

Best Value Assurance Report

West Dunbartonshire Council



ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

Prepared by Audit Scotland
June 2018

The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is the public spending watchdog for local government. We hold councils in Scotland to account and help them improve. We operate impartially and independently of councils and of the Scottish Government, and we meet and report in public.

We expect councils to achieve the highest standards of governance and financial stewardship, and value for money in how they use their resources and provide their services.

Our work includes:

- securing and acting upon the external audit of Scotland's councils and various joint boards and committees
- assessing the performance of councils in relation to Best Value and community planning
- carrying out national performance audits to help councils improve their services
- requiring councils to publish information to help the public assess their performance.

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Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000 under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. We help the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission check that organisations spending public money use it properly, efficiently and effectively.

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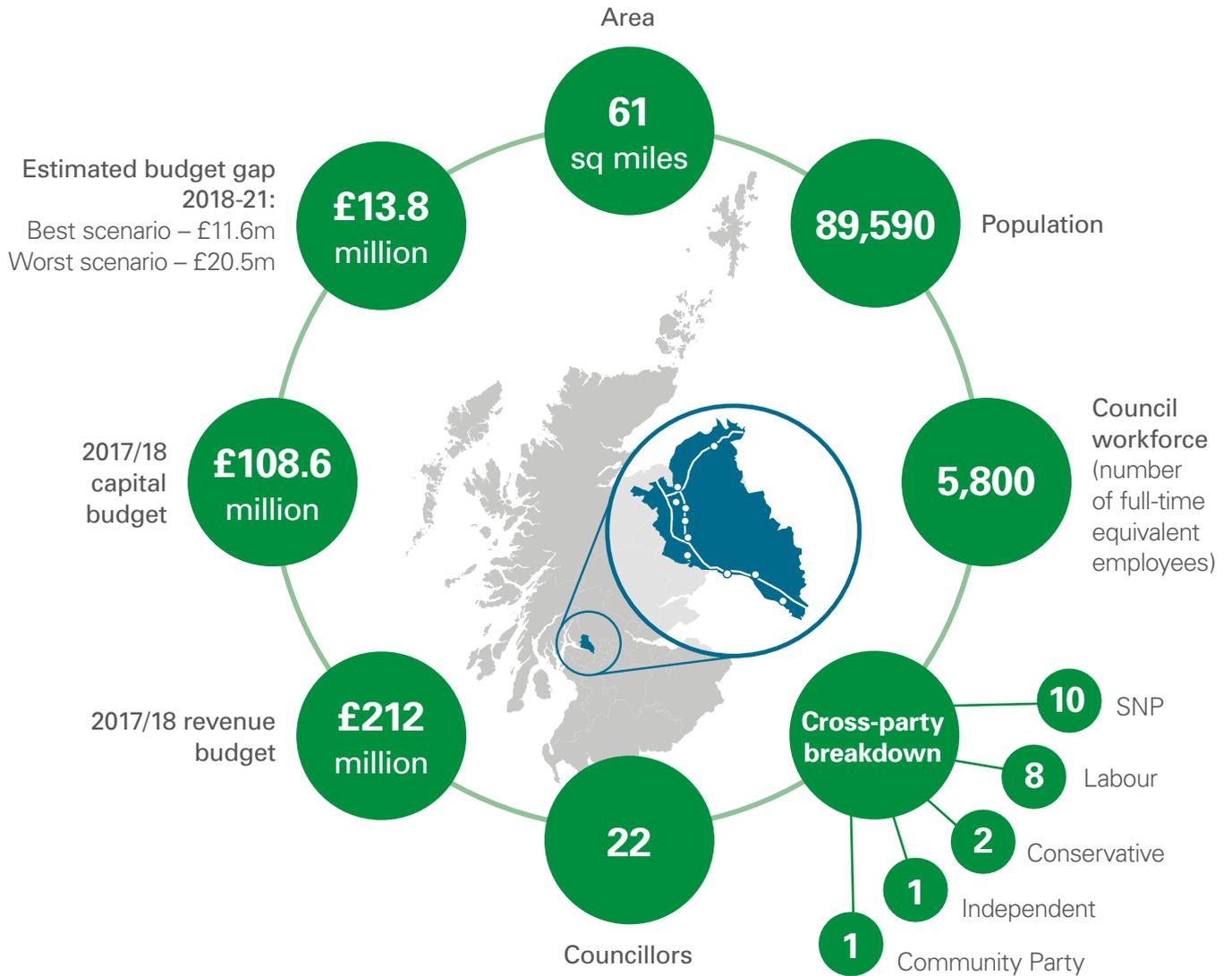


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Key facts



Commission findings



- 1** The Commission accepts the Controller of Audit's report on Best Value in West Dunbartonshire Council. We endorse the recommendations set out by the Controller of Audit in his report and expect the council to act upon them.
- 2** We are pleased with the significant progress made by the council since previous audit reports, most recently in 2010.
- 3** A core feature of this progress has been the strong and improved leadership of councillors and officers. Councillors demonstrate a shared commitment to improving the council and they and officers work well together. We urge continuing this positive momentum by adding weight to the recommendation in the Controller of Audit's report to consider more cross-party working to address the council's financial challenges. It is the Commission's view that a shared commitment to improvement helps inform constructive political discussion and debate. We also note the positive impact of a good take-up of member training and development opportunities.
- 4** We acknowledge steady improvement in service performance, particularly in priority areas in housing and educational attainment. The budget gap projected by the council will necessitate continuing changes in how it delivers its services.
- 5** The council has a good record of delivering services within budget but we note persistent issues of slippage in the capital plan. We underline the need for reviewing capital planning and project management. It is important that the council assures itself that it has the capacity and capability to deliver its ambitious capital projects. The significance of its economic development strategy in driving change in West Dunbartonshire helps underline the importance of progress in this regard.
- 6** This report confirms that the council and its partners are well placed to face the substantial challenges in West Dunbartonshire around reducing population, economic deprivation and poor health outcomes. We note the potential of the Community Alliance in further developing how the council and its partners involve communities in facing these challenges.
- 7** We look forward to seeing positive progress being maintained. The Controller of Audit will monitor progress through the annual audit and update the Commission accordingly.

Audit approach



1. The statutory duty of Best Value was introduced in the Local Government Scotland Act 2003. The audit of Best Value is a continuous process that forms part of the annual audit of every council. Findings are reported each year through the Annual Audit Report. The Controller of Audit will also present a Best Value Assurance Report to the Accounts Commission at least once during the five-year audit appointment for each council.

2. While this is the first assurance report on West Dunbartonshire Council, the report reflects on the progress made by the council since its last Best Value report. The Controller of Audit reported to the Accounts Commission in October 2006. A formal hearing was held in November 2006 to further inform the Accounts Commission's judgements on the council. Recommendations for improvement were then made in the Best Value report published in February 2007. Throughout this report we make reference to the February 2007 report. The [Appendix](#) summarises the findings from previous Best Value reports on the council in the Best Value audit timeline.

3. This report seeks to provide the Commission with assurance on the council's statutory duty to deliver Best Value, with a particular focus on the Commission's Strategic Audit Priorities. We look for a council to demonstrate Best Value by showing continuous improvement in how it delivers its priorities. The pace, depth and continuity of improvement are key to how well a council meets its priorities in future.

4. Our work covers many Best Value characteristics in the statutory guidance but does not cover them all. Our audit approach is proportionate and risk-based, that is, 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. Our [2016/17 Annual Audit Report](#)  was our starting point.

5. In this report, we show how we assessed the council's improvement over time and our conclusions are reflected in the [Key messages \(page 8\)](#). We did initial work to gauge the audit's scope – by reviewing previous audit and inspection reports and council documents; meeting senior council officers; and drawing on our wider public sector knowledge and experience. [Exhibit 1 \(page 7\)](#) shows the areas we decided to focus on. We assessed detailed evidence in February and March 2018. We also:

- interviewed councillors and senior officers
- observed council, committee and board meetings
- reviewed documents and performance data
- observed staff focus groups.

Exhibit 1

Key areas of focus for our audit



Vision and strategic direction [\(Part 1\)](#)

- What the council is trying to achieve.
- The council's strategic plan 2017-22 and its fit with wider community plans.
- The effectiveness of the council's leadership.



Performance [\(Part 2\)](#)

- The council's service performance.
- Reports by organisations that independently inspect council services.



Use of resources [\(Part 3\)](#)

- The services' budgets and capital budgets, which pay for projects such as new buildings.
- The council's workforce.



Partnership working [\(Part 4\)](#)

- The community planning partnership.
- Shared services with other local authorities.
- Queens Quay, redevelopment of the former John Brown's Shipyard.
- The City Deal, providing investment in local projects.



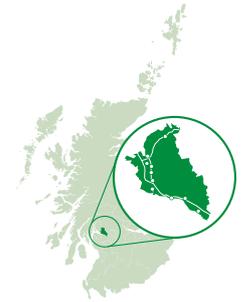
Continuous improvement [\(Part 5\)](#)

- The council's overall direction, depth and pace of change.
- Performance management and reporting arrangements.
- Self-assessment and how it drives improvement action.
- The programme of office rationalisation.

Source: Audit Scotland

6. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and assistance provided to the audit team by councillors, officers and the council's partner organisations.

Key messages



- 1** Since our last Best Value Report in 2007, West Dunbartonshire Council has made significant improvements in how it works. The council now demonstrates a focus on delivering Best Value and we found evidence of continuous improvement in its services.
- 2** In 2007, the Accounts Commission highlighted extensive and fundamental weaknesses in leadership and direction, and poor relationships among elected members and between members and officers. Since then, changes to the senior officer team, including the appointment of the current Chief Executive in 2011, have played a key role in the improvements the council has made. Officers and councillors from all parties work well together for the benefit of the residents of West Dunbartonshire.
- 3** Overall, service performance is improving and most residents who have provided feedback to the council are satisfied. The council maintains a steady pace of change that has led to improved outcomes in its priority areas including housing services and educational attainment among schoolchildren.
- 4** The council's latest 2017-22 strategic plan lays out a focused and ambitious vision for the period, which reflects the needs of its community. There is evidence to demonstrate that the views of the community influenced council budget-setting and decision-making. The strategic plan is clearly aligned to the Community Planning Partnership's strategic priorities.
- 5** The Strategic Improvement Framework provides a structured and practical approach to help council services to continue to improve. The council has demonstrated a commitment to delivering services differently in West Dunbartonshire and is working well with partners to achieve this. Partnership initiatives include:
 - a shared IT data centre with East Dunbartonshire Council
 - membership of the Civil Contingencies Service with Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde councils
 - a communications partnership with Stirling Council.

- 6** The council has a good record of delivering services within budget. It has developed both medium and long-term financial plans. However, it has a projected funding gap of £13.8 million for the three years to 31 March 2021, which will be a challenge to make up. Service reform needs to continue.
 - 7** In recent years, the council has significantly expanded its capital budget, which pays for projects such as buildings and roads. But there is a trend of significant slippage in the capital programme, which means that a number of projects are being finished late. The council now needs to strengthen project planning and management.
 - 8** The council has a detailed organisation-wide, five-year workforce plan and individual service-specific workforce plans.
 - 9** Our 2007 report highlighted that scrutiny in the council needed to improve. There is evidence of significant improvement in this area, with members working together and demonstrating stronger scrutiny.
-

Part 1

Does the council have clear strategic direction?



The council has an ambitious vision for 2017-22, which takes into account community needs

The vision is supported by clear priorities and target outcomes. The focus is a programme of regeneration, and plans to reduce inequality and poverty in the area.

There is clear alignment between the council and the Community Planning Partnership's (CPP) strategic priorities.

Leadership from senior officers and members is effective and has been an important part of the council's improvement since 2007.

Officers and councillors from all parties work well together for the benefit of the residents of West Dunbartonshire.

West Dunbartonshire faces many challenges

7. West Dunbartonshire is west of Glasgow, north of the River Clyde and is one of the smallest Scottish councils in terms of area (31st out of 32) and population (25th). Across the three main areas of Clydebank, Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven there is great diversity. The council area ranges from the densely populated urban centre of Clydebank to the more rural setting of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. The area faces a number of challenges including a reducing population, high levels of economic deprivation and relatively poor health outcomes.

