

South Lanarkshire Council Leadership of the development of new local strategic priorities

Best Value thematic work in South Lanarkshire
Council 2022-23



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Key messages

- 1 The Council's vision is supported by clear priorities. The Council's Connect Plan 2022-27 (the Council Plan) is the strategic document that sets out the Council's vision, values, priorities and outcomes and what difference this will make to the residents and communities of South Lanarkshire.
- 2 The Council Plan demonstrates a clear commitment to empowering local communities and continuing to develop partnership working with them.
- 3 Both the Council and Community Plans clearly reflect the priority to reduce inequalities. The Council and the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) show a commitment to tackling inequalities, poverty and fairness across South Lanarkshire. The CPP has a Children's Services thematic partnership that includes a commitment to tackling inequality, discrimination and poverty. The CPP is also undertaking research into **lived experience** in two communities to help tackle poverty as part of its Child Poverty Action Plan.
- 4 The Council approved the Community Wealth Building (CWB) Strategy in March 2021 and subsequently the CWB Commission was set up to engage a wide range of partners and stakeholders in the CWB agenda. A community wealth building action plan for the delivery of the CWB strategy was first approved by the Community wealth building Commission in August 2021 with annual reports providing progress updates.
- 5 The Council approved its new Sustainable Development and Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 in June 2022. It was developed using the principles of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and to reduce the Council's contribution to global warming. The new strategy aims to tackle climate change over the medium-term and provides a broad strategic direction for longer-term planning.
- 6 Resource Plans are prepared annually by each Resource (service department), and they reflect the outcomes detailed in the Council Plan. They also provide an overview of the Resource's main areas of activity, the key areas of focus for the year ahead and the measures and actions planned for maintaining and improving services.
- 7 The Council is forecasting a budget gap of £29.207 million which is significantly higher than in 2022/23 and those in previous years. The Council faces difficult decisions around the level and types of services it provides if it is to be financially sustainable.

- 8** There is collaborative working between members and with officers. The Council has a number of cross-party working groups and there remains agreement and cross-party support for significant initiatives.
- 9** In 2023, two Councillors had cases heard by the Standards Commission for Scotland relating to the inappropriate disclosure of confidential information in 2021, resulting in sanctions being imposed.

1 Scope of the audit

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

Code of Audit Practice 2020 Best Value reporting requirements

Best Value reporting – extract from the Code

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

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

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

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



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

- How clear is the new council vision and its priorities?
- How effectively have the views of citizens and communities been reflected in the priorities and decisions taken by the council?
- How effectively do the council priorities reflect the need to reduce inequalities and climate change?
- How good are the delivery plans and is there alignment of financial, workforce, asset and digital plans with the council's priorities?
- Overall, how effective has the leadership been (political and officer) in setting clear priorities and a sustainable approach to delivering them?

6. An improvement action plan is included at Appendix 1 of this report. This sets out audit recommendations in key areas, and the council's planned response including responsible officers and dates for implementation.

7. The coverage of the work is in line with the expectations for council's arrangements for the seven Best Value themes in the [Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Best Value Statutory Guidance 2020](#).

2 Council vision and priorities

8. A council focused on achieving Best Value in how it operates will be able to demonstrate that elected members and officers have a clear vision and priorities for their area.

9. The Local government in Scotland Overview 2022 says that Scotland's councils have had a pivotal role in supporting and working with communities as they respond to the impacts of Covid-19. Following the council elections in May 2021, council's will have reviewed their priorities.

The Council has clearly articulated its vision and priorities

10. The Council's Connect Plan 2022-27, is the strategic document that sets out the Council's vision, values and objectives and what difference this will make to the residents and communities of South Lanarkshire.

11. The Council's vision is 'to improve the lives and prospects of everyone in South Lanarkshire'. It sets out the key actions to be delivered over five years, around a long-term vision with three key priorities and supported by six detailed outcomes as outlined below:



12. Following the May 2022 local elections, the Council meeting on 15 June 2022 approved both the Council Plan, Connect 2022-2027 and the **Council Priorities and Work Programme 2022-2027** – which summarises the Council’s political priorities and work programme following the elections.

