation with the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). The council is undertaking a review of its arrears processes with a focus on supporting vulnerable people to sustain their tenancies. The council recognises the need to balance arrears recovery against the impact of eviction, which may in turn lead to more expensive homelessness services. Angus Council engages constructively with SHR on performance issues. SHR met with the council in October 2021 to gain assurance about delivery of its homelessness service during the pandemic. SHR will be meeting with the council again during 2022/23 to discuss the homeless service, with a particular focus on the council's assessment of homeless applications and outcomes for people who are homeless.

73. Despite these issues the council has seen an improvement in customer satisfaction and relationships with tenants, reflected in the housing services satisfaction indicators, with 88.4 per cent overall tenant satisfaction recorded for 2020/21. The Scottish average is 89 per cent.

74. Capital investment in energy saving improvements and achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2045 is a key part of the housing investment programme. The 25-year housing capital programme (paragraph 114) has been accelerated to prioritise delivery of these sustainability objectives, which should have a positive impact on child and fuel poverty.

75. The council is increasing the supply of affordable housing through its own new build developments as well as working with registered social landlords and developers. This will create a range of affordable housing models including shared equity, social rent and middle market rent. It is also re-purposing surplus council buildings as social housing as detailed in Case study 1.

Case study 1

Surplus buildings repurposed into social housing

Chapelpark in Forfar is an award-winning development that converted a former primary school into social housing. The category B listed building in the town centre was converted into 29 affordable homes (25 flats and four townhouses) for social rent. The design incorporates energy efficiency, including high levels of thermal insulation, airtightness, and passive solar gain. The council tenants allocated homes were involved at various stages of the development, including a drop-in event to see plans, meet the architects and view a walkthrough video of the site and the interior designs.

A surplus building at Invertay House in Monifieth has also now been approved for re-purposing as affordable housing and is currently at the design stage.

The council redeveloped the former Damacre Centre site in Brechin for social housing: ten affordable homes were built by a local contractor.

In February 2022 a further two former school sites in Arbroath and Forfar were approved for re-purposing as social housing.

Source: Angus Council and www.surf.scot

Education and Lifelong Learning has well-developed performance management arrangements

76. Analysis of the LGBF Children's Services indicators for 2019/20 showed that pupil attainment in Angus was broadly similar to the Scottish average. The council plans to explore the links between local deprivation, attendance and attainment in more depth to drive improvement. Education and Lifelong Learning has detailed performance management arrangements in place.

77. In Angus Council none of its schools which were inspected by Education Scotland in the year prior to March 2020 required a further inspection. During periods of disruption resulting from the pandemic, the council requested only limited additional support through locality working. Education Scotland staff have been working with councils in Tayside on improving performance and outcomes for learning. However, this work was not focused specifically on Angus Council but across the Tayside Regional Collaborative.

78. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities in a number of areas including education as reported in the Accounts Commission's report Local government in Scotland Overview 2021. One of the council's key priorities is to address inequalities and eliminate child poverty. Our analysis of the Improvement Service's Community Planning Outcomes Profile (CPOP) indicators (paragraph 129) showed an increase in the percentage of children living in poverty of 28.6 per cent between 2015/16 and 2019/20, similar to the overall decline in performance in Scotland over the same period.

79. The pandemic had a significant impact on children's services. Education provision continued during lockdown via school hubs for vulnerable children and the key workers' children. Online education services were developed, alongside the supply of digital equipment to support home-based learning. The amended governance arrangements established to ensure council decision-making continued during lockdown restrictions included a Special Education Committee for education related matters.

80. Restrictions on face-to-face contact led staff working with care-experienced young people to find new ways of keeping in touch and enabling the young people to maintain contact with their families. Front-line child protection workers continued to meet young people face to face where essential.

81. More detail can be found at paragraph 144 on how the council works and collaborates with partner organisations. Several projects are specifically aimed at young people.

Part 3

Is the council using its resources effectively?

Financial management is effective with a budget setting process focused on priorities.

The medium-term financial plan projects funding gaps of over £10 million in each of the next two years. Plans are in place to meet these through Change Programme savings and use of reserves. More radical service redesign is now required.

The council has approved a Sustainable Energy and Climate Change Action Plan.

Waste management is a key priority with Angus Council ranked first in Scotland for household recycling.

Budget setting is effective and focused on council priorities

82. The council has well-established member-led working groups that develop annual budgets with help from officers. These are always agreed before the start of the financial year. The administration's budget proposals are presented to Council, along with a tabled amendment from the main opposition group. The council's budget proposals are aligned to its strategic priorities and objectives. There is open and transparent discussion and debate. The budget for 2022/23 was agreed in March 2022.

83. The Policy and Resources Committee keeps budgets under review and adjusts them as necessary. Revenue and capital budget monitoring reports are presented to every meeting to allow regular and effective scrutiny of the council's ongoing financial position.

The council consistently delivers services within budget

84. The council has consistently delivered services within its total budget. For 2020/21 the council had a final budget for council services of £305.7 million and reported an underspend of £14.9 million. The most significant contribution to this underspend was £11.6 million relating to underspends against additional funding provided by the Scottish Government to support Covid-19 expenditure. This has been carried forward for use in future years.

85. The council is currently projecting an underspend of £14.6 million for services to 31 March 2022. The majority of this relates to the Education and Lifelong Learning service, with underspending resulting from the phasing of Early Years Expansion funding and the impact of Pupil Equity Funding being tied to an academic year. These underspends will be carried forward to 2022/23.

Medium-term financial plans are in place and have been updated to reflect the impact of Covid-19

86. The Finance and Change Plan 2022-25 is an accessible summary of the financial challenges the council faces and the plans in place to address these. The rolling three-year Medium Term Budget Strategy and Capital Plan ensure consistency. These are refreshed every year as part of the budget setting process and have been updated to reflect the ongoing impact of Covid-19 including additional costs, delays in capital projects and potential impacts on income generation.

87. The council is currently projecting a funding gap of £48.9 million over the next three years to 2025. Change Programme savings of £20.1 million have been identified, alongside the use of £6.9 million of reserves, to partly fill this gap. Work is under way to address the remaining balance. This represents a significant financial pressure and the council recognises that it will have to make difficult decisions.

88. Work to develop a long-term financial planning framework, setting out the main factors and pressures affecting the council's financial position, has not yet reached conclusion. The original plan was to present this alongside the 2022/23 budget; however, the council was unable to finalise this alongside the other documentation required for the budget. The council has an outline plan in place for this work and will continue to develop it over the coming months, planning to present it for council approval by September 2022.