8. Some parts of West Dunbartonshire are prosperous, but significant inequalities exist between communities. Forty-eight of the 121 data zones (population units) across West Dunbartonshire are among the 20 per cent most deprived data zones in Scotland.¹ West Dunbartonshire has seen relatively large increases in its share of the most deprived areas, showing the biggest increase in Scotland in relative deprivation from 2012. Between October 2016 and September 2017, unemployment in West Dunbartonshire was 5.2 per cent compared to the Scottish average of 4.3 per cent.²

9. West Dunbartonshire has a population of 89,590. By 2039 the population of West Dunbartonshire is projected to decrease by 6.7 per cent whereas the population of Scotland overall is projected to increase by 7.5 per cent. In West Dunbartonshire by 2039:

- the number of people aged 75 and over is projected to increase by 71 per cent (to approximately 12,000) – affecting health and social care services for older people
- the number of people of working age is projected to fall by 20 per cent (to 46,500) – and a lack of local workforce could potentially make the area less attractive to some businesses
- the number of children and young people aged 0-15 years is forecast to fall by 12.1 per cent (to 13,700) – affecting services such as schools.

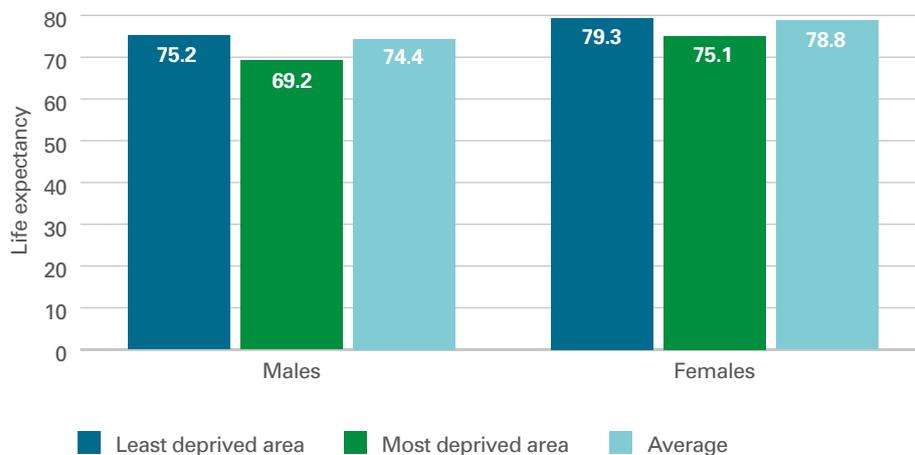
10. West Dunbartonshire has life expectancy rates that are statistically significantly worse than the Scottish average, with the second lowest life expectancy at birth of all Scottish local authorities. Male life expectancy at birth in West Dunbartonshire is improving more rapidly than female life expectancy. The effect that poverty has on life expectancy can be seen when comparing life expectancy rates in the least and most deprived areas of West Dunbartonshire ([Exhibit 2](#)). Such inequalities represent a long-standing and long-term challenge in West Dunbartonshire.

The council has a clear vision supported by a set of priorities and outcomes developed from a good understanding of local need

11. Since the 2007 report, West Dunbartonshire Council has in place a vision and suite of strategic priorities, described first in council plans and then through its five-year strategic plans for 2012-17 and 2017-22. The 2012-17 strategic plan included an overall vision of 'A prosperous West Dunbartonshire recognised as a dynamic area within a successful Scotland.' In October 2017, the council approved

Exhibit 2

Life expectancy in West Dunbartonshire by deprivation, 2009-13



Note: Scotland averages: males – 77.1, females – 81.2.

Source: *West Dunbartonshire Council Strategic Plan 2017-22*

its strategic plan for 2017-22. The vision is 'to deliver high-quality services, led by priorities identified by the communities of West Dunbartonshire, in an open and transparent way'. The new strategic plan has five priorities linked to supporting outcomes ([Exhibit 3](#)). The council agreed on its priorities and outcomes based on a good understanding of what local people wanted after consulting them, and on the administration's election commitments.

Exhibit 3

West Dunbartonshire Council's Strategic Plan 2017-22: Priorities and supporting outcomes

Strategic priority	Supporting outcome
A strong local economy and improved job opportunities	Increased skills for life and learning
	Increased employment and training opportunities
	A growing economy
Supported individuals, families and carers living independently and with dignity	More affordable and suitable housing options
	Enhanced life chances
	Improved wellbeing
Meaningful engagement with active, empowered and informed citizens who feel safe and engaged	Strong and active communities
	Fully consulted and involved citizens who are able to make full use of the Community Empowerment Act
Open, accountable and accessible local government	Equity of access for all residents
	A continuously improving council delivering Best Value
Efficient and effective frontline services to improve the everyday lives of residents	A committed and skilled workforce
	Sustainable and attractive local communities

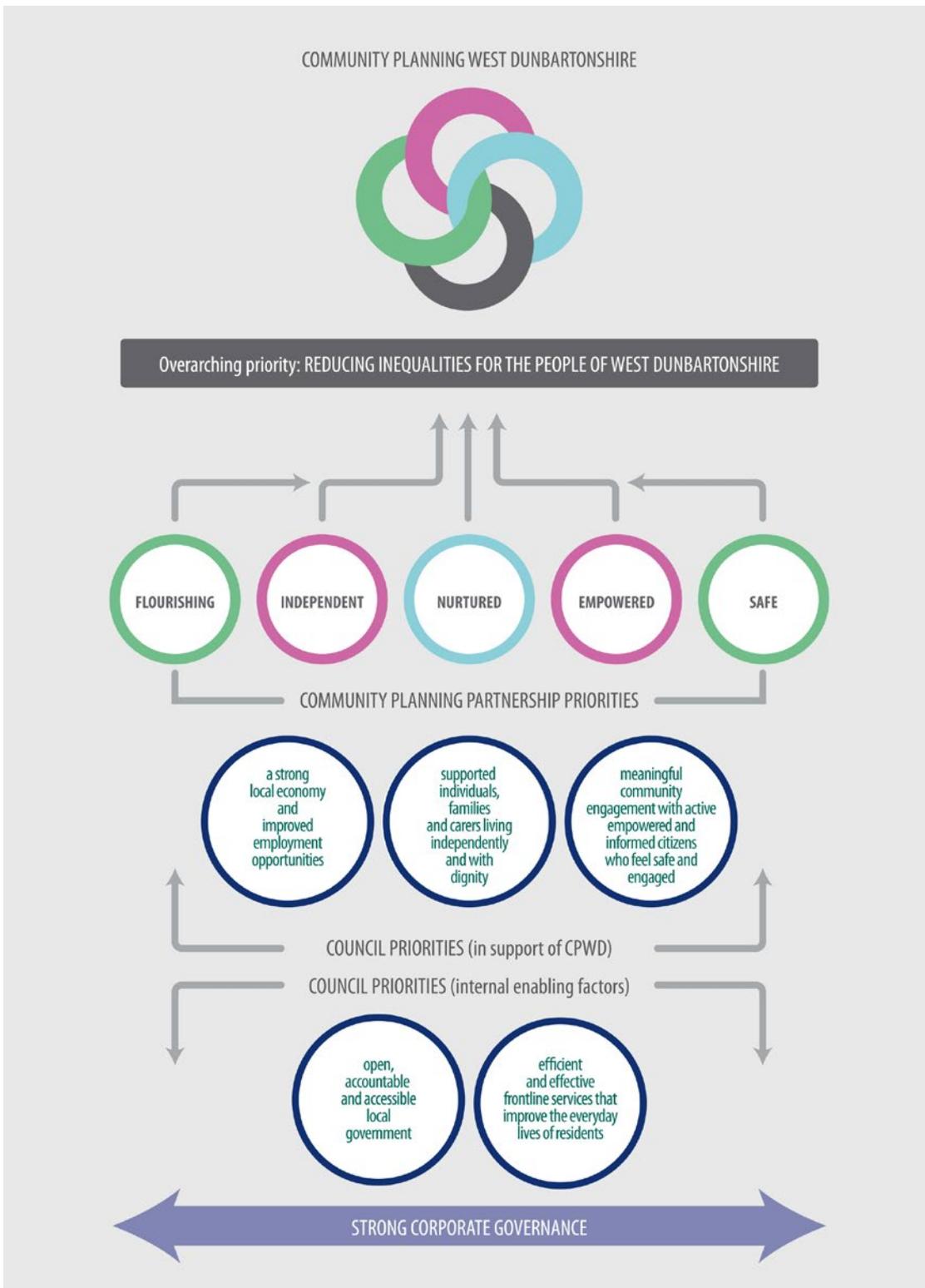
Source: West Dunbartonshire Council Strategic Plan 2017-22

There is clear alignment between the council and the Community Planning Partnership's (CPP) strategic priorities

12. Councils do not deliver services alone. The council has a leading role in the West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership, known as Community Planning West Dunbartonshire (CPWD). The partnership includes representatives from the council, health board, police and fire services and local charities and voluntary organisations. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires community partnerships to produce a Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) for its area. CPWD's LOIP was issued in October 2017. The plan sets out shared vision for the area. [Exhibit 4 \(page 13\)](#) shows how the LOIP links the council and the CPWD's strategic priorities. The LOIP covers ten years, which is longer than the council's five-year strategic plan. This helps the partnership to target broader areas for improvement.

Exhibit 4

How the council priorities link to and support the CPWD’s Local Outcomes Improvement Plan long-term aspirations



The council's service plans will help deliver the strategic priorities

13. The council has three strategic directors, one of whom operates as the Chief Officer of the West Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), as [Exhibit 5 \(page 15\)](#) shows. Council services are split across eight areas, with each managed by a strategic lead officer. In addition, there are four heads of service within the HSCP.

14. Each strategic lead area has an annual service delivery plan. These plans set out the key actions for each service to help deliver the council's strategic plan. The plans also set out more operational improvement priorities and actions identified through the service planning process. We discuss the service plans further in [Part 2](#).

15. As the council only adopted the new strategic plan in October 2017, the 2017-18 service delivery plans still reflect the priorities and performance indicators from the previous plan. New service delivery plans were introduced in May 2018 to support the new strategic plan. We found continuity and consistency between the 2012-17 and 2017-22 priorities and performance indicators.

16. As well as these planning processes, the council's Strategic Improvement Framework enables the council to review and improve services and helps ensure it can continue to deliver them in the longer term. This is discussed further in [Part 5](#).

17. The council's strategic priorities are taken into account when decisions are being made. All council and committee covering reports include a strategic assessment. This acts as a prompt to officers and members to consider how any issues and decisions will help deliver on the council's priorities. This is an area of good practice.

The council consults with the community when making decisions

18. The 2017-22 strategic plan priorities were informed by a consultation by the current administration during the 2017 election campaign. The consultation asked residents what was important to them and what their priorities were. It was undertaken via online and paper surveys and received over 3,000 responses.

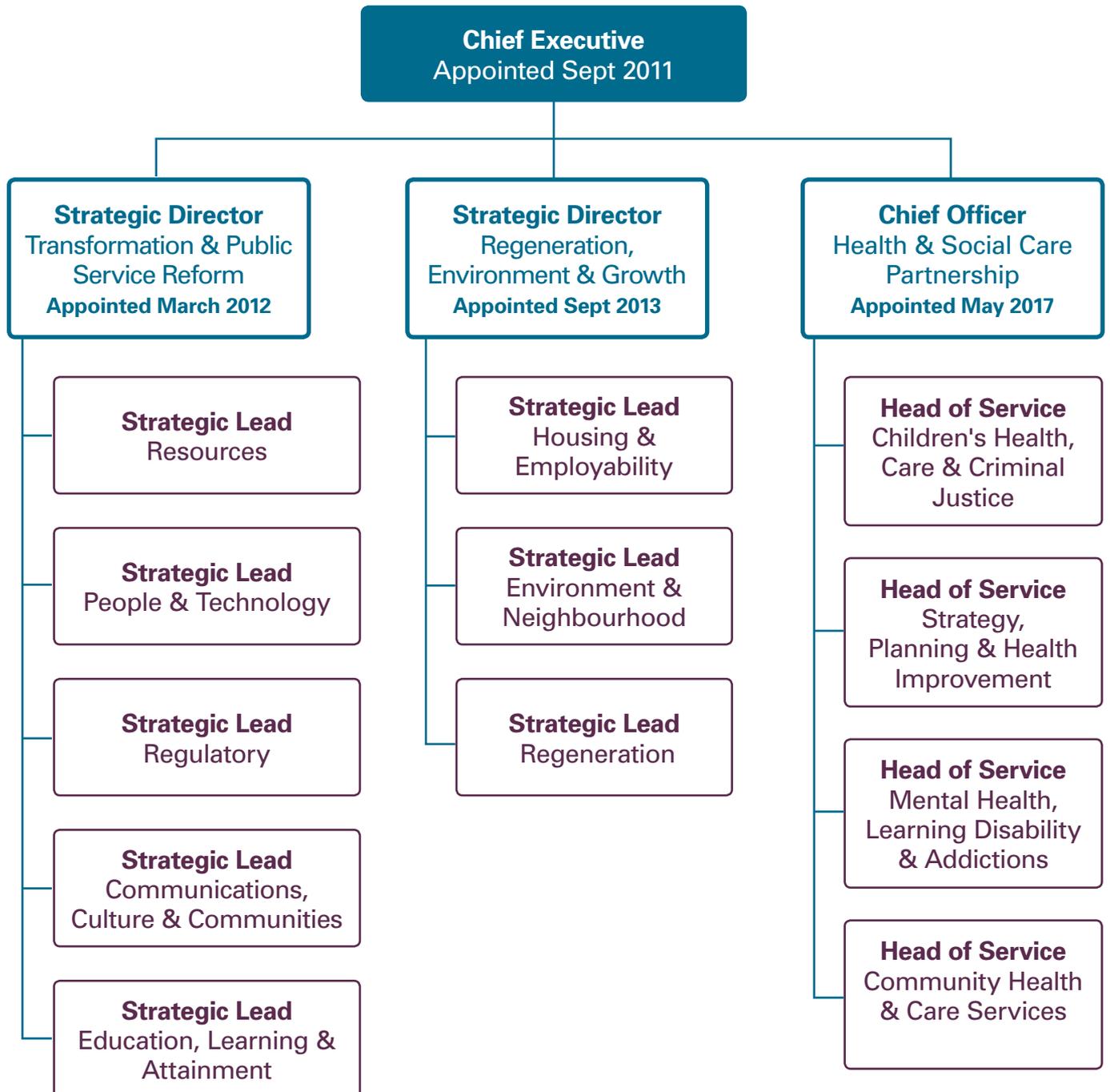
19. The council has an Engaging Communities Framework in place. This helps the council to consult on important issues. There is a focus on online consultation, for example on the budget, rent setting and the local development plan. Local people can also give their views during a consultation in libraries and the council's one-stop shops. The council also has a citizens' panel. The framework provides a practical guide which explains what community engagement is and how staff can best use the range of tools, methodologies and approaches available to them.