13. The political priorities of the new minority administration (a Labour-Liberal Democrat-Independent agreement to work in partnership) are sustainable economic recovery, sustainable income generation and financial resilience and action on climate change. The initial programme of areas of work are presented in three over-arching themes:

- **People:** the Council and Community Planning Partnership has identified tackling poverty as an overarching theme and a review of anti-poverty strategies as well as focussing on raising literacy and numeracy standards and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap.
- **Places:** the administration’s priorities are being sustainable and achieving innovative economic recovery and development and tackling climate change with a focus on growing South Lanarkshire’s wealth and delivering a new Green Deal.
- **Planet:** there is a clear link to the **Places** theme with a focus on sustainable growth. The Council also revised the terms of reference for the Climate Change and Sustainability Committee to give it full committee status in line with the other five Resource Committees.

14. The Council’s Connect Plan 2022-27 is clearly signposted and publicly available on the Council’s website and was well publicised across the Council’s communication channels.

The Council has communicated with citizens, staff and other partners

15. The Council Plan was informed by the views of South Lanarkshire residents and information from many other sources including local community plans, face to face discussions, online feedback, feedback from Community Groups, Community events and surveys. It was approved by Council in June 2022.

16. In addition to engaging with staff, citizens and elected members in its development, the Council communicated the new Council Plan through a range of methods. Externally, the Council published a news article on the day it was approved and posted on a number of social media platforms. Internally an email was sent out to all staff as well as a blog being published on the intranet from the Chief Executive.

The Council’s priorities have been developed with partners and aligned with their priorities

17. The Council is also a statutory Community Planning Partner and the Community Plan 2022-32 provides a common vision for the South Lanarkshire Community Planning Partnership and sets out how the partners aim to achieve that vision.

18. In line with the [Best Value Assurance Report](#) (March 2019) (BVAR) recommendation, and to further align the work of the Council and the partnership, the new Connect Plan sets out a common vision – to improve the lives and prospects of everyone in South Lanarkshire – and a common set of outcomes.

19. The new Council Plan and Community Plan were jointly developed through an engagement and consultation process with residents to obtain their views and wishes. When the engagement period closed in August 2021, more than 3,300 responses had been received and was the largest consultation exercise the Council had undertaken.

20. Three cross-cutting themes emerged from the community responses and feedback, and these became the priorities for the new Plan. These were:

- **People** (in particular, the impact of poverty and inequalities)
- **Progress** (in particular, recovery from the pandemic)
- **Planet** (in particular, sustainable development).

21. The Council undertook further analysis of residents and communities feedback which resulted in six outcomes being identified for the Council Plan and **six priority areas** in the Community Plan:

- **Communities and Environment:** Caring, connected, sustainable communities
- **Education and Learning:** Inspiring learners, transforming learning, strengthening partnerships
- **Health and Wellbeing:** People live the healthiest lives possible
- **Children and Young People:** Our children and young people thrive
- **Housing and Land:** Good quality, suitable and sustainable places to live
- **Our Economy:** Thriving business, fair jobs and vibrant town centres.

22. The Council has produced a Community Wealth Building Strategy which sets out their objectives in relation to spending, workforce, land and property, finance and building the generative economy that was approved in March 2021. A Community Wealth Building Commission was established to oversee the implementation of the Strategy and a Community Wealth Building Progress Group has been set up to ensure that timescales within the action plan are met.

23. The Council has also reviewed the annual resource plans for each of the five council resources or departments; Community and Enterprise, Education, Finance and Corporate, Housing and Technical and Social Work in order that they support and deliver the priorities detailed above. These plans outline the outcomes and actions to be achieved within the year and are linked with other key strategic Council and partnership plans.

The Council has identified performance measures to monitor and report on the priorities and outcomes in the Council Plan

24. The Council reviews its performance using a number of measures that are aligned to the priorities and outcomes set out in the Council Plan. A total of 234 measures were identified within Resource Plans for 2022/2023. Of those 66 are linked to the achievement of the Connect Outcomes detailed in the Council Plan. The measures are detailed within the individual Resource Plans and bi-annual progress reports are publicly reported on the performance pages of the Council's website.

25. In addition, the Connect 2022-27 Quarter 4 Progress Report 2022/2023 was reported to the Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum on 8 August 2023. The progress reports include a summary of performance against measures for each of the Council's Connect Plan objectives, along with details of the main achievements for that objective.