The general fund reserve has been steadily increasing, but a large proportion is earmarked for specific purposes

89. Angus Council has seen a rise in general fund reserves of approximately £23 million since 31 March 2017, however a large portion of this increase relates to Covid-19 funding carried forward in 2020/21 as well as other underspends relating to specific projects delayed by the pandemic. A large proportion of these reserves are earmarked for specific purposes as illustrated in Exhibit 10 (page 32).

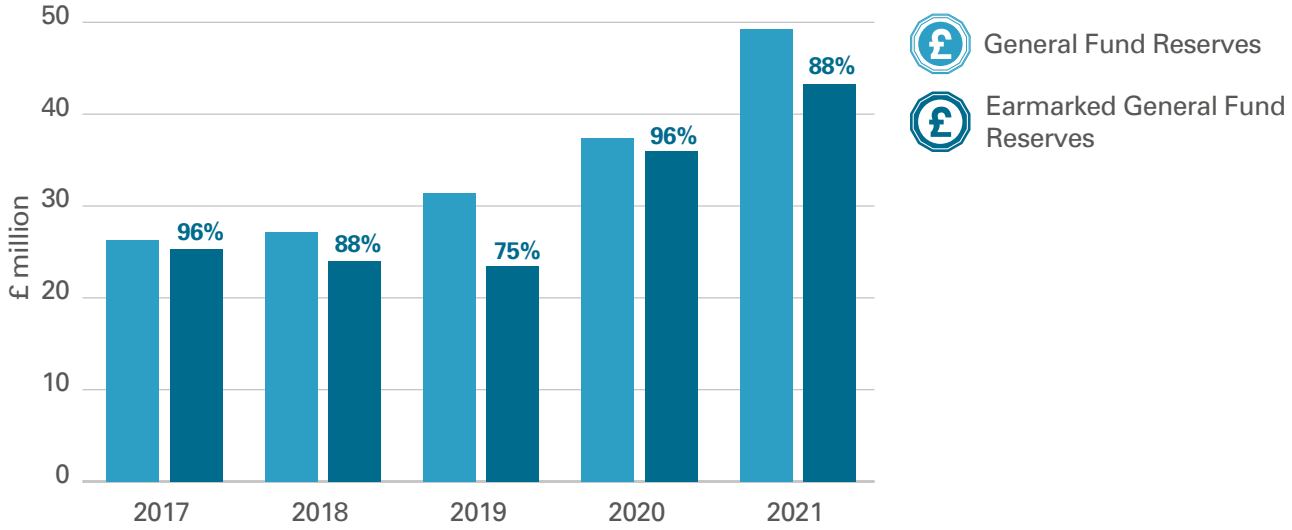
90. As at 31 March 2021, Angus Council had a usable general fund balance of £49.3 million, of which £43.3 million (88 per cent) was earmarked for specific purposes. This level has fluctuated between 75 per cent and 96 per cent over the last five years. This shows that the council generally has limited uncommitted reserves to support additional expenditure.

The capital programme has been impacted by Covid-19, causing delays to capital projects

91. Total capital expenditure in 2020/21 was £22.2 million, of which £11.3 million related to general services and £10.9 million to the housing revenue account. This compares with budgeted capital spending of £34 million. The underspend

Exhibit 10

General fund reserve levels from 2017 to 2021 including earmarked elements



Source: Angus Council

was due to slippage in capital projects as a result of the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown measures. This caused slippage in several significant capital projects initially due to the restrictions on construction activities and subsequently due to issues with supplier capacity and availability of materials which will have a knock-on effect on future years. The council has reviewed and re-profiled capital expenditure to account for this and the Capital Projects Monitoring Group keeps this under regular review.

92. The council has seen an improvement in the current year in terms of the capital programme as the impact of Covid-19 has begun to lessen. The most recent capital monitoring reports show projected slippage of £2 million for 2021/22, representing an improved position.

93. There has also been slippage in repairs of the council's housing stock as all but emergency repairs were restricted until April 2021. Covid-19 had a significant impact on this because of the lockdown measures in place, exacerbated by one of the companies contracted to undertake repairs and several housing capital projects pulling out of their contract. A new contract has been put in place to take over the repairs. Despite these issues the council has seen an improvement in relationships with tenants reflected in the improvement in housing services satisfaction indicators.

94. Despite the impact of Covid-19, Angus Council has successfully delivered several capital projects, including two new early learning and childcare centres in Forfar and Carnoustie and has a significant capital project to deliver a flood prevention scheme in Arbroath currently under construction. It has also accelerated capital spend on energy efficiency as part of their housing programme.

The Change Programme has consistently delivered savings while generally improving performance in key priority areas

95. Comprehensive service reviews are a significant element of the Change Programme. These include a **zero-based** ⓘ review of budgets and services' financial and performance data as well as reviewing the organisational design of the council. Service managers and a member of the leadership team reviewed service data and the purpose of each service to identify options for future provision. These have been followed up by a series of Rapid Improvement Events, which are special meetings held between officers and members to produce actions for improvement.

96. The council has made good progress in delivering planned savings through the Change Programme. Over the last five years the council has made efficiency savings of £45.4 million, representing almost four per cent of net expenditure each year. The council has consistently delivered these recurring savings while also showing a reasonable overall performance picture (paragraph 50); however it needs to do more work to ensure performance targets are met. Exhibit 11 shows savings levels year on year as a percentage of net expenditure, including performance against budget.

Zero-based budgeting

Building up a budget by justifying and approving all costs, rather than basing it on past spending. Starting from a 'zero base' and asking challenging questions about the purpose of and value added by each activity creates an effective process for allocating funding.

Exhibit 11

Actual savings against budget year on year and the percentage of net spend

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Budgeted Savings	£10.1m	£7.2m	£10.0m	£10.2m	£9.0m
Actual Savings	£10.1m	£7.2m	£9.6m	£10.0m	£8.5m
Percentage achieved	100%	100%	96%	98%	95%
Net Cost of Services (NCoS)	£254.5m	£257.7m	£266.5m	£271.8m	£290.1m
Savings as a percentage of NCoS	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%

Source: Angus Council

97. This is a significant level of savings; however as previously noted there is still a substantial funding gap which needs to be addressed. Increasing financial pressures mean more radical change is required to the scale and delivery of services. The council is reviewing services through its 'Business Insights' programme to improve the business intelligence for each service. This is aimed at understanding key measures such as service quantity, quality and cost to identify where resources may no longer be required, or where services can be delivered differently. This is seen as an important next step for the Change Programme to understand key metrics such as service quantity, quality and cost to identify areas where services can be delivered differently. The council is currently developing a transitioned Change Programme to address future funding gaps.