20. There is evidence of the community being involved in council decisions. Examples include the following:

- Following a review of library opening times, the council amended proposals to reflect over 1,000 responses to a consultation.
- Housing tenant forums have participated in decisions about, for example, rent setting and housing allocation policy.

Exhibit 5

West Dunbartonshire Council's structure



- Participatory budgeting, where local residents were involved in the allocation of small grants to upgrade community facilities and reduce social isolation.

21. The West Dunbartonshire Tenants and Residents Organisation (WDTRO) is an independent, umbrella group which works to influence decisions on council houses and services. The council supports the group and has regular contact with and provides training for WDTRO members. Creating the Joint Rent Group is an example of good working relationships. Through this, tenants feel their interests are represented.

22. The Community Alliance (CA) brings together representatives from neighbourhood, interest and user groups. The council sees it as an important engagement link with the community, but there are challenges. For example, it is hard to attract a diverse range of members to join the CA to ensure that it is representative of the whole community. The council held focus groups so that the CA could influence the council's 2017-22 strategic plan, but these were poorly attended by members of the CA. The council should continue to offer help to further develop the role of the CA so it can reach its full potential.

23. The council has good foundations for meeting its responsibilities under the Community Empowerment Act. The Act aims to empower communities by enabling them to own land and buildings and to strengthen their voices in decisions that matter to them. The council has been involved in a number of projects to transfer assets to the community [Case study 1 \(page 17\)](#). We will continue to look at how the council implements the Act in future years.

Members and officers demonstrate effective leadership

24. Our previous BV report commented on the lack of effective leadership from senior elected members and officers and poor relationships among elected members and officers. There is evidence to demonstrate effective council leadership from members and officers. This has been an important part of the council's improvement since 2007. The chief executive and senior management team operate well, showing shared corporate ownership and commitment. There is good communication and the team works effectively together.

25. Members have set out a clear vision and priorities for the council through its strategic plans. The Chief Executive and Senior Management Team provides clear direction through the council's 'Leadership and Governance' structure for officers, shown at [Exhibit 6 \(page 18\)](#). The Chief Executive, strategic directors and the strategic leads meet every Monday to review current issues and the week ahead. Each of the monitoring and scrutiny groups and boards meet monthly. Senior officers are motivated and passionate in striving to achieve the council's priorities.

Officers and councillors from all parties work well together in the interests of residents of West Dunbartonshire

26. In the period to May 2017, a Labour majority administration was in place. Following the elections in May 2017, no political party in West Dunbartonshire had an overall majority. A joint administration was formed, made up of ten SNP councillors and one Independent councillor. As the largest single group not in administration, it was agreed that Labour would form the official opposition.

Case study 1



Community Empowerment Act in action: Westbridgend community centre

In 2015, Westbridgend Hall, a well-used community centre in Dumbarton, was closed because the building was no longer fit for purpose and was too damaged to repair. The council allocated £675,000 to build a new centre on the site, on the condition that members of the community ran it.

A community-led management committee was set up. Members of Westbridgend Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) started the campaign to encourage people to join the committee. A lot of effort has gone into bringing others on board through public events.

The council's Tenant Participation Team and the Communities Team have supported the new management committee. The teams have spent time with the committee on subjects such as:

- how you work as a committee
- business planning
- priority setting
- how to consult and engage with the community and ensure it is representative
- how you hold a meeting.

Work will continue in building capacity of the group and supporting development of a business plan to inform the design of the future facility. The main focus for the council has been on empowering the community, giving local people skills and confidence, and transferring a valuable asset to the community that will provide services based on local needs.

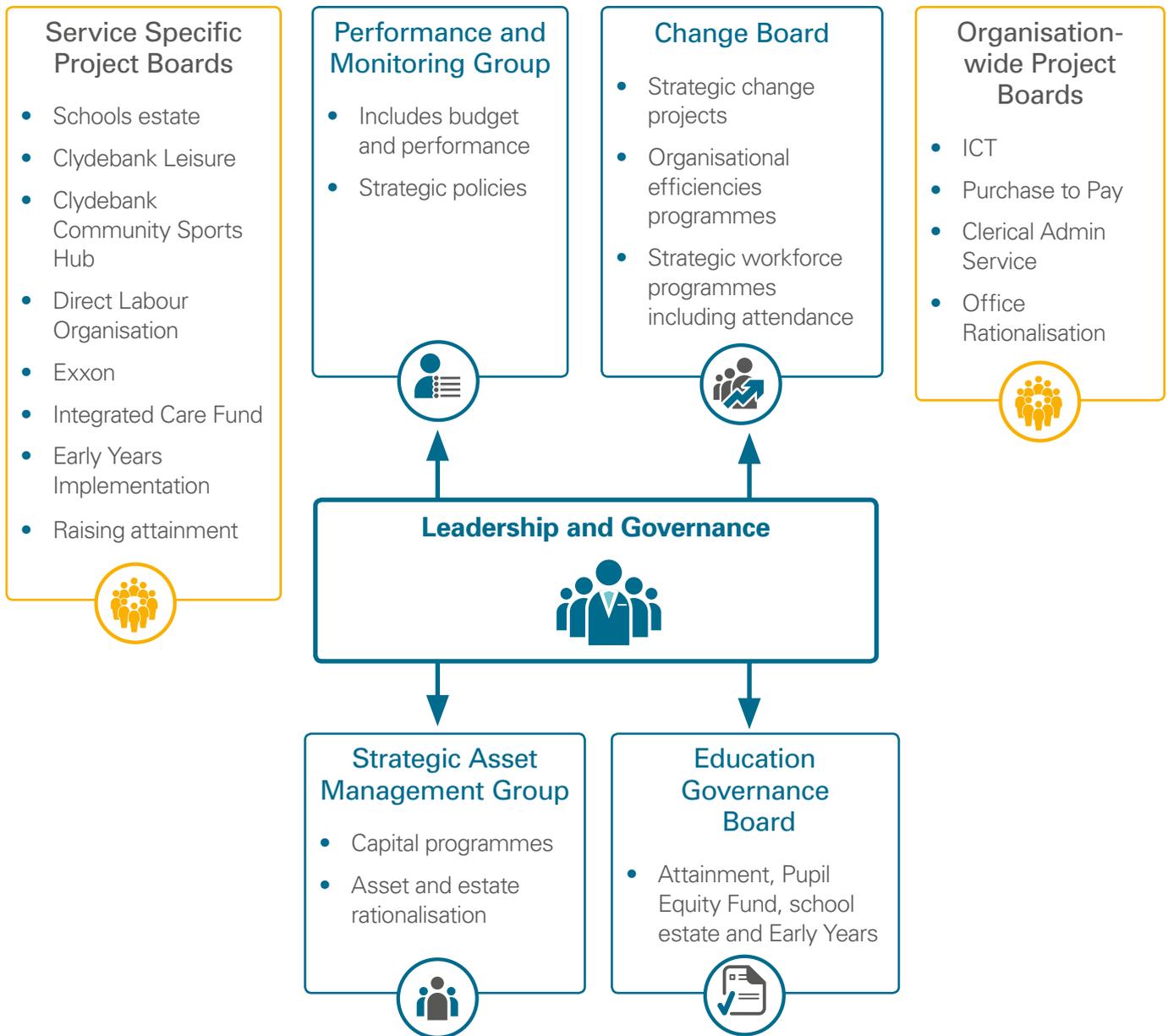
Source: West Dunbartonshire Council 2018

27. Eight of the 22 members elected in May 2017 are new. The induction programme for councillors was, therefore, crucial for members to be effective in their roles. We consider that the induction programme is a good practice example of support for elected members. The induction programme is followed up by members' seminars. The council currently has 11 seminars scheduled in the period to June 2018. These cover a wide range of areas, such as Community Planning Partnership – Tackling Domestic Abuse, Understanding our Equality Duties, Adult Support and Protection, Safeguarding our Environment and an ICT drop-in session. There has been good attendance at members' sessions and development workshops, and we feel the material the council provided was comprehensive and accessible. It is also clear that officers provide ongoing support to members.

28. Within the political environment in which local authorities operate, councillors are working well together. We have observed them asking questions and making decisions based on what they believe is for the benefit and interest of the

Exhibit 6

West Dunbartonshire officer governance structure



Source: Audit Scotland

residents of West Dunbartonshire. Discussions at committees focus on the main issues, and councillors are able to make decisions. Working relationships between officers and councillors are respectful and constructive. Our view is supported by our interviews with a number of members. The council holds briefing sessions or seminars to give councillors more in-depth information to help them scrutinise at committee if particularly complex information is being provided to councillors or new ideas about delivering services are proposed. To further develop this area, the council could consider introducing cross-party working groups to address the financial challenges facing the council and to help with difficult decisions which will have to be made.

Part 2

How well is the council performing?



The council's overall performance is improving and there is evidence that residents are satisfied with services

The council's Strategic Improvement Framework uses benchmarking to help achieve continuous improvement.

The council reports improved performance in two-thirds of its priority indicators for the period 2012-17. Particular highlights are improvements in housing services and educational attainment among schoolchildren from poorer areas.

Resident satisfaction has increased significantly over the last five years.

The council has effective systems in place to monitor performance and drive continuous improvement

29. In 2016, the council consolidated improvement activity in a new Strategic Improvement Framework to monitor its performance and drive continuous improvement. We discuss this further in [Part 5](#).

30. Members and officers effectively scrutinise how services perform. Examples include the following:

- Each Strategic Service Management Team considers performance reports during routine management meetings.
- The Performance Monitoring and Review Group considers— regular reports from across strategic areas through its online performance management system, Pentana. This monitors the performance indicators linked to the strategic plan.
- Service committees meet every quarter and get regular performance information.
- Service performance is reviewed through the Corporate Services Committee, Education Services Committee, Housing & Communities Committee and Infrastructure, Regeneration & Economic Development Committee and annually through the council.
- Officers and councillors have a good understanding of what the council has achieved and the challenges that remain.

31. Improvement priorities and actions are clearly set out in the eight annual service delivery plans. The plans include a review of the previous year's performance. Areas covered include:

- self-evaluation
- benchmarking data
- feedback from customers and employees
- the challenges remaining and areas for improvement
- an overview of resources, including employees and budgets, and risks for each service.

32. The service plans provide balanced analyses of performance and areas for improvement and there is evidence of actions leading to improved outcomes ([Exhibit 7](#)).

Exhibit 7

West Dunbartonshire Council 2012-17 strategic plan performance

Key area	No. of indicators	2016/17 target status
Social mission		
Improve economic growth and employment	2	 
Improve life chances for children and young people	3	  
Improve local housing and environmentally sustainable infrastructure	4	   
Improve wellbeing of communities and protect the welfare of vulnerable people	4	   
Organisational capabilities		
Committed & dynamic workforce	3	  
Fit for purpose estate and facilities	3	  
Innovative use of information technology	2	 
Strong financial governance and sustainable budget management	6	     
Legitimacy & Support		
Positive dialogue with local citizens and communities	4	   

KEY  Met  Narrowly missed  Significantly missed

Source: *Strategic Plan 2012-17: Progress in 2016/17*, West Dunbartonshire Council

33. Public performance reporting focuses on the 2012-17 strategic priorities and is available on the council's website. Performance is displayed in several formats including:

- three performance wheels that give a general overview of progress using a red, amber and green scale
- a document with infographics that highlight targets the council has met and missed
- a table that details specific progress made against targets

34. The performance reporting offers a clear analysis of targets that the council has missed and met, along with historical trend information. It may also benefit from providing a summary of the journey of performance in each area and future plans for improvement, alongside the detailed performance indicator report.