Best Value improvement recommendations from the 2019 Best Value Assurance Report have now been addressed

26. The [Best Value Assurance Report](#) (BVAR) was issued in March 2019. The BVAR contained ten improvement recommendations, in areas including how community engagement is used to shape services, the role of the Community Planning Partnership Board and the need for elected members to review their training needs.

27. The audit work undertaken in 2019/20 and 2020/21 concluded that the Council had achieved four of these, with progress having been made on the other six recommendations. In the 2021/22 AAR, the previous external audit team concluded that the Council has put in place arrangements to address the six recommendations that were still open at that time, as detailed in [Appendix 2](#).

3 Citizen and community engagement

28. Recovery from the pandemic requires councils to work alongside their local communities. Councils, with their community planning partners, have a responsibility to ensure that people and communities are able to be fully involved in the decisions that affect their everyday lives.

29. Early and meaningful engagement and effective collaboration with communities should be a core part of determining a council's vision and priorities. This is essential both to identify and understand local needs, and to inform decisions that affect the planning and delivery of services.

Community empowerment is reflected in the Council priorities and embedded within the strategic plans

30. The three priorities within the Council Plan demonstrate a clear commitment to empowering local communities and continuing to develop partnership working with them. The actions being undertaken to support outcomes one, three, four and five also reference listening to communities, promoting choice and community ownership and leadership.

31. The Community Plan makes reference to engaging and working in partnership with communities and empowering groups, specifically young people.

Elected members and officers have worked with communities to identify priorities that respond to the needs of communities

32. The Council is part of the **South Lanarkshire Community Planning Partnership (CPP)** and the **Community Planning Partnership Board (CPPB)** which has a key role in progressing Community Planning.

33. The CPPB's remit is to provide collective strategic leadership, direction, governance and oversight of partnership activity with local communities to support the delivery of its agreed vision and outcomes.

34. In June 2018, the Council's Executive Committee agreed to develop a new approach to community participation and empowerment. This included establishing a new Community Participation and Empowerment team, now called the Community Engagement Team. This team sits within the Communications and Strategy service within Finance and Corporate Resources.

35. The team provides support to the CPPB as well as being the main interface for community engagement including neighbourhood planning. The CPPB also

employs a Community Planning Development Officer who works within the Community Engagement Team. Community Planning in South Lanarkshire and the role of the CPPB is detailed below:

Community Planning in South Lanarkshire Council



36. Membership of the Partnership Board includes a wider range of organisations: Scottish Government; NHS Lanarkshire; Scottish Enterprise; Skills Development Scotland; Police Scotland; Scottish Fire and Rescue Service; University of the West of Scotland; South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture; Strathclyde Partnership for Transport; VASLan (Community and Voluntary Sectors); Community Partnerships and Federation of Small Businesses.

37. In April 2019 the CPPB agreed to create a new **Lived Experience Fund** with the purpose to support partners and organisations in capturing lived

experience of local residents to inform service delivery and help identify any policy issues and gaps in service provision.

38. At the CPPB meeting in March 2023 it was agreed each of the four Community Partnerships would be allocated £2,000 Lived Experience Funding in 2023/24 to help them gather local people's experiences to inform a better understanding of inequalities and local needs. The Community Engagement Team works with these organisations to support them in gathering feedback information and presenting it to the CPP Board.

39. To ensure inclusivity and help shape service delivery, the Council co-ordinates regular engagement with targeted groups of people such as young people, older people, people with disabilities, unpaid carers, black and ethnic minorities. Groups consider items such as the budget consultation, rent setting and performance reporting.

40. There are a number of ways that residents and people using council services can engage with and feedback to the Council including through consultation and petitions. Links to these and other methods as well as information on how to make a formal complaint and contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman are available on the Council's comments, complaints and consultations webpage.

41. The Council uses online consultations to seek the views of stakeholders and residents. The consultations webpage provides access to current and past consultations.