98. The deputy chief executive is leading on work with other councils, namely East Ayrshire and Wigan, on how to engage with communities on a vision for the future of local public services. The council recognises that it cannot provide

all services with the current resources available. This is an opportunity for the community to take increased ownership of services and get involved in how they are delivered. Angus Council has a community asset transfer policy in place and has had several successful transfers (paragraph 139).

A strategic workforce plan is in place and underlying service workforce plans are currently being updated

99. The council has a high-level strategic workforce plan covering the period 2019-24. It covers workforce development, succession planning, developing the young workforce and workforce profiling/planning. The supporting action plan is updated each year as part of the budget process to ensure that it remains relevant by ensuring the council has the correct staff in the right places. This has also been updated to reflect the Agile programme and has embedded processes for staff engagement. The underlying service workforce plans are in the process of being updated. Angus Council has reduced its workforce by six per cent, based on employee numbers, since 2014/15. This is net of additional early learning and childcare provision, for which staff numbers were increased. When excluding this the council has reduced staff numbers by 12 per cent in this same period.

100. The council has increased its focus on developing the young workforce through its 'Angus Works' programme (Case study 2).

Case study 2

Angus Works programme

Angus Works is an extended work experience programme that is open to all S4-S6 pupils across Angus. It runs for 22 weeks (August to April) and forms part of the pupil's timetable. Each young person is engaged one day a week within an identified role supported by a mentor.

The programme was developed in consultation with local secondary schools and Education Scotland and is coordinated by the council. Interested young people are invited to submit an application form, indicating their preferred role and are invited to an assessment centre. Successful candidates are allocated to roles across the council.

This programme has been successful in preparing students for the transition to the workforce and in developing key skills. It gives the council the chance to engage with its potential future workforce and provides mentoring opportunities for its current staff. In 2019/20, 93 per cent of the 46 applicants successfully completed their placements and achieved high performance levels. The feedback on the programme has been positive from both pupils and mentors.

Source: Angus Council

101. The council has had recruitment issues in the past, linked to its rural setting. This has resulted in fewer than anticipated applications for roles and in several cases, roles having to be advertised multiple times. Work is under way to improve the recruitment process by making the application process less onerous, enabling people interested in roles to submit only their CVs.

102. The council is also looking to improve how it markets itself as an employer of choice including using videos and wider marketing through its website, especially in health and social care. Angus Council offers flexibility as one of its

main selling points and has recently started to offer remote contracts to widen the pool of potential candidates. The council has done a great deal of work on job evaluation as part of its Agile programme.

103. Angus Council staff have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic with the move to home working. Much staff engagement has taken place making use of the Hive employee feedback platform to carry out surveys and get staff feedback. The council has also made use of 'employee voice' sessions where staff can provide input to strategic plans. These are held bi-annually and involve large-scale meetings on Microsoft Teams, with breakout sessions to get feedback on organisational issues.

104. The council has also put a specific focus on the health and wellbeing of employees. This has included several health and wellbeing days over the course of the pandemic, with training and information sessions on mental health and resilience. An intranet page gives staff access to resources and information on health and other information on home working, such as how to lead a team remotely.

105. Angus Council has not met its targets on sickness absence in the last four years, but it has seen a significant improvement over the past year despite the impact of Covid-19. The target for teaching staff is 4 days with 2020/21 absence levels at 4.2 days, down from 7.5 days in the prior year. The target for other staff is 9.35 days with actuals at 10.5 days, down from 13.5 days. The switch to home working has had a significant impact on sickness absence as it provides flexibility for how people manage their work.

106. Trade unions representatives commented very positively on engagement with the council and on the support provided to staff. They did note that not all staff had digital access to corporate systems which created a barrier to communication for some staff.

An established digital strategy is kept under regular review and aligned with council priorities

107. The council has a 'digital first' ambition to ensure that services are easily accessible on a 24/7 basis. This is linked to the digital strategy, which in turn is aligned to the council's four priorities. The strategy is reviewed annually with the next update due in May 2022.

108. The council is aware of digital and cybersecurity risks and these feature on the corporate risk register. The council has achieved Public Services Network (PSN) certification for cybersecurity. The council's business continuity arrangements were tested in March 2020 when the council had to make a quick shift to home working. This was managed quickly and efficiently.

109. A digital maturity assessment was recently completed, concluding that Angus Council is progressing well in its Digital Maturity strategy. The overall assessment was 3 out of 5, placing it in a good position relative to many other public sector bodies.

110. One of the key challenges the council will have to address is digital skills, ensuring that it has the appropriate resources in place to deliver its digital strategy. As in other areas of the council, there have been difficulties in recruiting staff

(paragraph 101), with current concerns over the skills in the areas of service desk and IT engineers.

The council's progress with its Agile programme enabled it to adapt service delivery in response to the impact of Covid-19

111. In March 2020, at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the council was well positioned to make the switch from office working to homeworking. Many staff already had access to portable computing devices and had experience of working from home as part of the council's Agile programme.

112. The council is considering the next phase of the Agile programme and has taken the following action:

- It has assessed all roles to determine how much can be delivered via home working and how much must be done in an office or council building.
- It is holding staff engagement events to discuss the new Agile working policies - these are well advertised on the council's intranet. Sessions are for all staff and for individual services, giving employees the chance to have an input as the policies are being developed.
- Trade unions are also involved in the consultation on proposed changes to terms and conditions and ways of working.

The council has published a Sustainability Strategy reflecting the Sustainable Development Commission principles

113. The council approved its Sustainable Energy and Climate Change Action Plan (SECAP) in November 2021. The SECAP was developed by an external consultant supporting a member-officer working group to address the council's responsibilities under the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. Key elements of the SECAP are to ensure that sustainability is a key priority for the council and to increase public awareness of sustainability and the impacts of climate change.