The council reports improved performance in two-thirds of its priority indicators for the period 2012-17

35. The strategic plan 2017-22, has five-year targets with monitoring and reporting on progress planned annually. The council only approved the plan in October 2017 and it has not yet published performance reports. Targets have milestones for every year and these will be reported to full council each year. Targets are set from a baseline and will be reviewed over time. Annual performance reports against the new strategic plan are planned for members.

36. Service performance against the council's vision and five priorities in the 2012-17 strategic plan was measured against 31 performance targets. [Exhibit 7](#) shows that by 2017 it had met or exceeded two-thirds of these.

The council can demonstrate positive progress in some key services such as housing, employment and education

37. The performance assessment demonstrates some significant improvements in key services, and highlights that the council still faces significant challenges in a number of areas, for example achieving a committed and dynamic workforce. Performance targets missed under this priority included percentage of employees satisfied with council, sickness absence per employee and sickness absence per teacher. We discuss this further in [Part 3](#) and [Part 5](#). These have been reflected in the council's new plan. The two financial and budget management targets that were missed both relate to rent collection.

38. The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) reported in June 2013³ on the change in strategic direction that the council took in June 2012. The SHR reported that the change had a significant impact on improving the quality of local housing and delivering its asset management plans. The council increased the new supply of social housing for rent from 51 units in 2012/13 to 91 units in 2016/17. The SHR reported positive levels of tenant participation and that the council's new corporate procurement strategy encouraged competitiveness and market testing. Increasing the percentage of council houses and flats that meet the Scottish Housing Standard was a priority indicator in the council's 2012/17 strategic plan. Although nationally its performance is in the lowest quartile, the rate of performance improvement has been good. Only 62 per cent of dwellings met the standard in 2012/13, but this increased to 88 per cent in 2016/17. This remains

a key priority in the council's 2017-22 plan. The latest assessment in the West Dunbartonshire Local Scrutiny Plan for 2017/18 details progress in this area.

39. In 2016, West Dunbartonshire Council's Working 4U service won a COSLA gold award in the Service Innovation and Improvement category. This was for its innovative approach to helping people find jobs, develop skills and deal with benefits and debts. The council assisted 21 per cent of unemployed people registered with them into work in 2016/17 compared to 9.7 per cent in 2012/13. This is better than the Scottish average of 14 per cent.

40. The council is making good progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap ([Case study 2](#)). In 2016/17, 23 per cent of secondary school pupils from deprived areas achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 6 or higher compared to 11 per cent in 2012/13. This is above the Scottish average of 16 per cent in 2016/17. The proportion of pupils entering positive destinations, such as education, training or work, has also improved from 91.1 per cent in 2012/13 to 93.1 per cent in 2016/17. This is in line with the Scottish average of 93.7 per cent and its performance sits in the middle of their family benchmarking group.

Case study 2



West Dunbartonshire is making good progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. This is the overarching priority of Community Planning West Dunbartonshire

West Dunbartonshire Council's strategy for raising attainment was approved in 2012. The strategy provided a strong basis for improvement and also helped the council prepare for the introduction of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) in 2015 and, more recently, the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF).

In January 2018, a review by Education Scotland and Audit Scotland showed considerable improvement in the achievement levels of pupils from deprived areas of West Dunbartonshire. In 2016/17, 23 per cent of secondary school pupils from deprived areas were successful at five or more exams compared to 11 per cent in 2012/13. This is above the Scottish average of 16 per cent in 2016/17 and above other councils in West Dunbartonshire's family group.

The review also highlighted that there is a robust and well-articulated governance framework within the council for education overall and, specifically, for raising attainment. Lines of accountability were clear and there was evidence that governance arrangements were widely understood by council staff and headteachers. There was clear evidence that a 'golden thread' exists in relation to raising attainment and closing the poverty-related gap. SAC and PEF have been used to extend the depth and pace of existing initiatives, ensuring the council's approach is coherent and fully supports its strategic priorities

Source: How well is West Dunbartonshire Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related gap? Education Scotland, May 2018

The Care Inspectorate's recent joint inspection into services for children and young people reported strong performance in several areas

41. In February 2017, the Care Inspectorate⁴ reported that the council worked with community partners to assess how well services were improving the lives of children, young people and families. The review identified areas of particular strengths including:

- a strong strategic approach and a coherent shared vision
- highly committed staff groups
- young people, including the most vulnerable, were involved in influencing policy and service development
- commitment to early intervention and prevention.

42. The Care Inspectorate identified several actions for improvement for the council including:

- demonstrating investment in early intervention and prevention through robust data collection
- strengthening strategic plans in recognition of national policy directives on prevention of domestic abuse and local use of kinship care
- achieving consistency in quality of risk assessments
- ensuring robust and systematic plans are in place for day-to-day quality assurance.

The council is working with the community planning partners and the HSCP to address these areas for improvement.

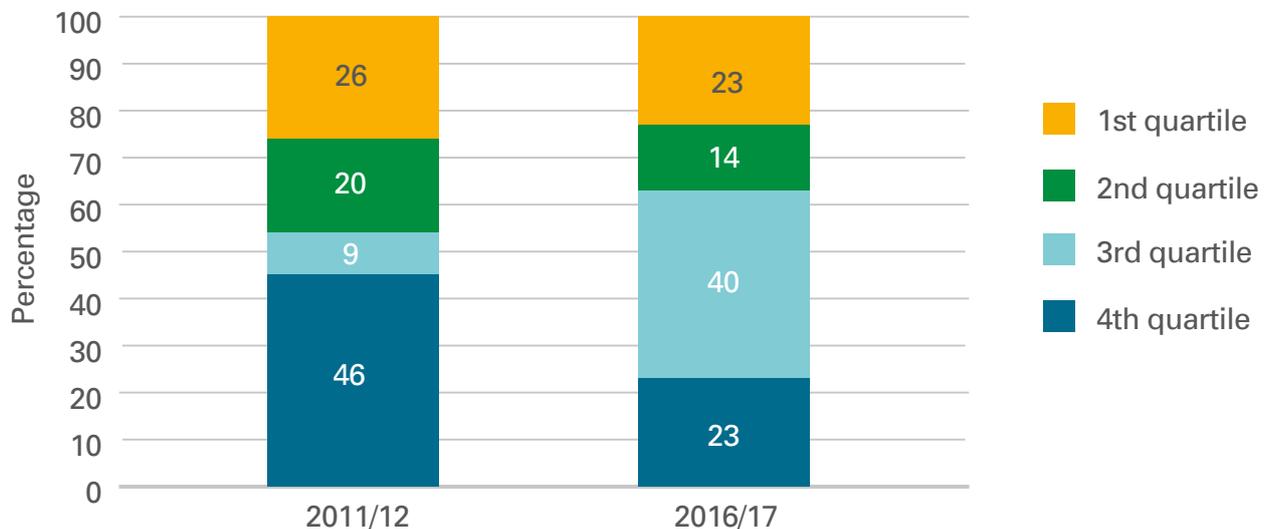
Overall, the council's performance against national indicators has improved in recent years. But improvement is slower than other councils in some areas

43. The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) allows councils to compare its local performance against the Scottish average and that of similar councils through family groupings. Although there are over 70 performance indicators in the LGBF, this analysis is based on 35 single-year indicators measuring performance rather than cost.⁵ Some ambiguity may exist in the judgement of whether an increased cost is good or bad. Therefore the focus is on outcomes-based indicators where relative performance can be categorically measured.

44. [Exhibit 8 \(page 24\)](#) shows the council's pace of improvement compared to Scotland as a whole. The council has significantly reduced the number of indicators in the lowest quartile (from 46 per cent to 23 per cent). However, the number of indicators in the top two quartiles has also (from 46 per cent to 37 per cent). The rate of change of indicators in the bottom quartile was higher than both of the council's family groups. The family grouping percentage point change

Exhibit 8

Comparing West Dunbartonshire Council's performance over time



Note: Measuring council performance involves considering how all councils are performing, from lowest to highest for each indicator. From this it is possible to see how one council compares to all councils. Relative performance against other councils is divided into four equal bands, or quartiles. The first quartile contains the best-performing councils for that indicator and the fourth quartile contains the poorest performing councils.

Source: Audit Scotland; and *Local Government Benchmarking Framework*, Improvement Service, 2016/17

ranged from a reduction of 23 per cent to an increase of 20 per cent. This shows that while the council is improving, the rate of improvement compared to the national picture is mixed. Nationally, the council performed particularly well in:

- improving attainment levels for pupils from the most deprived areas (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quartiles 1 & 2)
- providing energy-efficient council housing.

45. The indicators in which the council performed less well compared to other councils include the following:

- The percentage of procurement spent on local small and medium enterprises. The council identified that it awarded the lowest percentage of procurement to local small and medium enterprises in its family benchmarking grouping. This has now been included as a target indicator in the 2017-22 strategic plan and is monitored under the 'growing economy' outcome.
- The proportion of social work spending on self-directed support (SDS) for adults. Although the proportion of adults receiving funding for SDS increased from 1.6 per cent to 2.4 per cent between 2011/12 and 2016/17, the council performs below the Scottish average. This is a priority area for the Health and Social Care Partnership.

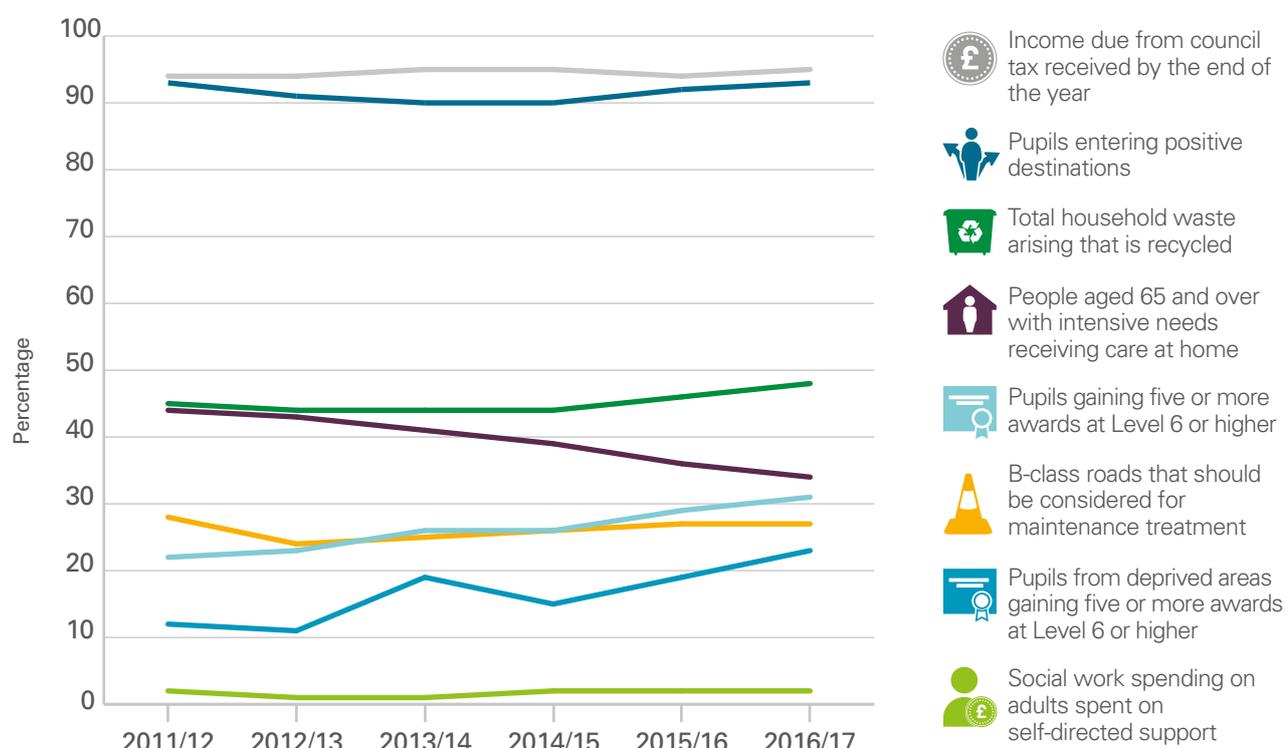
46. The Accounts Commission's report, *Local Government in Scotland: Challenges and Performance 2018*  selected eight measures from the LGBF likely to matter to the public. These include performance measures on services that are not all covered by the council's own strategic priorities, giving a wider review of the council's performance. **Exhibit 9** shows that over the last five years, performance has been stable in four indicators, improved in three and declined in one. The indicators with the greatest improvements were educational attainment and the proportion of adults receiving funding for SDS, which we discuss above. The percentage of household waste recycled by the council consistently performed above the Scottish average, rising from 45 per cent to 49 per cent between 2011/12 and 2016/17. This indicator is ranked third highest in its family grouping and the council has prioritised it for further improvement in the 2017-22 plan.