The Council has provided opportunities for more local participation in decision making

42. As part of the Council decision making structure there are four Area Committees. The Council has regularly adopted a Participatory Budgeting (PB) approach and routinely reports on PB exercises to elected members at each of the four Area Committees. During 2022/23 and 2023/24 PB reports included the;

- Pupil Equity Fund
- Estate Improvement Budget
- Environmental Programme within the Housing Investment Programme
- Footway improvements within the Roads Capital Programme

43. This is a transparent approach to reporting and the Council has committed to further reporting of Place-based PB activities through the CPP website, by developing areas for each Community Partnership within which such reports will sit alongside other locality information.

44. Elected Members on the four Area Committees will also be taking decisions on applications to a new Community Challenge Fund that was launched in August 2023. The fund is not available for communities that have access to the participatory budgeting process but is aimed at community organisations in

other local areas. The aim of the fund is to address community needs identified through local consultation.

45. In the Finance and Corporate resource plan for 2023-24 **involving our communities** is one of the eight areas of focus for the year. The Community Engagement Team is responsible for one of the actions listed under the Resource Outcome - **'Individuals and communities in South Lanarkshire are engaged and able to participate in decision-making processes'**.

46. The Finance and Corporate resource action plan also refers to increasing activity around the Participatory Budgeting programme, and for more community led neighbourhood plans to be developed as well as new approaches to community involvement, specifically the community wish list and shaping places for wellbeing project.

4 Reducing inequalities and tackling climate change

47. Council priorities are expected to reflect the Best Value expectations that all activity should contribute to tackling poverty, reducing inequality and promoting fairness, respect and dignity for all citizens, alongside a focus on sustainable development, including climate change.

Reducing Inequalities

48. The [Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022](#) report says that the impact of the pandemic and service disruption have been felt most strongly by those already experiencing inequality. Councils have worked hard and adapted to maintain service delivery but those most in need of support are still being affected. Councils must evaluate these impacts so that recovery and renewal supports those most affected and addresses inequalities.

The Council and its community planning partners clearly reflect plans to reduce inequalities in their vision and strategic priorities

49. Both the Council and Community Plans clearly reflect the priority to reduce inequalities. The Council Plan introduction makes reference to the need to tackle deprivation and inequality and its People Priority states:

People – we need to put people first and reduce inequality

Together, we will take a people first approach to reducing inequality and improving lives and life prospects.

50. To support the Council and Community Plan, the new administration approved the **Council Priorities and Work Programme 2022-2027** – which summarises the Council's political priorities and work programme. These include actions that look to address poverty and inequalities and include;

- a review of anti-poverty strategies
- a review of narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap
- explore 'tackling the cost of the school day'.

Community groups are involved in identifying local needs and inequalities to inform priorities

51. In terms of consultation and engagement to inform priorities for the Council and Community Plans, the Council together with the CPP engaged with 27 different groups. These include younger and older people and local residents as well as the Gypsy Traveller community and tenants. Other communities and groups fed into the consultation process through partners including people in recovery from substance use or alcohol misuse with NHS Lanarkshire facilitating a discussion through the Beacons in Blantyre, a recovery hub, working within the local area.

52. Other examples where the Council consults with external groups includes:

- the South Lanarkshire Disability Partnership (incorporating the SL Access Panel)
- Seniors Together and the Olde People's Assembly
- LEMAG (Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Groups)

53. The Council along with NHS Lanarkshire and its neighbouring council, North Lanarkshire Council (NLC) developed a Share British Sign Language (BSL) Plan and steering group. The BSL plan includes a commitment to support BSL users to participate in community engagement events.

54. The Head of Administration and Legal Services and an SLC Councillor Veterans Champion are members of Lanarkshire Firm Base, which was created in partnership with both North and South Lanarkshire Council. The organisation is the lead for delivering the key commitments contained in both councils' Armed Forces Community Covenants to ensure that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly. An awareness seminar is held each year for elected members, officers and partner organisations.

55. The Council also has an internal employee network group (Caring/ Disability/ Ethnicity and LGBT) and a network of Resource Diversity Liaison Officers who monitor recruitment and provide advice to managers on equality matters and employee forums.

56. The Council recognises that harder to reach groups and individuals are less likely to be supported in these forums, with support more directly in schools with pupils and families and through service provision to service users and through community engagement activities.