114. Capital investment in energy-saving improvements and achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2045 is a key part of the council's housing investment programme. The council is improving the energy efficiency of its housing through a range of measures including fitting internal and external insulation, photovoltaic solar panels and replacing heating systems. The 25-year housing capital programme has been accelerated to prioritise delivery of these sustainability objectives, anticipating expected increases in tenants' fuel costs. While this meant a projected overspend of £2 million on the £4 million budget allocated to energy saving work in the 2021/22 financial year, bringing forward future spend in this way was a positive change. The overall cost of the project is still expected to be within budget.

115. Waste management remains a key priority. The council partnered with Dundee City Council and MVV to reduce the amount of waste it sent to landfill by incinerating it instead, which, along with closing its Restenneth landfill site, contributed to reduced carbon emissions. The council's Climate Change Public Bodies Duty Report 2020/21 stated that since the baseline year of 2010/11, Angus Council carbon emissions have reduced by 49 per cent. Since the previous 2019/20 report, emissions from buildings had fallen by a further 8.8 per cent.

Part 4

Is the council working well with its partners?

The council has strong working relationships with partners with good examples of collaborative working.

The Community Plan is being reviewed and will cover the period 2022 to 2030.

Strong existing partnerships enabled the Angus Community Planning Partnership to respond quickly to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The council recognises that it needs to engage more effectively with communities. The Vibrant Communities Team is at an early stage of taking this work forward.

On engaging with hard-to-reach communities, the council has focused on expanding digital engagement supporting its wider moves towards digitalisation.

The council is committed to partnership working and has strengthened positive relationships during the pandemic

116. Angus Council works well with partners to achieve the best outcomes for its citizens. It has good working relationships with a wide range of partners, including NHS Tayside, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the third sector, business partners and community representatives. It has one arm's-length external organisation – ANGUSalive, the Angus culture and leisure trust. Partnership working was strengthened during the response to Covid-19 and remains as the council moves into the recovery period.

117. Elected members, officers and partners commented on the strong existing partnerships that enabled the Angus CPP to respond quickly to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. This included establishing the Humanitarian Assistance Angus Response Team (HAART) - a new service developed at the start of the pandemic focusing on the provision of food, medicines and befriending to vulnerable groups (Case study 3, page 38).

Case study 3

Humanitarian assistance during Covid-19 pandemic

HAART delivered a trauma informed response and proactive outreach, initially to people shielding and then extended more widely to vulnerable adults and families. The team operated from The Cross third sector hub, a location where multiple organisations are based, facilitating good communication. HAART quickly developed systems to enable volunteers to deliver prescription medications, shopping, food parcels and befriending to those most in need. At the height of the response, there were over 1,000 active volunteers and up to 140 requests for assistance per day. HAART personally contacted around 4,000 people as part of its work.

HAART was also involved in coordinating Angus activity on the Scottish Government's 'Connecting Scotland' programme to provide tablets and laptops and support for people who were digitally excluded to develop digital skills.

The team took a personal and solution-focused approach to supporting local people and quickly established systems to triage requests, passing them onto relevant services for action. Vulnerable people were contacted by someone they were already involved with to discuss their support needs. This approach enabled volunteers and or services to be deployed to meet needs quickly and efficiently and for whole families to access early help and support to prevent concerns escalating.

HAART overcame barriers to multi-agency working as people focused on delivering support to those who needed it. The key role of Voluntary Action Angus (VAA) and its volunteers led to improved recognition of the third sector as an equal partner with statutory agencies in providing community services.

Source: Angus Council

There is evidence of strong pan-Tayside collaboration

118. Tayside Contracts is a long-term collaborative and commercial operating arm working for the three councils in Tayside. It provides key services to Angus Council and helped to ensure that services were maintained during the pandemic. Development of new services has continued including the launch of a new cook-and-freeze unit in February 2021 to provide nursery, school and community meals.

119. The Covid-19 pandemic had a direct impact on Tayside Contracts operations. The constituent councils provided financial support because of reduced levels of activity; however, actual financial performance for the year exceeded initial expectations.

120. The Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative focuses on collaborative improvement for children, young people and families. Working with Tayside CPP and other key partners it developed the Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families. It focuses on reducing inequalities and improving outcomes for all children across Tayside and was informed by the views of and responses from children and families. Owing to the pandemic the 2017-20 plan was extended to 2021 with the 2021-23 plan approved in September 2021.

121. The Tay Cities Region Deal, signed in December 2020, is a collaboration between the UK and Scottish Governments and the four local authorities in the Tay Cities Region (Angus, Dundee City, Fife and Perth and Kinross). The UK

and Scottish Governments pledged up to £300 million over a ten-year period which aims to bring a further £400 million of investment and over 6,000 new job opportunities to the region. Currently the Tay Cities Region Deal has 26 identified projects across the four local authorities.

122. The Deal included a commitment of £26.5 million to the Angus Fund which has initiated the Mercury Programme, a £1 billion partnership programme between government and the public, private and community sectors. It aims to help the area develop as a sustainable, low carbon region through a range of projects. Some innovative projects are starting, but it is too early yet to see the impact.

123. The Tay Cities Region Deal is seen as strategically important for each of the three cross-cutting themes of Economy, People and Place in the Angus Community Plan 2017-30.

Community planning partners have a shared vision for Angus

124. The council is one of five statutory partners in the CPP that work closely at both strategic and operational levels. The CPP's priorities are set out in the Angus Community Plan 2017–2030 (Exhibit 3, page 13) and partners have also aligned their own strategic plans with the community planning outcomes.

125. The governance structure of the CPP was reviewed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. At its November 2020 meeting it was agreed to continue holding joint meetings to streamline the decision-making process. The Joint Executive Board consists of senior officers from each of Angus's statutory agencies, representatives from Dundee and Angus College, ANGUSalive, VAA, Angus Community Planning Locality Implementation Partnerships, Angus Health and Social Care Partnership (AHSCP), the Community Justice Partnership and other third sector organisations.