47. The percentage of people aged 65 and over with intensive needs receiving care at home declined from 44 per cent in 2011/12 to 34 per cent in 2016/17. This indicator is monitored by the HSCP, which has set a target of 35 per cent by March 2018.

Exhibit 9

West Dunbartonshire Council's performance against selected indicators from 2011/12 to 2016/17

West Dunbartonshire Council's performance has improved in six of the eight indicators over the last five years.



Note: Performance reported every two years instead of annually.

Source: Audit Scotland; and *Local Government Benchmarking Framework, Improvement Service, 2016/17*

Resident satisfaction has increased significantly over the last five years

48. The council runs a monthly telephone survey of residents asking how satisfied they are with the council's services. One hundred residents each month, representative of the demographic profile of West Dunbartonshire, are contacted by phone and asked to give their views on key council areas. The survey began in 2013 and asks the same five key questions about residents' views of West Dunbartonshire Council every month. This gives the council consistent trend data over time.

49. [Exhibit 10](#) shows that all questions have shown improvement over the five-year period.

Exhibit 10

Residents' satisfaction with the council

Question	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% change since 2013
	%	%	%	%	%	%
WDC is efficient and well run	58	79	87	90	90	+32
WDC services are value for money	63	82	84	81	91	+28
WDC takes account of residents' views	53	72	75	67	59	+6
WDC communicates well with its residents	57	77	76	72	69	+12
I would speak highly of the council	45	70	78	72	74	+29

Source: Audit Scotland

50. The statement 'WDC takes account of residents' views' has shown the least improvement, with six per cent change from 2013. The council recognises that support for this statement was reported at 75 per cent in 2015 and has deteriorated in 2016 and 2017. This, in part, was as a result of the council's decision in these years not to hold a budget consultation. The council held a budget consultation in 2018.

51. The council feels that having robust and consistent resident satisfaction data allows services to improve and learn from the feedback. It also acts as a regular temperature check of satisfaction levels among residents. The data from the survey complements a suite of management information and performance indicators which allow long-term analysis of resident satisfaction overall.

Part 3

Is the council using its resources effectively?



The council has effective arrangements in place for financial planning that include a long-term financial plan

The council has a good record of delivering within its service budgets. However, the council has a cumulative funding gap of £13.8 million over the next three years to March 2021 that it needs to fill. Service reform needs to continue.

The council's capital plan has grown since 2015 to £109 million in 2017/18. However, there is a high level of slippage every year, with over 43 per cent predicted for 2017/18.

The council has demonstrated good practice and approved a detailed organisation-wide, five-year workforce plan and individual service specific workforce plans.

The council has effective financial management and a good process in place for financial planning

52. Since our previous Best Value report in 2007, the council has worked hard to develop its financial planning. The council now has a long-term financial strategy that projects budget gaps to 2028. The strategy identifies budget pressures and provides clear links to the council's strategic objectives. Given that financial settlements are only made annually, it is difficult for the council to plan with absolute certainty. To address this, the council has included scenario planning and a risk assessment of the likely impact of any changes in assumptions. The council's annual revenue estimates supplement the long-term strategy and show the projected movement in budget gaps as a result of changes in strategy.

53. In March 2018, a report to the council updated the general services revenue estimates for 2018/19 to 2020/21. This identified a projected budget surplus for 2018/19 of £0.671 million and cumulative budget gaps of £7.091 million and £13.8 million for 2019/20 and 2020/21 respectively.

54. In March 2018, the council approved its revenue budget for 2018/19. The budget includes a three per cent increase in council tax, which will yield £1.35 million of additional income, in 2018/19, increasing to £1.65 million by 2027/28.

55. Since 2013, the council has been refining and improving its budget consultation procedures and the way it consults online to encourage more people to get involved in budget decisions. The council also involves representative

groups across the community as it sets its budget. This year, the council received over 2,700 responses to its budget consultation. The results of the consultation were presented to the council before the budget was approved on 5 March 2018.

56. At the March 2018 council meeting, members frequently referred to the results of the budget consultation. There are examples where the budget proposals had been revised to take into account the views demonstrated in the consultation. For example, one of the proposals presented was to reduce devolved school budgets by either five or ten per cent. From the consultation, only 31 per cent and 35 per cent of respondents agreed with the respective reductions. Respondents expressed the view that this option contradicted the ambition to close the attainment gap and the general consensus was that reductions should not be made to education budgets. Due to this, this preferred savings option was not taken forward as part of the budget agreed in March 2018.

57. The council continues to develop how it reports financial performance against its budget and we found evidence in council papers of improvements in this area. Budget monitoring reports to councillors cover all services and give a breakdown to individual budget heads for each service. The reports describe the service, the reason for any variance, any mitigating action and the expected outcome. The reports are informative, comprehensive and easy to read.

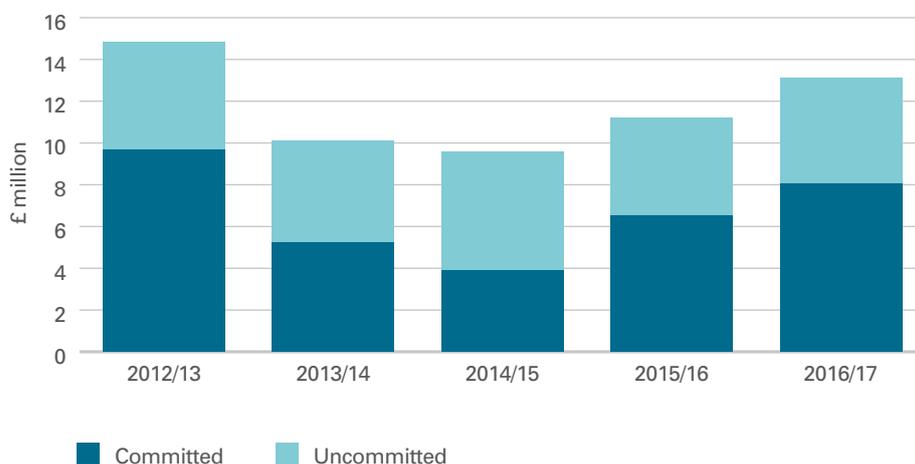
The council has a low level of usable reserves. This means there is limited scope to use reserves to close the funding gap

58. The council's level of reserves is in line with its financial strategy to maintain a reserve of two per cent of net expenditure to safeguard assets and services against financial risk. This equates to a minimum required reserve level of £4.1 million at 31 March 2017.

59. The General Fund balance is the largest usable reserve and accounted for £13.1 million (53 per cent) of usable reserves at 31 March 2017. [Exhibit 11](#) analyses the General Fund reserve over the five years to 31 March 2017.

Exhibit 11

Analysis of General Fund over the last five years

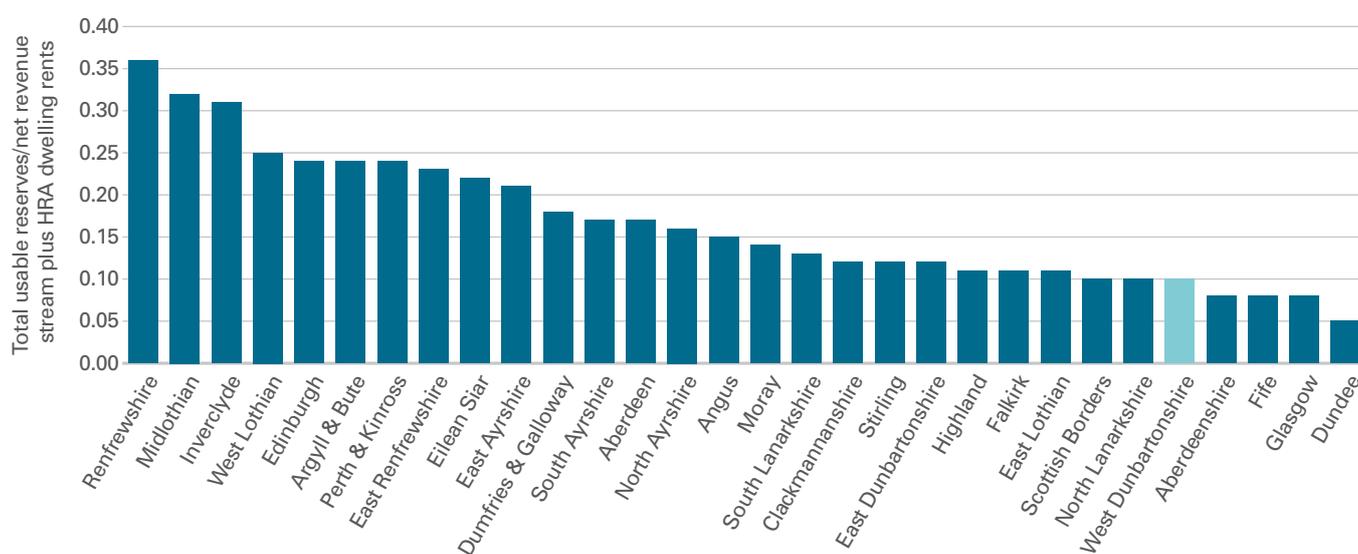


Source: Audited financial statements

60. The level of usable reserves increased during 2016/17 from £22.3 million to £24.7 million. Despite this increase, as demonstrated in [Exhibit 12](#), the council has a low level of reserves as a proportion of net revenue stream including housing rents compared with other local authorities and is in the lowest quartile in Scotland. This means that there is limited scope for the council to use reserves to close any funding gap. The council recognises this and has no plans to use reserves to close the funding gaps and it is concentrating on identifying savings.

Exhibit 12

Usable reserves as a proportion of net revenue stream including housing rents



Source: 2016/17 audited financial statements

The capital programme is not being delivered on time. Each year there is a high level of slippage against the council's capital plan

61. The council has comprehensive asset management plans in place, linked to the council's strategic objectives. The plans set out the resources required to invest in the council's assets including schools, offices and land.

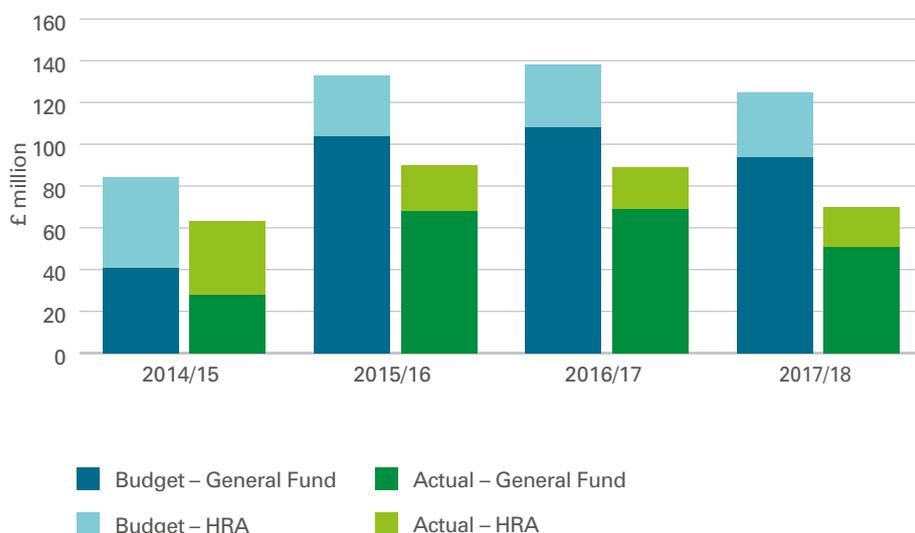
62. In 2015, the council substantially increased its capital budget levels for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). [Exhibit 13 \(page 30\)](#) illustrates this increase. The planned General Fund capital expenditure for each of the years 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 was over 100 per cent higher than the 2014/15 budget. The council's capital plan since April 2015 is considered ambitious, with a total gross General Fund capital budget for the three years to 31 March 2018 of over £300 million.