The Council and the CPP are committed to tackling inequality, poverty and fairness issues identified in local communities

57. The Council has demonstrated its commitment to tackling poverty and inequalities by establishing a cross-party Tackling Poverty working group in February 2019. This was an internal short life working group with the remit of

taking a strategic overview of initiatives relating to poverty prevention and reduction and considering and agreeing a workplan.

58. There were a total of seven meetings where the group considered the contributions each resource department was making to address poverty, considered feedback from various groups involved in the lived experience consultation and the effects on poverty and examined the work of community planning partnership groups. The final meeting was held in January 2022 and a final progress report went to the Executive Committee in February 2022 with four recommendations :

- how the Council builds an understanding of the most effective approaches to tackling poverty
- how it uses information on impact and lived experience to determine the best solutions to address poverty related issues
- make use of the Fairer Scotland Duty to hold council services to account
- develop an action plan that would focus on how to co-ordinate the work and integrate it with the work of the Council and other partners.

59. In September 2020, the Council established an Equity Cross-party Working Group. This was a short-life internal working group established to consider equalities in recruitment and investigate and identify sources of inequity and to develop a consensus on how to address any inequity identified or referred to it. Following the May 2022 election, the work of the Equity group was absorbed by the Equal Opportunities Forum.

60. The CPP has also been committed to reducing inequalities and poverty and has a Children's Services thematic partnership that includes a commitment to tackling inequality, discrimination and poverty. The CPP is also undertaking research into lived experience in two communities to help tackle poverty as part of its Child Poverty Action Plan.

61. The Child poverty commitment seeks to create oversight of the work and how it is embedded across a range of planning and delivery processes. **'We will provide support to South Lanarkshire's families in order to tackle child poverty head on, through an offer of the right support, at the right time and delivered in the right way'**.

62. In South Lanarkshire, the Council, NHS Lanarkshire and partnership members produce a single Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPAR), recognising a collective effort to be most effective. The fifth South Lanarkshire LCPAR for 2022/23 and a child poverty commitment were reported to the CPPB in September 2023.

63. The LCPAR is structured around the three child poverty drivers of income from social security and benefits in kind, income from employment and costs of living. One of the key features of the LCPAR is listening to families and communities experiencing poverty and recognising this as crucial to being a feature of future service design. The CPP plans to try adding a child poverty

lens to developing Neighbourhood Plans and is planning to take this new approach for the East Kilbride South area Neighbourhood plan.

The Council's Covid-19 recovery and renewal plans support those most affected and address inequalities

64. Following the pandemic the concept of community wealth building has gained momentum and received support from the Scottish Government and COSLA as a model for local economic development.

65. The Council's approach to Covid-recovery was embedded into the new Council Plan 2022-27 under the priority; Progress – we need to recover, progress and improve. Recovery from the pandemic is also embedded into the Community Plan, the Community Wealth Building strategy and the Economic Strategy 2022-2027.

66. The Council approved the Community Wealth Building (CWB) Strategy in March 2021 and subsequently the CWB Commission was set up to engage a wide range of partners and stakeholders in the CWB agenda. A community wealth building action plan for the delivery of the CWB strategy was first approved by the Community wealth building Commission in August 2021 with annual reports providing progress updates.

67. The Commission for South Lanarkshire includes the Council, NHS Lanarkshire, third sector representatives VASLan, the University of the West of Scotland and the Federation of Small Businesses. The Commission also includes representation from senior elected members, and community representation through the involvement of the CPP locality groups.

68. In August 2021, the Commission approved an action plan for delivery of the CWB strategy which contained a range of actions over a three-to-five-year timeframe, setting out how the aspirations of the strategy could be progressed for each of the five key areas of CWB:

- Spending
- Workforce
- Land and property
- Finance and building
- Generative economy.

69. The draft 2022/23 annual report was presented to the CWB commission in September 2023 for approval. This highlights the progress over the second year and provides examples of significant work under each of the five key areas:

- the Council co-hosted seven specific events with the Supplier Development Programme between June 2022 and January 2023 and a Meet the Real Buyer event in February 2023

- the Council developed an employability pipeline which creates opportunities for residents and local communities. Two Recruitment Fairs were held in August 2022 and February 2023 respectively
- during 2022/23, the Council delivered 176 new build council homes as part of its ongoing Affordable Housing Supply Programme
- The South Lanarkshire Credit Union Network has been re-established and regular meetings held to link credit union activity to CWB process
- A South Lanarkshire Social Enterprise Strategy 2023 to 2027 was developed in consultation with the social enterprise sector, wider partners and stakeholders. It was approved by the Executive Committee in June 2023.