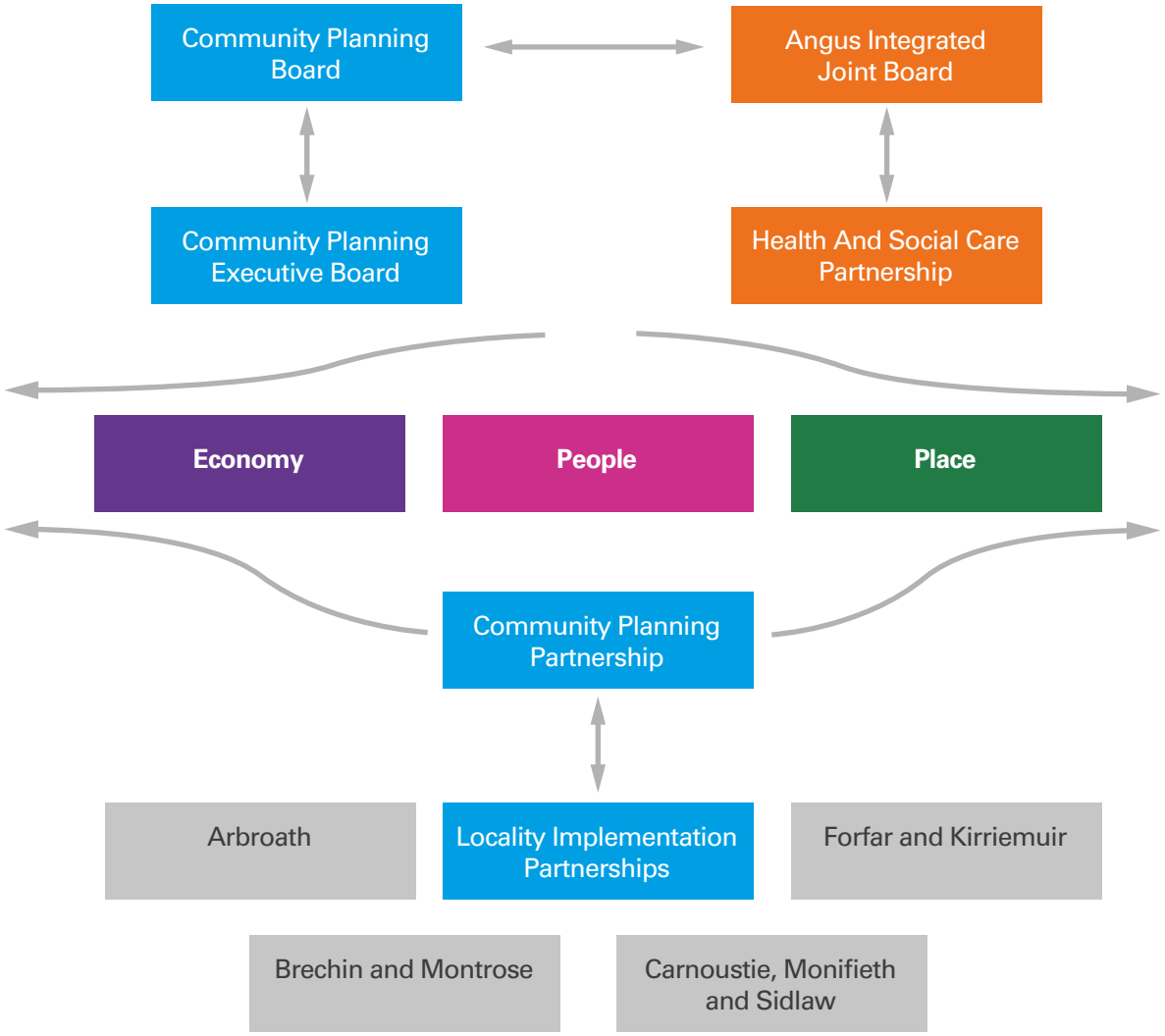
126. Exhibit 12 (page 40) demonstrates the CPP's governance structure with the four locality implementation partnerships supporting the CPP and linking to the three cross-cutting themes of Economy, People and Place at every level. Following community consultation events and workshops, four locality plans were developed aligned with the locality implementation partnerships: Brechin/ Montrose, Carnoustie/Monifieth/Sidlaw, Forfar/Kirriemuir and Arbroath. The locality plans were published in September 2017.

127. The CPP sets out the partnership's commitments and focuses on reducing inequalities by: reducing child poverty, improving mental health and wellbeing, and improving accessibility and digital connectivity, and three interlinking cross-cutting themes. Progress on key projects is reported at CPP meetings and in the annual performance report. Partners spoke positively about the level of engagement and communication.

The CPP annual performance report does not clearly link how its actions are influencing the outcomes it wants to achieve

128. The most recent CPP annual performance report for 2020/21 includes information on performance in a number of indicators over the last five years under each cross-cutting theme. The report outlines the projects and work

Exhibit 12
Angus CPP governance structure



Source: Angus Community Plan 2017-2030

completed by partners and includes case studies for each of the three priorities. This reporting approach is informative, but the narrative could more clearly demonstrate how the actions described influence the performance indicators and outcomes.

129. The Improvement Service's CPOP is a collection of 18 measures to help assess whether residents' lives are improving. Angus CPP's performance has improved in eight and declined in ten of the 18 CPOP indicators between 2015/16 and 2019/20:

- The most significant improvement relates to the number of people living in fuel poverty (48.6 per cent reduction) which outstrips both the Scottish average and the family group performance. Notable improvements are also evident in reducing crime (15 per cent) and carbon emissions (13.9 per cent) and increasing median earnings (12.9 per cent).

- A significant decline has been seen in the number of people claiming out of work benefits (55.4 per cent increase) higher than both the Scottish average and family group. Other indicators that have declined include the number of children living in poverty (28.6 per cent increase), where performance is similar to the other comparators, business survival (15.4 per cent decline) and unplanned hospital attendances (19 per cent increase) where performance is worse than the other comparators.

Strong existing relationships enabled the council and partners to respond quickly to the Covid-19 pandemic

130. Strong existing working partnerships and relationships enabled the council, CPP and AHSCP to respond quickly to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. This included establishing the HAART (Case study 3, page 38).

131. Following the success of the front-line response, the HAART Steering Group carried out a lessons-learned exercise based on feedback from partners. HAART created a significant opportunity to develop new ways of working, linked to the CPP. After a CPP discussion in July 2020 and a series of workshops, it was decided to merge the HAART arrangements into a leaner responsive body called the Angus Response Collaborative.

132. The third sector played a significant role in the front-line response to the pandemic and resulted in a new initiative, Angus Connect, being established between VAA and around 20 third sector organisations. It brought third sector organisations together to help build capacity and actively promote the sector and its support to communities. This initiative helped reach people most in need during the height of the pandemic and was integrated with the local response and HAART's work.

133. Partners were clear that the working relationships during the Covid-19 pandemic meant that partners could quickly and easily react to the impact of other emergencies in communities. This was demonstrated during the response to Storm Arwen (paragraph 140) and in the Tayside Local Resilience Partnership's de-brief in December 2021, when Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks referred to the Angus partners' response to the storm as the 'gold standard' of effective partnership working. Some Angus initiatives and best practice has been shared with other regions.