63. However, this programme is not being delivered on time and high levels of slippage have been reported against the capital programme over a number of years. This is not a unique problem; capital slippage has long been identified as a common problem in councils. Audit Scotland's [Local government in Scotland, Financial overview 2016/17](#)  stated that 'consistent levels of capital

slippage across the country suggest that councils are setting unrealistic budgets'. However, the level of slippage in West Dunbartonshire has been a concern over a number of years as [Exhibit 13](#) illustrates.

Exhibit 13

Capital expenditure compared to budget (General Fund and HRA)



Source: Audited financial statements and council budget reports

64. Capital slippage for the financial year to 31 March 2018 is projected as £47 million against the budget of £109 million. This represents 43 per cent of the annual capital plan. Our audit focuses on the general services capital projects. But the same principles apply to the HRA capital plan, which is also forecasting 37 per cent of slippage against its plan for 2017/18.

65. Members regularly receive comprehensive capital monitoring reports. There is clear disclosure of the progress of each major project with reasons for variances over £0.5 million. At present, covering reports reference slippage as 'favourable underspends'. This should be reviewed given the levels of slippage and the impact of this on delivering key council projects.

66. The council has recognised that its capital programme is an area for improvement and has made some changes. In the last six years, post-project reviews have been introduced to learn lessons after a project is completed. The council believes that the high levels of slippage are due to optimism bias included within projects and that some slippage is strategic and opportunity driven.

67. To identify the causes of the slippage, we reviewed three significant projects which are currently in progress. [Exhibit 14 \(page 31\)](#) shows the nature of the slippage on these over their lifetime to date. This shows that scheduling the work and costs between financial years is not accurate and that the completion date is consistently falling into future years. This in turn affects the costs associated with that project. Two of the three projects we reviewed are projected to cost more than their original budgets. This has an impact on the council's ability to deliver on its strategic priorities.

Exhibit 14

Extracts of capital projects performance to March 2018

Capital project	Cost scheduling	Completion timescale	Additional implications
Queens Quay (£15.620 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original plan in February 2015 showed phased expenditure to be completed by 2017/18. In the first two years, 88% of the costs were to be completed and 22% of costs in the final year. As at 5 March 2018, only 24% of the costs have been incurred and 76% of costs are still to be incurred. No impact on overall costs, which remain at £15.62m. 	<p>Initial completion by 31 March 2018 (within the 2017/18 budget).</p> <p>Re-phased completion to 1 November 2018 (within the 2018/19 budget).</p> <p>Given the scale of the project and costs remaining, we consider this timescale ambitious.</p>	<p>This has had an impact on 'replace elderly care homes' capital project which has incurred slippage.</p> <p>This has had an impact on 'local economic development' capital project which has incurred slippage.</p>
Office rationalisation (£21.702 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original plan in February 2014 showed phased expenditure to be completed in 2017/18. As at 5 March 2018, expenditure has slipped into 2018/19. Initial planned project costs of £18.67m. Revised project costs £21.81m (increase of £3.14m; part of this increase relates to additional work undertaken at Bridge Street which would allow implementation of modern working practices). 	<p>Initial completion by June 2017 (within the 2017/18 budget).</p> <p>Re-phased completion to 2018/19.</p>	<p>Capital receipts to be received upon completion from sale of site were anticipated to be £3.7m. This has not yet been received.</p> <p>Recurring savings of £1m not yet being fully realised.</p>
Replace elderly care homes and day care centres (£27.463 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original plan in February 2013 showed phased expenditure to be completed in 2016/17. As at March 2018, 50% of the costs are still to be incurred and the project has slipped into 2020/21. Initial planned project costs of £20m. Revised project costs of £27.463m (an increase of £7.463m). 	<p>Initial completion by 2016/17.</p> <p>Re-phased completion to 2020/21.</p>	<p>Additional costs incurred for residents due to move in and any costs associated with the maintenance of existing buildings.</p>

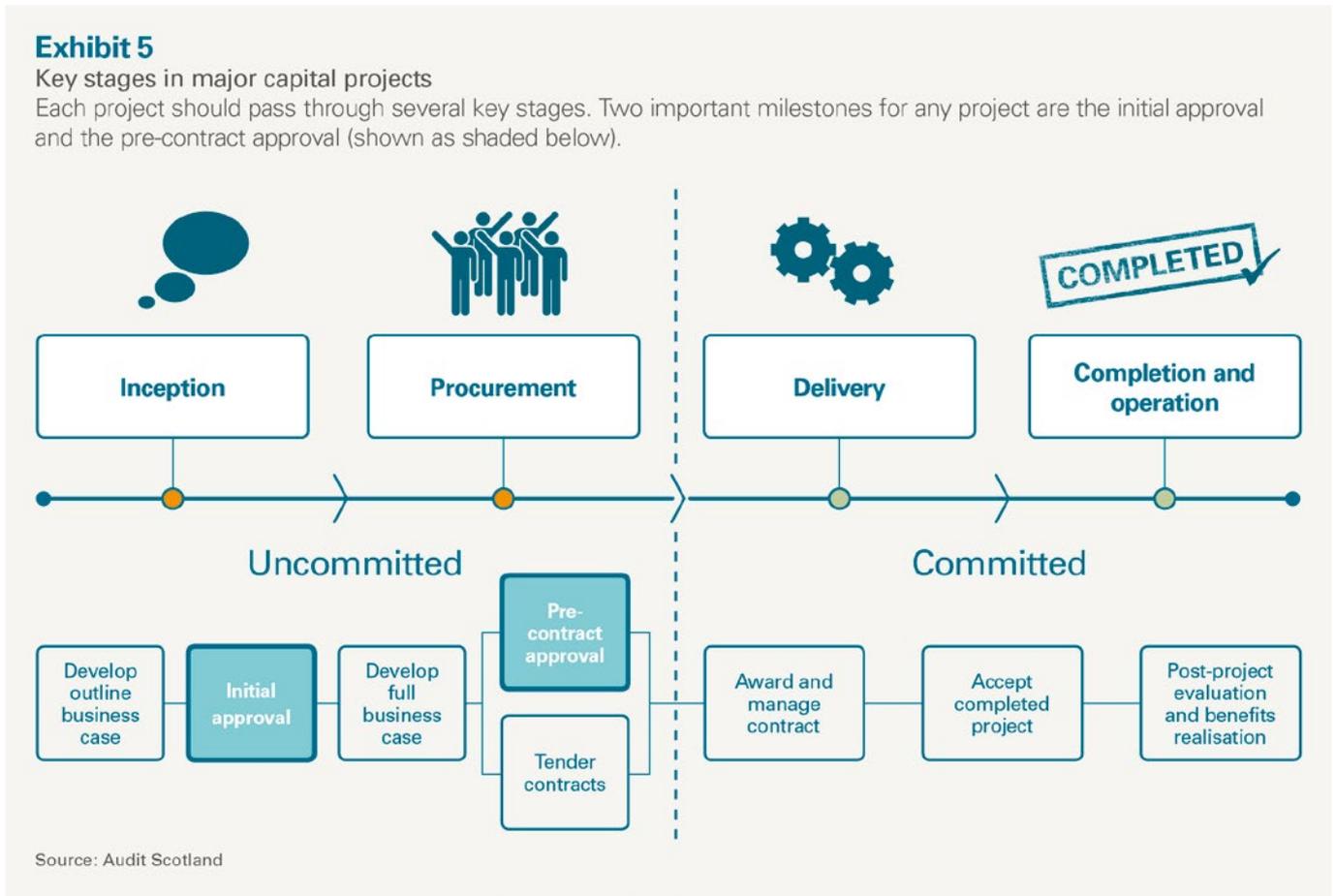
Source: Council capital plans and budget monitoring reports

68. In reviewing these projects we considered the Accounts Commission report [Major capital investment in councils](#)  published in 2013. It says 'for most major projects completed within the previous three years, councils' early

estimates of the expected costs and timetable were inaccurate'. **Exhibit 15** is an extract from this report. The Accounts Commission report is accompanied by a [Major capital investment in councils: good practice guide](#)  to help councils improve how they manage and deliver their capital projects.

Exhibit 15

Extract from our major capital investment in councils' report 2013



Source: *Major capital investment in councils*, Accounts Commission, March 2013

69. The council has issued project management guidance which references the Accounts Commission report. To date, the council's guidance has not been effective in reducing levels of slippage. We recommend that the council uses the Accounts Commission good practice guide as the basis of a self-assessment to identify areas where its capital management could be improved.

The council has a high level of borrowing. However, its long-term financial plan takes this into account

70. The [2016/17 Annual Audit Report](#)  demonstrated that the council's net borrowing as a proportion of net revenue stream, including housing rents, was the highest in Scotland. At 31 March 2017, the council's total borrowing was £383.5 million. This included long-term liabilities for Public Private Partnership (PPP) finance contracts that will run up to 2038/39. Over the remaining life of the contracts, the council expects to pay £272 million in annual repayment and service costs. These costs are reflected in the council's financial plans. The borrowing is used for capital projects such as enhancing and upgrading the school estates, Clydebank leisure centre and replacing elderly care homes and day care centres. The council receives Scottish Government revenue support funding of £7.3 million annually for PPP which amounts to £160 million over the remaining contract term. The council's borrowing figure includes debt associated with both the HRA and the council's PPP assets, which not all Scottish authorities have.

The council has a detailed organisation-wide, five-year workforce plan and individual service specific workforce plans.

71. The council has approved a detailed organisation-wide, five-year workforce plan in 2017. This includes a narrative about the future workforce and actions required and a profile of the current workforce in each directorate at 1 April 2017. This profile includes numbers of staff at each grade, age and gender profile, length of service, turnover and absence analysis. This is further broken down in the corresponding service specific workforce plans with a similar narrative and profiling for each service area. The area-specific plans also set out the future service context and assumptions, the additional workforce capabilities that will be required, potential gaps between future demands and future supply and how they plan to address any gaps.

72. The organisation-wide plan and the area-specific plans state that the council will require to make at least three per cent year-on-year savings over the lifetime of the workforce plan and that it will not be able to avoid workforce-related savings. These workforce-related savings will impact differently in individual service areas. Appendix A of the council's workforce framework states that workforce plans should 'forecast workforce numbers..., the expected shape of the workforce and costs over the planning period'. The workforce plans do not currently include this level of detail and further development by the council is recommended.

73. The council is working to reduce staff absence, and is making some progress. Sickness absence days per teacher reduced from 6.8 in 2015/16 to 5.8 in 2016/17, which is below the Scottish average of 6 days, but higher than the council's target of five days. However, while absence days for other non-teacher employees declined to 11.6 it remains higher than the Scottish average of 11 and the council's target of seven days.

74. The council is taking positive steps to understand and continually improve staff absence rates. It is developing and implementing a wide range of policies, schemes and employee-centred initiatives aimed at creating a positive, engaged workforce. This includes implementing an Employee Wellbeing Strategy, a Carers Policy, a Bereavement Scheme and an Enhanced Leave Scheme.

75. Many of West Dunbartonshire Council's staff are long-serving and staff turnover is relatively low. Consequently, the council has an ageing workforce and it can be difficult to attract new talent. To help develop the leaders of the future and develop staff more generally, the Organisational Development and Change team have introduced The Skills Passport and a range of associated learning opportunities. This sets out mandatory learning for staff at various career milestones and allows them to plan their ongoing development ([Exhibit 16](#)). Passports are dated to encourage and support continuous learning and development.

Exhibit 16

The Skills Passport and examples of the training and learning requirements for staff at different grades

For:	Validity	Example of training or learning
New staff	6 months	Induction, Equality & Diversity, Data Protection, ACHIEVE values
Employees	3 years	Approach to Change, Attendance Management
New managers	3 years	Be the Best at Managing People, People Management Framework
Experienced front-line managers	3 years	Managing Safely, Recruitment & Selection, Focus, Engage, Deliver
Experienced middle managers	3 years	Inspiring Leaders, Project Management, Business Continuity Management
Senior managers & leaders	3 years	Coaching Collaborative, Leadership Exchange

Source: West Dunbartonshire Council 2018

Part 4

Is the council working well with its partners?



The council and its community planning partners have a history of working well together

The health and social care integration is starting to lead to improved outcomes for the community.

The council actively pursues shared arrangements with other bodies to regenerate the local area and make services more efficient.

The council has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to pursuing different approaches to deliver services. The council must now review business cases and decisions because of changing conditions.

The council and its community planning partners have a history of working well together

76. The Leader of the council is Chair of the West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership. As we discussed in [Part 1](#), the council's strategic priorities help deliver the Community Planning West Dunbartonshire's (CPWD) Local Outcome Improvement Plan. These priorities have also influenced the local fire and police plans for West Dunbartonshire.

77. Five Delivery and Improvement Groups lead on delivering each of the CPWD strategic priorities. These officer groups develop action plans, building on partners' existing plans and strategies. The plans detail the actions partners will take collaboratively to improve outcomes under each of the five strategic priorities. CPWD meetings are well attended by elected members, officers and partners.