The council and its partners are committed to meaningful engagement with communities, but a council-wide approach is not yet in place

134. The council engages with communities through a range of approaches. It has focused on digital approaches during the pandemic, including hosting workshops and engagement events online. For example, 'Arbroath: A Place for Everyone' had a range of consultation approaches including online community events, a virtual hub using the online platform Social Pinpoint, two drop-in events and a household survey. Partners and elected members also focused on the need to have other forms of approach, including face to face and phone calls, for those without digital access.

135. The council's website also has a 'Have Your Say' section for residents and service users to feed into current consultation exercises. Although the council has no single corporate approach, examples of effective consultation and listening to communities include the decision to demolish a former leisure centre in Forfar (paragraph 32) and the proposal to include Monifieth public library in the new learning campus in 2021. The public consultation on the Monifieth library proposal highlighted that local residents did not want this. The decision was made to listen to these views and not continue with the original proposals.

136. The council recognises that it does not yet have a council-wide approach to community engagement and needs to engage more effectively. It has looked to learn from other councils' approaches to community engagement (paragraph 98). This is especially important given the budget challenges ahead and the need for redesign of future service provision. The new Vibrant Communities team is taking this work forward. A council-wide audit of current tools, software and budgets has been undertaken and a new engagement and consultation platform will be established. In addition, learning and engagement modules on community consultation are being developed with the Scottish Community Development Centre. These will be made available for free to all partners including the third sector.

The council has made progress implementing the Community Asset Transfer requirements of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

137. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 gives people more influence over how their council and its partners plan services. It provides formal routes for people to become more involved, including participatory budgeting, participation requests and community asset transfers. The Act also aims to tackle poverty and inequalities across communities by targeting resources to those most in need.

138. The Act makes it easier for communities to take ownership of, or responsibility for, land and buildings belonging to the council. Angus Council has a history of supporting community groups to manage and own facilities that pre-dates the Act (eg, Brechin City Hall, Friockheim Community Hub and the Montrose Playhouse). Examples of community asset transfers under the Act include premises leased to Angus Cycle Hub, Arbroath Men's Shed and Carnoustie and Monifieth Men's Shed, and the long-term lease of allotments to Arbroath Garden Allotment Association. Surplus assets are offered to the community but may not all be suited to community ownership and operation.

In addition, as reported in (paragraph 75) several surplus council buildings are being repurposed as social housing.

139. The council received only two community asset transfer applications in 2020/21 compared with seven in the previous year. One was approved with the other deferred for further consideration and ultimately approved in June 2021. Work to review and improve the effectiveness of the council's approach to community asset transfers during 2020/21 included officers' discussions with East Ayrshire Council to share learning and regular reviews of supporting procedures to learn from previous applications and responses.

140. The council and partners also enable rural community empowerment in other ways, including designating Eassie and Nevay village hall as a local resilience centre that can be used as a safe refuge during emergencies. During Storm Arwen the local community used the village hall generator to provide power and offer hot food, hot water and phone/device charging so people had means of communicating. Partners were also involved in the emergency response, for example the Tayside 4×4 Response charity drove VAA volunteers up the Angus Glens checking all homes to ensure that people were safe.

The council needs to go further in its approach to participatory budgeting

141. Participatory budgeting is a way of giving local people a greater say in how the council spends some of its money. Angus Council is committed to the Scottish Government's aim that one per cent of the council's budget will be spent on community choices. Before the pandemic the aim was to reach one per cent by the end of 2021, but it has not met this target.

142. To date the council has focused on small grant schemes, with the most recent exercise in late 2021 making a total of £260,000 available across four localities. The council received good engagement with this scheme, and the total value of bids was £640,000. Voting was publicised through the Social Pinpoint platform. This shows there is an appetite for the community to be engaged further in the budgeting process. If the council is going to meet the one per cent target - £2.3 million in 2021/22 when calculated in line with COSLA guidance - then the council has to go further with regards to 'mainstreaming' participatory budgeting. This will ensure the public have more influence over the council's core spending decisions.

Local projects are targeted at addressing inequalities across different communities

143. The Accounts Commission's Local government in Scotland: Overview 2021 report says that Covid-19 has laid bare and exacerbated existing inequalities in areas such as health, work, income, housing and education across Scotland's communities. The multiple impacts of these inequalities have affected the most vulnerable, minority groups and women.

144. Reducing inequalities is one of the council's priorities, demonstrated by the range of work that the council and partners are undertaking. The council has adopted a joint equality impact assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty assessment since January 2021 for all relevant committee reports. Tay Cities Region Deal projects are required to meet inclusive growth and Fairer Scotland Duty criteria.

145. Domestic abuse training and awareness sessions have been a theme at leadership forums during 2021 and the council has provided training for elected members and council staff. Members of the council's Communities team led the development of an Angus Youth Engagement Strategy for the CPP in 2018. It was co-designed by young people and CPP members.

146. The Children, Families and Justice team, working with Who Cares? Scotland and the Corporate Parenting board, act on young people's views of the way feedback is provided. The approach has now been changed to be less formal and more interactive. The council and partners, including VAA, are part of the Tayside-wide Children and Families Leadership Academy which supports leaders to develop innovative multi-agency work to reduce inequalities for vulnerable children and families.

147. The Angus Violence against Women Partnership is a multi-agency partnership dedicated to tackling all violence against women and girls. It reports to the Angus Chief Officer Group comprising senior officers from Police Scotland, NHS Tayside and the Chief Executive of Angus Council as well as the CPP and the Protecting People Angus Partnership (Case study 4).

Case study 4

Glen Isla and Glen Clova projects

The Glen Isla project is an initiative supporting vulnerable women. It recognises that women who have had traumatic life experiences are more likely to experience mental health crises, substance misuse, and relationship and accommodation difficulties. This can significantly affect them, their families and communities. As part of its Finance and Change Plan 2019-2024, the council extended financial support and established the Glen Clova project.

The ethos of the Glen Clova project is to work in a trauma-informed way with support tailored to the individual over either the short or the longer term. There is a high level of voluntary engagement. As at March 2022 it had supported 131 women. Financial savings are difficult to measure; however, the council estimates that a specific example saved around £8,500 for the statutory agencies. The key priority of this project is to make changes for individuals and their families' future life chances and avoid longer term crisis interventions.