78. West Dunbartonshire has the highest reported incident rate of domestic abuse in Scotland. This requires a partnership response and CPWD is taking forward a range of initiatives to try to address this problem. Examples include the following:

- increasing identification of domestic abuse through health and social care services
- re-establishing multi-agency risk assessment conferences
- doing prevention work with young people

- contributing to national discussions about potentially expanding the Caledonian system perpetrator programme. This is an approach funded by the Scottish Government which works with convicted offenders and offers help to women and children
- continued leadership of the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership as it contributes to the West Dunbartonshire Licensing Board Overprovision Policy.

Health and social care integration is starting to deliver new ways of working

79. Councils and NHS boards work together to provide services through partnerships managed by Integration Joint Boards (IJBs). The IJBs develop strategic plans on how to deliver health and social care services. Councils and health boards delegate budgets to fund the IJB plans.

80. West Dunbartonshire IJB was established in July 2015. The IJB partners' view is that the IJB has built upon the mature and constructive health and care partnership already in place before the IJB was set up. The partnership agreed a strategic plan for 2016-19, which includes national and local commitments and priorities. The Chief Officer of the IJB is also one of West Dunbartonshire Council's strategic directors.

81. We found evidence that the IJB is progressing well with implementing new models of care. For example, in 2017, the Care at Home Service was awarded the Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) Award for the 'Best example of collaboration in an integrated setting'. As well as a core service, it created an integrated out-of-hours care at home and district nursing service to respond more effectively to risks and avoid unnecessary hospital admissions. As a result, more elderly people are living independently at home. Evidence of this can be found in the IJB's 2016/17 annual performance data including:

- a reduction in emergency hospital admissions (aged 65+) from 282 per 1,000 population in 2014/15 to 263 per 1,000 population in 2016/17
- a reduction in the number of acute bed days lost to delayed discharges from 5802 in 2014/15 to 3047 in 2016/17
- an increase from 55 per cent in 2014/15 to 66 per cent in 2016/17 in the number of people whose levels of independence were improved
- the vast majority of clients agreeing or strongly agreeing that the Care at Home service made them feel safer in their home (97 per cent) and that their contact with Home Carers has improved their quality of life (98 per cent).

The council actively pursues shared service arrangements with other bodies to regenerate the local area

82. The Economic Development Strategy 2015-20 supports the council's priority to achieve a strong local economy and improved employment opportunities. The strategy includes a number of projects reflected in this report, such as Exxon site (City Deal), office rationalisation, Queens Quay and the district heating network

at Queens Quay. The projects are reported and monitored through the Strategic Asset Management Group. Efficiencies, both financial and non-financial, from these programmes are then reported to the Change Board.

Queens Quay

83. The council has entered into a joint venture with Clydeside Regeneration Limited (CRL) to develop the previous John Brown's Shipyard, now known as Queens Quay. The development will comprise of 1,200 new homes (200 of which are social homes), retail and commercial facilities, a health centre and a council care home. A separate project for a district heating network (DHN) is also on site. We discuss this further in [Case study 3 \(page 38\)](#).

84. Under the terms of the agreement, the council will invest £15.6 million into core infrastructure. In return, it will receive a share of the money raised from selling the development plots.

85. Initially, it was expected that work would start on site during 2015 and be completed in 2017/18. The council decided to delay this project to allow for the alignment of infrastructure works and the addition of the DHN on the same site. Work started in late 2017 and is expected to be completed during 2018/19. This is an ambitious programme of work to rejuvenate the area and create additional jobs, and is in line with the council's strategic plan.

The council is developing an innovative and ambitious district heating network

86. The Queens Quay development includes an innovative district heating network (DHN) ([Case study 3, page 38](#)).

The council has developed strategic and outline business cases to support its City Deal project and understands it faces challenges delivering it

87. City Deals provide city regions with the opportunity to deliver infrastructure, innovation and employment projects to improve their economic performance. Both the UK and Scottish governments have provided funding and councils contribute additional finance. In 2014, West Dunbartonshire Council became one of the eight local authorities included in the Glasgow City Region City Deal. West Dunbartonshire Council is one of the smallest involved in the City Deal but has an equal partner role and plays an active role in the governance structure. It is represented on all sub-groups and takes the lead on the Housing and Equalities portfolio.

88. West Dunbartonshire Council is currently developing one infrastructure project as part of the City Deal: the Exxon Site at Bowling. Funding totals £27.9 million over the next seven years (£24.1 million in grants from the UK and Scottish governments and the remaining £3.8 million to be contributed by the council). The project includes a proposal to create an industrial and commercial development at the site. It also includes plans for a new road to provide an alternative route into and out of West Dunbartonshire.

Case study 3

Queens Quay – District Heating Network



In November 2016, the council approved funding of £6 million for a district heating network (DHN) at the Queens Quay. This was subject to funding from the Scottish Government under their Low Carbon Infrastructure Transformation Programme (LCITP), which was granted in May 2017. This innovative project will result in water extracted from the River Clyde through heat extraction pumps and directed to businesses and homes via insulated pipes.

The council commissioned its partners, Clydeside Regeneration Limited (CRL), to carry out a feasibility study into this project. The study has also had three rounds of investment scrutiny. In addition, the council organised a regular mentoring programme with Danish experts in district heating. The design work was completed in July 2017 and procurement of a network operator and water-source heat pump provider is progressing.

The council and its partners have identified potential customers including West College Scotland, Clydebank Property Company and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde. To ensure long-term control over the expansion and investment of the DHN, a Municipal Energy Supply Company (ESCO) will be established to be 100 per cent owned by the council. The development of the network has been planned to allow further expansion.

The primary aim for the DHN is to achieve targets for reducing carbon emissions for West Dunbartonshire Council and directly contribute to the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 targets. This will be achieved by using the renewable resource of river water as an alternative to fossil fuel. The reduced heat tariff will also help address local fuel poverty issues and will generate revenue for the council.

Source: LCITP funding application, council committee papers, November 2016

89. The main aim of the City Deal project supports the council's priority to generate additional employment opportunities in West Dunbartonshire and increase the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the area. This aims to improve job density, which is extremely low within West Dunbartonshire at 0.55 per head, compared with the Scottish average of 0.8 per head. Job density shows the ratio between the total jobs to the working-age population. This is lower than the City Deal Region and the Scottish national average. The project should help address the average length of unemployment, which is the longest within the City Deal region.

90. The council approved the strategic business case in June 2015, which was subsequently approved by the City Deal Cabinet in August 2015. An analysis of the socio-economic conditions within West Dunbartonshire was then summarised in the form of a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats). This allowed the council to understand the local West

Dunbartonshire context in relation to the regional Glasgow context. The strategic business case also contains a high-level options appraisal.

91. The council approved the outline business case in February 2017, which was subsequently approved by the City Deal Cabinet in April 2017. It contains detailed options appraisal based in three parts:

- location for a sizeable economic investment site
- options for using the site
- options for access to the site, including sensitivity analysis to assess the impacts of potential changes.

It also outlines how the project fits with national, regional and local policies and strategies.

92. Progress to date includes meetings with Exxon to formally agree terms for acquiring the site. Discussions are also taking place with Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) about an appropriate solution to flood prevention within the site. Discussions have also begun with the owners of adjacent sites which may be required to deliver the project.

93. The final business case is projected to be completed and reported in December 2019. It is expected that infrastructure work will begin on the site in early 2021 and be completed in early 2024.

The council has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to pursuing different approaches to deliver services

94. West Dunbartonshire Council has actively pursued opportunities over the years for sharing services or information with other public sector bodies, specifically neighbouring councils. We outline some of the varied examples below.

95. In 2015, a shared IT data centre was set up with East Dunbartonshire Council. This has enabled the council to achieve small cost efficiencies that are now taken into account in budgets, and to share information on disaster recovery and performance monitoring. The two councils currently share the IT helpdesk. Both councils expect to share more services as they each explore new opportunities. The council has, for the third year, provided internal audit services to Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. The 2016/17 fee for this service was £14,000. The arrangement was agreed in 2015/16 for a period of three years, and there is an option for it to be extended for a further 24 months.

96. In 2016, when the council's resilience officer left, the council joined the Civil Contingencies Service (CCS). This is a joint committee operated by Renfrewshire Council, which includes East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde councils. This service has operated since 2009 and helped improve councils' resilience. An exercise was completed, following the recent weather disruption, to learn lessons and identify best practice. Staff were praised by councillors for going above and beyond their duty and it was recognised at a council meeting that this was due to effective partnership working and communication with the CCS.

97. In 2017, senior officers from West Dunbartonshire and Stirling councils met to discuss the potential for shared services. West Dunbartonshire has a well-established and effective corporate communications service. Stirling Council had identified this as an area requiring support due to absence, and the two councils agreed that West Dunbartonshire would lead on a project to work with Stirling's communications team. Achievements to date include creating and recruiting Senior Communications posts, establishing the team's first operational plan, introducing new processes for media statements and press releases and supporting the council's budget consultation.

Shared Services Joint Committee – Inverclyde, West and East Dunbartonshire councils

98. In December 2016, a Shared Services Joint Committee (SSJC) was established between West Dunbartonshire, East Dunbartonshire and Inverclyde Councils. The committee is developing a shared road and transport service, with a view to expanding this model to include other services in the future. West Dunbartonshire Council currently holds the position of the committee's Vice-Chair.

99. The three councils discussed a detailed business case in August 2017. They originally discussed a model in which the lead authority would, over time, become the employing authority for the workforce. The trade unions, however, expressed concerns over this model. The councils' revised proposals are based on employees remaining with their existing councils. Through this process, differences emerged between the preferred approach for each of the three councils. As a result, East Dunbartonshire Council declined to join this model – called a Lead Council shared service – but said it would collaborate in strategic partnership.

100. In March 2018, West Dunbartonshire Council presented a revised detailed business case to the council to reflect the changes. Members continue to support a shared services approach. Due to the geographical constraints and prolonged timescale to arrive at the current stage, council requested a member's seminar prior to making any decision. The report was subsequently considered and agreed at the council on 28 March 2018. Cross-boundary working, which is key to this arrangement, remains an issue the councils need to negotiate on.

101. This project demonstrates the challenges of sharing services where the workforce is required to work across council boundaries. Although progress has been slower than hoped, we consider it good practice that members review the benefits of the partnership as the business model changes.

Part 5

Is the council demonstrating continuous improvement?



The council is demonstrating continuous improvement in delivering services. It maintains a steady pace of change that has led to improved outcomes in priority areas

The Strategic Improvement Framework provides a structured approach to driving continuous improvement. However, the council has a funding gap of £13.8 million for the three years to 31 March 2021, and the council must continue to reform services.

The council is progressing innovative and ambitious projects which will help regenerate the local area.

The council has managed its office rationalisation project well and, in the process, is regenerating Dumbarton town centre.

The council has a Strategic Improvement Framework that provides a consistent and effective approach to ensuring continuous improvement

102. West Dunbartonshire Council's Strategic Improvement Framework delivers the transformation agenda of the council, drives continuous improvement and prepares its services for the future. The Strategic Improvement Framework, agreed in 2016, replaced the previous Strategic Planning and Performance Framework.

103. The framework says that the council will deliver continuous improvement by:

- setting clear outcomes and priorities
- self-evaluation
- benchmarking and improving services and planning
- managing, monitoring and reporting on its performance
- being externally assessed and accredited.

104. [Exhibit 17 \(page 42\)](#) details the main documents and policies relating to the key elements of the Strategic Improvement Framework. The senior management team's Performance and Monitoring Group and Change Board ([Exhibit 6, page 18](#)) supports the framework.

Exhibit 17

The key elements of the Strategic Improvement Framework

Outcomes	Self-evaluation	Benchmarking, service improvement and planning	Performance reporting	Scrutiny and external assessment
Single outcome agreement	Employee survey	Local government benchmarking framework	Strategic priority indicators	Investors in People and Investors in Young People
Strategic plan	Self-evaluation and continuous improvement	Asset management strategy	Strategic planning and performance framework	Customer service charter
Code of good governance		Workforce plan	Development plans	Citizens' panel
		Strategic budget	Service plans and strategies	Monthly telephone survey
		Personal development plans	Be the Best	Best Value
		People management framework		Scrutiny and inspection
		Equalities monitoring		
		Risk management strategy		
		Change framework		

Source: Audit Scotland

105. The council has a self-evaluation framework and a three-year rolling programme for services to carry this out. All council services not subject to an external assessment, such as that carried out by the Scottish Housing Regulator or Education Scotland, are part of this programme. The Performance Monitoring and Review Group agreed the timing of the self-evaluations based on risk assessments of each service. Service areas that have already completed a self-evaluation include customer services, planning and building standards, ICT infrastructure and libraries.