In addition, at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the project staff recognised the increased risk of gender-based violence. New guidance was drawn up and implemented. This was shared as good practice with COSLA and equality colleagues across local authorities and the national coordinator for violence against women.

Source: Angus Council – Independent Evaluation Report March 2022

New models of delivery for health and social care are being introduced, but more needs to change to remain financially sustainable

148. Although AHSCP has reserves available, the way that health and social care services are delivered needs to change to remain financially sustainable. AHSCP is projecting a reserves balance at 31 March 2022 of £31 million, however most is earmarked with only £5.2 million available for other use. There is a recurring shortfall in the partnership's Strategic Financial Plan that will consume the general reserve and result in a £6.3 million cumulative shortfall by 2024/25.

149. Between 2018 and 2028, the population of Angus is projected to decrease by 0.8 per cent compared with a projected increase for Scotland of 1.8 per cent. However, the average age of that population is projected to increase and more people are expected to live longer. The 75 and over age group is projected to see the largest percentage increase (+30.3 per cent) and will have a significant impact on the demand for the services provided by the AHSCP. Difficulties in recruiting social care staff and GPs (which are national and not specific to Angus) are already resulting in unmet need.

150. As well as a general increase in overall demand, AHSCP faces a significant challenge in addressing the changing pattern of demand from provision in care homes to care at home. Demand for care at home rose sharply during the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside significant vacancy rates in care homes. This pattern of demand is set to continue. The AHSCP agreed in February 2022 to close the Beech Hill House Care Home to release resources to support care at home. It also agreed to revisit the options for replacing The Gables as the projected costs had increased from £3.5 million to £5.7 million.

151. AHSCP has made some good progress in shifting care from hospitals into the community, and in introducing social prescribing. Now more needs to change in the way services are delivered. The partnership keeps its services under review and has introduced new models to improve patients' experience of care, such as Mental Health Enhanced Community Support and the Community Treatment and Care Service (Case study 5).

Case study 5

Integrated community health and care services

Mental Health Enhanced Community Support co-locates GPs, mental health and wellbeing services and substance use services, providing one referral route, with no referrals rejected. This is a person-centred approach which coordinates the relevant services that each person needs and allows coordinated planning of care for hospital discharge.

The 'hub and spoke' model for the Community Treatment and Care Service (CTCS) aims to reduce GP workload and prevent duplication by providing access to tests and treatment in a community hub; those services were previously provided in a number of different ways and locations (practices, community hospitals, treatment rooms and Minor Injury and Illness Units). The CTCS provides patients with safe, convenient and comprehensive access to treatment and care services that are located within the community. For areas without hubs, spokes based in local practices are being developed.

Source: Angus Health and Social Care Partnership

152. AHSCP, ANGUSalive and Angus Council have committed funding for a two-year test of change project to develop preventative health and wellbeing activities which should, over time, shift the balance of care.

153. The National Integration indicators 2019/20 show that Angus's performance is higher than the Scottish rate in a number of areas including: the percentage of adults who agree that they are supported to live as independently as possible at home; the percentage of adults supported at home who agree that they had a say in how their help, care or support was provided; the percentage of adults receiving any care or support who rate it as excellent or good, and the percentage

of adults supported at home who agree that their services and support had an impact in improving or maintaining their quality of life. There are also areas of declining performance including the rate of emergency readmissions which also declined at a Scottish level, but Angus performed less well than Scotland overall in each of the last five years.

154. The adult social care LGBF indicators also show some areas where Angus has lower performance than the Scottish rate: the percentage of adults with intensive care needs receiving care at home and the percentage of people with positive experience of care at their GP practice. The percentage of carers who feel supported to continue in their caring role while consistent with the Scottish rate is low at 34.9 per cent.

155. The partnership monitors its performance indicators through six-monthly performance reports to the Integration Joint Board (IJB): areas that are below target or declining are scrutinised to understand the reasons for this and to ensure that appropriate improvement action is being taken. AHSCP also publishes an annual performance report against its priorities and reports this to both the IJB and the council.

156. The AHSCP website has a 'How we performed in 2019/20' section which summarises the relationship between the Angus strategic priorities and performance areas, the national wellbeing outcomes and the national core indicators. For each priority it shows key measures, the improvement or decline in those measures and the action being taken by AHSCP. It also has local examples of the impact on individual service users. The website section is not exhaustive, but it is an accessible way of relating performance data to what that means in practice. Owing to ongoing workload pressures from the Covid-19 pandemic the 2020/21 data is still to be updated on the website.

157. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was also reflected in AHSCP's most recent interim performance report. This included an improvement in the falls rate, a reduction in the number of hours of respite and care home placements, an increase in care at home and personal care hours (linked to the reduction in respite and closure of day care facilities), a reduction in emergency admissions and increase in the average length of stay in hospital following an emergency and increase in complex delays.

AHSCP is working with partners in Tayside to implement improvement actions

Tayside Mental Health Inquiry

158. On 5 February 2020, the Independent Inquiry into Mental Health Services in Tayside published its final report, Trust and Respect. The report highlighted major failings in the delivery of mental health services across Tayside and cited a breakdown of trust and a lack of respect as key factors that undermined public confidence.

159. Tayside Executive Partners[1] accepted the report's findings and have since worked together to improve mental health services for those who need them and those who deliver them. On 25 February 2021 the Tayside Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, 'Living Life Well' was launched. This was co-created with input from over 600 stakeholders with lived and professional experience.

160. Service improvements include seven-day working for Angus Community Mental Health Services which was fully implemented across the area in September 2021. The community mental health nursing team at the Montrose Mental Health Hub won the Community Mental Health Nursing category of the Mental Health Nursing Forum Scotland Awards 2021 and was also a joint winner of the Overall Winners Award.

Significant Case Review P19

161. The Angus Adult Protection Committee (AAPC) Significant Case Review (SCR) P19 was published on 25 November 2021. Adult Protection Committees and Chief Officers have responsibility for commissioning SCRs and ensuring any improvement actions are delivered. There are 59 recommendations assigned to a range of agencies including Angus Council and AHSCP. Both considered the SCR and the draft multi-agency action plan at a meeting in early 2022.

162. The AAPC is overseeing the improvement action work through a mandated subgroup. The Scottish Government has shown considerable interest in the SCR and has issued a commission to Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate; these bodies are engaged with AHSCP and AAPC in taking that work forward. Some high-risk matters were addressed before the publication of the SCR, as a result of the Initial Case Review. Significant work is required to complete the improvement actions with AHSCP having 20 stand-alone actions and sharing a number of wider multi-agency improvements.