106. The model uses a self-evaluation checklist for services. Evidence is provided to support the evaluation and areas for improvement and best practice examples are included.

107. After self-evaluation, the service reviews its annual service plan and delivery plans to include:

- improvement actions identified
- external scrutiny recommendations
- customer and employee feedback
- relevant benchmarking data.

108. We found evidence of service action plans being developed following self-evaluation. For example, actions following self-evaluation of the library service included a number of staff development actions, improving communication with staff, implementing branch improvement plans and implementing a regular programme of branch visits.

109. As stated in the self-evaluation framework the service policy, planning and performance business partners support strategic leads to review the outputs from each evaluation. Where a significant improvement project is identified, the service's policy, planning and performance business partner works with the management team to scope this as a project and link into the Organisational Development and Change team for a more comprehensive plan of support. This is then scheduled in to a work programme for continuous improvement.

110. At a corporate level, the service policy, planning and performance business partners are responsible for collating the findings from the self-evaluation exercises to understand how performance compares between different services areas. The Performance and Monitoring Group is responsible for reviewing the outcomes of self-evaluation in different service areas and the strategic lead delivery plans. This is to understand how different service areas can learn from each other, share good practice and continuously improve.

Scrutiny has improved and is effective in the council

111. Our 2007 Best Value report said that scrutiny in the council needed to improve. Service scrutiny arrangements have been outlined earlier at [paragraph 30](#). The audit committee is responsible for financial scrutiny. The membership, remit, delegated powers and arrangements for meetings of committees are detailed in the standing orders.

112. From our review, it is clear that the audit committee includes elected members from different parties and its remit covers scrutiny of all council service areas. Membership of the audit committee was refreshed following the elections in May 2017 and there are several new members. There is evidence that these members understand their scrutiny role and are providing appropriate levels of challenge. There have been lay members on the committee since 2012. The current lay member is a qualified accountant and this adds an additional level of financial scrutiny.

The council has innovative and ambitious programmes to regenerate West Dunbartonshire

113. A strong local economy is one of the council's strategic priorities. Regenerating the area is seen as key to this, by providing long-term benefits to the West Dunbartonshire area. In addition to the projects we have already discussed in this report, the council has prioritised other local regeneration sites:

- Clydebank town centre and waterfront
- Dumbarton town centre and waterfront
- Exxon site, Bowling
- Lomondgate and the Vale of Leven Industrial Estate.

114. The projects are sustainable and the council has assessed the long-term impacts and benefits. It has also considered future cash-flows and carried out sensitivity analysis and feasibility studies. While some benefits will be realised in the long term, they have already started to have an impact on the local area.

The council managed its office rationalisation project well and there is evidence the project is contributing to regenerating Dumbarton town centre.

115. The council is in the final stage of its office rationalisation programme. The outline business case for rationalising the offices was initially completed in 2011. The council refreshed the outline business case in 2014 and presented seven options, including one to do nothing. The council's main aim was to achieve efficiencies by rationalising the council offices and introducing modern working practices which would allow flexible working and enhance the work-life balance of employees.

116. The first stage was completed in March 2015 and the fifth and final phase at Church Street is to be completed by mid-2018.

117. The decision by officers and members to build new offices in Dumbarton town centre has been the key factor in reaping wider benefits through this project. We found evidence that this is helping to regenerate the town centre. This has attracted external investment into the area and units which have been vacant for many years are being taken up. The council also made the strategic decision to retain the façade of the Old Academy Building as it was building the new council offices. This allowed it to obtain heritage funding for restoring the site.

118. The council recognised that a project of this size can impact adversely on employees and has managed this well. A 'change champions' group was set up which included a member of staff from each team that was due to relocate. These 'change champions' kept their colleagues informed about the relocation process. The operational development team put additional measures in place to help staff feel ready for their phased moves, such as service assessments, action plans and readiness checkers. The council also gauged how staff were feeling using a system they called temperature barometers. These helped the council assess and deal with any areas of concern. The following areas scored low at various stages of the process:

- lack of communication early in the process
- visibility of managers during the process
- confidence in the move toward the end of the process.

119. The teams addressed these areas with mitigating actions including:

- signposting to various information on the intranet which gave the contact details and responsibilities of the 'change champions'
- reiterating the importance of managers being seen by and talking to staff, and leading by example
- roadshows with IT and data protection experts and people who have already relocated to address any staff concerns.

120. The Scottish Futures Trust has highlighted the way the council has continued to monitor the project as good practice. After relocating to their new premises, the 'change champions' became part of a staff forum group. This group collect and analyse information on the impact of the move in areas such as absence, work-life balance and expenses to ensure the benefits are being maintained.

As part of this work, the team has been able to identify skills gaps throughout the organisation and is currently in the process of drafting a new learning and development plan.

121. The office rationalisation project was a capital investment of £19.1 million and projected savings of £1 million a year (over 40 years). Given the project has experienced some slippage, and is not fully concluded, these savings have not yet been fully realised. The council expected to complete the phased moves by June 2017. However, it now expects them to be completed by 2018/19. The council's capital plan assumes capital receipts from the sale of current sites at £3.7 million.

122. Overall, the council has managed this process well and ensured that it considered and took staff needs into account. The additional impact of helping regenerate Dumbarton town centre will have wider and sustainable benefits to the local area.

Some staff are finding the pace of change challenging. But the council is taking positive steps to try to address the issues and should continue to monitor and review its actions in this area

123. The council performs an employee survey every two years, with 34 questions covering six categories. In 2017, it issued the survey to all council staff and 53 per cent responded. This was a higher response rate compared to previous years. The 2017 survey shows that employees:

- understand their role (92 per cent)
- are supportive of each other (84 per cent)
- are proud of what they deliver (85 per cent)
- feel motivated to help the council succeed (82 per cent).

124. There have been improvements in a number areas compared to previous years but respondents remain less positive about feeling appreciated and valued for the work they do (57 per cent), having regular one-to-one meetings which focus on their development (59 per cent), or being asked their views when change is taking place which directly affects them (46 per cent). The survey found no evidence of bullying or harassment that we had identified as a concern in our 2007 Best Value report.

125. The council's office rationalisation and introduction of modern working practices to allow more flexible working have required staff to adapt and work differently. The council's view is that these changes are leading to some of the less positive survey results. The council is taking steps to understand and address these issues. Following each staff survey, the council convenes focus groups with each service area to improve their understanding of the issues arising. This informs an organisational improvement plan which is reported on regularly between surveys and the detail of service specific actions in Strategic Delivery Plans.

126. The Organisational Development and Change team is implementing a number of initiatives to help develop employees. These initiatives include what the Improvement Service referred to as an innovative Approach to Change (Focus, Engage and Deliver), corporate project management standards, Work Place of the Future and the Skills Passport. We discussed the Skills Passport in [Part 3](#).

127. A committed and dynamic workforce was a priority for the council in the 2012–17 strategic plan. But the council missed all three performance indicators around staff absence and satisfaction in this area. A committed and skilled workforce remains a priority in the 2017–22 strategic plan. The council has recently put in place additional initiatives to try to address staff absence and satisfaction. The council should continue to monitor and review its actions in this area.

Since 2007, the council has significantly improved the way it manages and delivers services

128. West Dunbartonshire Council's Best Value audit timeline is set out in the Appendix. Our 2007 report said that West Dunbartonshire Council had made limited progress in demonstrating Best Value and urgently needed to address weaknesses in the way the council was run. The council has significantly improved the way it manages services since then. [Exhibit 18 \(page 47\)](#) highlights the main improvements.

The council is demonstrating continuous improvement in delivering services. It maintains a steady pace of change that has led to improved outcomes in priority areas

129. This overall judgement on the council's pace and depth of continuous improvement reflects the evidence we have reported throughout this report. In forming the judgement, the auditor has assessed:

- the council's arrangements for demonstrating how it delivers Best Value
- the rate of improvement in the council's priority services as reported by the council itself and the auditor's review of key performance indicators.

Exhibit 18

Comparing Best Value judgements, 2007 and 2018

The difference in Controller of Audit judgements between 2007 and 2018 shows progress made by West Dunbartonshire Council.

Controller of Audit judgement	Controller of Audit judgement	View
2007	2018	
More transparency and openness required in decision-making process	The council has a transparent and open decision-making process. It has improved the content of papers provided to members to support decision-making. There have also been developments such as the strategic plan, the financial strategy, ten-year capital plan and the workforce plan. The council will be live-streaming some of its committees in the future, as set out in the 2018/19 budget.	Part 1
Staff morale problems and culture of bullying and harassment	We did not find any evidence of bullying or harassment. Improved staff morale, but some issues continuing to be addressed.	Part 5
Improvements required in community engagement	Evidence of improved engagement.	Part 4
Inadequate scrutiny regime	Evidence of effective and improved scrutiny.	Part 5
Inadequate levels of member training	The council has developed an induction programme for members and the good attendance level shows it has improved in this area. Officers follow up the induction programme to identify further training needs. We identified this approach as an area of good practice.	Part 1
Lack of effective leadership from senior elected members and officers and poor relationships among elected members and officers	We found evidence of effective leadership. Changes to the senior officer team, including the appointment of the current Chief Executive in 2011, have played a key role in the improvements the council has made. Officers and councillors from all parties work well together for the benefit of the residents of West Dunbartonshire.	Part 1

Source: Audit Scotland; and *West Dunbartonshire Council: The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning, Accounts Commission, 2007.*

Recommendations



To reduce the level of slippage on the capital plan, the council should review its project management processes. The council could use the [Major capital investment in councils: good practice guide](#)  as the basis of a self-assessment. ([paragraph 69](#))

Workforce plans are in place and should be further developed to include forecasts of workforce numbers, the expected shape of the workforce and costs, over the planning period. Progress should be monitored. ([paragraph 72](#))

Some staff are finding the pace of change challenging and staff absence remains an issue. The council is taking positive steps to try and address this and should continue to explore opportunities for improvement. ([paragraph 127](#))

The Community Alliance (CA) brings together representatives from neighbourhood, interest and user groups. The council sees it as an important engagement link with the community but there are a number of challenges that it needs to address. The council should continue to offer help to further develop the role of the CA and help it reach its full potential. ([paragraph 22](#))

Councillors should consider working in cross-party groups to address the financial challenges which exist and the important decisions required in the future. ([paragraph 28](#))

Endnotes



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- ◀ 1 SIMD16 council area profile and analysis: West Dunbartonshire, Scottish Government, November 2016.
 - ◀ 2 *Scotland's Labour Market, Table and Charts*, Scottish Government, February 2018.
 - ◀ 3 *Inquiry Report, West Dunbartonshire Council*, The Scottish Housing Regulator, June 2013.
 - ◀ 4 *West Dunbartonshire Council: Joint inspection of services to protect children and young people*, The Care Inspectorate.
 - ◀ 5 The full range of indicators are available on the Improvement Service website – www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/.

Appendix

Best Value audit timeline



October 2006

David McMillan appointed as chief executive

September 2011

Joyce White appointed as chief executive

May 2007

Scottish local elections
SNP-Independent
administration formed

May 2012

Scottish local elections
Labour majority
administration formed

May 2017

Scottish local elections
SNP-Independent
administration formed



July 2009

The audit of Best Value
and Community Planning

January 2008

The audit of Best Value
and Community Planning
progress report



February 2007

The audit of Best Value
and Community Planning



March 2010

Update on the Best Value
progress report



June 2018

Best Value
Assurance
Report



November 2006

Formal hearing held

October 2006 – The audit of Best Value and Community Planning:

The Controller of Audit reported to the Accounts Commission in October 2006 that the council was not in a position to deliver Best Value. It also reported that there was an urgent need for effective leadership, the scrutiny regime was viewed as inadequate, and decision-making was not open and transparent. A formal hearing was held in November 2006 to further inform the Accounts Commission's judgements on the council. Recommendations for improvement were then made in the Best Value report the Accounts Commission published in February 2007.

2008–10 – Progress reports (January 2008, July 2009 and March 2010):

The Commission requested a number of progress reports following the initial findings. The most recent of these was published in March 2010. The Commission welcomed the evidence that some positive steps had been taken in this time. However, insufficient progress had been made on priorities, such as strategic leadership and councillor and officer relations. The council had benefited from peer support but was urged to use the support available in the local government community more effectively.

June 2018 – Best Value Assurance Report:

The Controller of Audit will present a Best Value Assurance Report to the Accounts Commission at least once during the five-year audit appointment for each council. This is the first of its kind at West Dunbartonshire. The report seeks to provide the Commission with assurance on the council's statutory duty to deliver Best Value, with a particular focus on the Commission's Strategic Audit Priorities.

West Dunbartonshire Council

Best Value Assurance Report

This report is available in PDF and RTF formats,
along with a podcast summary at:

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