163. Angus Council and AHSCP are taking appropriate ownership of improvement actions and monitoring progress at a senior level.

1 Tayside Executive Partners is made up of the Chief Executives of NHS Tayside and Angus, Dundee City and Perth & Kinross Councils and the Tayside Divisional Commander of Police Scotland; it issued a collective statement of intent following the publication of the report.

Part 5

Is the council demonstrating continuous improvement?

The council has demonstrated a good pace of improvement. It has removed layers of management and is keen to learn from others.

Plans and resources are focused on priorities and some hard decisions have been made, with cross-party agreement, to achieve financial balance.

The council is demonstrating improvements in delivering priority services.

The council has done well to achieve financial balance, but increasing pressures mean that it needs to make more radical changes in service provision. The council recognises the need to engage with the local community on the difficult choices ahead.

Progress in embedding a council-wide performance management framework has been slow, although improvement is evident.

The council has demonstrated a good pace of improvement since the previous Best Value audit

164. A timeline of the council's previous Best Value reports is shown in the Appendix. In the Best Value audit 2016 (October 2016), the Accounts Commission reported that the council needed to raise the level of its ambition and increase the pace and depth of improvement; at that point it was implementing initiatives which many councils had already put in place. The council faced a significant challenge to identify and deliver savings.

165. Angus Council has changed significantly since the 2016 Best Value audit report. It has reduced the layers of management and is more outward looking. It has reshaped services and made good progress in delivering financial savings through its Change Programme. This has involved making difficult decisions to focus resources on priority areas. The council is demonstrating continuous improvement in delivering priority services. Its use of self-evaluation and challenge covers all services, although the progress of the PLED programme

varies across services and has been delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The council maintains a steady pace of change leading to improved outcomes in priority areas.

166. When the PLED programme is fully embedded it will enable the council to use self-assessment to drive targeted improvement. It has yet to get to this point. As we have reported, progress in implementing the PLED programme is not consistent across services. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on some services' capacity to progress the PLED programme. Further work is required if the council is to realise its ambition to be a performance-led council.

167. The council gathers feedback on services through surveys, representative groups and consultations and where appropriate reports it to the council and relevant committees. The council's website provides details of the current consultation exercises for the council and partners and a link to national consultations by the Scottish Government. There is also a link to an archive of completed consultations and to further information on community councils and participatory budgeting.

168. The council is aware that it needs to continue to engage with the local community to identify needs and inform future service changes and delivery models to ensure long-term financial sustainability. Exhibit 13 (page 50) compares the best value judgements from the 2016 Best Value audit report with the findings in this report.

Exhibit 13

A comparison of key Best Value judgements from 2016 and 2022 shows that the council has made good progress but further improvement is needed to embed performance management

2016 judgement	2022 Controller of Audit judgement	View
Slow pace of change	Since the 2016 report we have seen an increase in the pace of change and improvement. The council is focused on its priorities and links these to its budget setting. It has significantly reduced its size and delivered the majority of Change Programme planned savings. However, it needs to focus on the future. The council faces significant, increasing financial pressures and more radical service redesign and reduction is required.	Part 1
More openness and transparency	The council now operates in an open and transparent manner with public accountability a central priority in the revised governance arrangements introduced during the pandemic. We reported in 2018/19 that public scrutiny was limited: we have observed improved scrutiny since then. There are also signs of improved options appraisal reporting.	Part 1
Focus on service performance priorities	Resources are now focused on priority service areas through budget setting and the Finance and Change Plan. But there is not yet an explicit link between service performance reporting, priorities for improvement and budget setting. The council accepts that performance on non-priority areas will decline but this is kept under review. Road condition performance declined as a result of redirecting resources to higher priorities in earlier years, but additional resource is included in the 2022/23 budget to ensure that performance does not drop below an acceptable standard.	Part 2
Increased learning from other councils	Angus Council is now more outward looking and keen to learn from others. The deputy chief executive is leading on work with other councils on how to engage with communities on what local public services will be in future.	Part 4
More coherent performance management	Angus Council has made slow progress in embedding its Performance Led Council (PLED) programme. It has been working to roll out HGIOC across all services as a consistent corporate approach. Services are at different stages of using performance data to drive improvement. Further progress is required if the council is to achieve its ambition to be a performance-led council.	Part 2
Improvements to budgeting processes	The rolling three-year medium-term budget strategy is well established. The Finance and Change Plan is part of the budget setting papers which forms an accessible summary of the financial pressures and the funding gap and how it will be addressed.	Part 3
More detailed workforce plan	Workforce planning has developed since 2016 and the council is engaged with national groups. The Strategic Workforce Plan 2019-2024 informs the Council Plan and Finance and Change Plan. Service level workforce plans are in place and there is an annual action plan at both corporate and service level.	Part 3
Appropriate management capacity	The council streamlined its management structure which reduced the number of senior management posts and increased middle manager capacity. The council recognised the need to support and empower this middle management level through management development investment. The council has restructured in phases, revisiting where necessary.	Part 1

Source: Audit Scotland

Recommendations

The council and AHSCP must develop and deliver significant savings plans over the next few years to secure financial sustainability. This will require changes to the range and scope of services being delivered. (paragraphs 26 and 148)

The council needs to work better and more meaningfully with communities to engage with them to identify needs and opportunities and implement service changes that deliver the required savings. (paragraph 88)

The council should complete its implementation of the PLED programme which will improve the use of performance information and better demonstrate the impact of improvement actions. (paragraph 64)

The council should introduce its partially developed long-term financial planning framework. (paragraph 168)

Appendix

Best Value audit timeline

Council journey

May 2007
Scottish local elections
SNP minority administration

May 2012
Scottish local elections
SNP majority Administration

May 2017
Scottish local elections
Independent, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition

May 2022
Scottish local elections
SNP/Independent Coalition

February 2011
Richard Stiff appointed as Chief Executive

June 2017
Margo Williamson appointed as Chief Executive

2004 | 2005-2009 | 2010 | 2011-2015 | 2016 | 2017-2021 | 2022

September 2004
Audit of Best Value and Community Planning

May 2010
Best Value 2 pathfinder audit report

October 2016
Best Value Audit Report

July 2022
Best Value Assurance Report

Best Value Assurance Report

Angus Council

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