70. The Accounts Commissions [Local Government in Scotland: Overview 2022](#) highlights that those experiencing inequality have felt the impacts of both the pandemic and service disruption most strongly over the past two years. Initiatives such as CWB are recognised as being a good example of new ways in which councils can support local economic development and tackle poverty.

The Council uses equality impact assessments but Fairer Scotland assessments are not fully embedded

71. The Council is committed to undertaking equality impact assessments and the website includes an Impact Assessments directory. A review of Integrated Impact Assessments (IIA's) identified a reduction in the number of assessments available online. We also identified examples where the IIAs had not been completed before they were approved by the relevant Committee.

72. The Fairer Scotland Duty set out in part 1 of the Equality Act 2010, came into force from 1 April 2018. It places a legal responsibility on local authorities and certain other public bodies in Scotland to actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions. The Scottish Government issued statutory guidance on the duty in October 2021 and advised that relevant public bodies should publish a written assessment showing how they have done this, usually known as a Fairer Scotland Assessment.

73. The Council publish an annual Equalities Mainstreaming Report to demonstrate its commitment to human rights and equalities, this is reported to members, key stakeholders and the public. The Council has carried out a total of 981 impact assessments for any new policy / practice or change to policy and practice, which is relevant to its duty to promote equality and eliminate discrimination or harassment. If the new Bills successfully receive Royal Assent, the Council will apply any guidance issued by the Scottish Government .

74. The Council advised that Fairer Scotland assessments are carried out as per the statutory duty and published. The Council is currently in the process of rebranding the assessments it carries out in council papers.

Recommendation 1

The Council should continue its work to embed its Fairer Scotland duties by completing and referencing Fairer Scotland assessments in council papers, strategies and plans. It should also check all assessments are listed online.

The Council is developing a human rights based approach in its design and delivery of services

75. The Scottish Government is seeking to introduce a Human Rights Bill that will bring four United Nations international human rights treaties into the law in Scotland, within the limits of the Scottish Parliament's devolved powers. A public consultation on the proposed Bill is currently underway and will continue until 5 October 2023.

76. The Council has advised they take a human rights based approach to considering the impact assessments. When further guidance is provided by the Scottish Government the Council will consider any changes necessary.

Tackling Climate Change

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

78. The Climate Change Act 2019 committed Scotland to Net Zero by 2045. The Public Bodies Climate Change Reporting Duties place a legal requirement on public bodies to set target dates for zero direct emissions and indirect emission reductions. They must also report on how spending and resources will contribute to these targets, and report on the body's contribution to Scotland's Climate Change Adaptation Programme.

The Council clearly reflects sustainability of the environment, and in particular climate change, in its vision and priorities

79. One of the three priorities is Planet which is specifically about working towards a sustainable future and sustainable places. Residents' feedback identified climate change as a key concern with young people specifically asking to be involved in shaping and influencing actions. The Plan also refers to the Council's Sustainable Development and Climate Change Strategy and to reducing carbon emissions and seeing more energy efficient homes in terms of outcomes.

80. The Council's plan recognises the importance of addressing the climate emergency and setting actions to achieve net zero. As reported in the Accounts

Commission's [Local Government in Scotland: Overview 2022](#) report, commitments such as this will contribute to councils' overall recovery and renewal from the pandemic.

81. The Community Plan 2022-32 also refers to feedback from consultation work identifying concerns about the environment and impacts on people and communities. One of the three Community plan ambitions, Planet, references taking action on climate change and supporting young people to lead the way.

82. The Council approved its new Sustainable Development and Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 in June 2022. It was developed using the principles of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and to reduce the Council's contribution to global warming. The new strategy aims to tackle climate change over the medium-term and provides a broad strategic direction for longer-term planning.

83. The Council sought views from a range of stakeholders to help it shape the strategy. This involved holding community engagement focus groups with citizens together with workshops that included council officers, community planning partners, and elected members. From the issues that were discussed during the public engagement four key themes emerged, [exhibit 1](#). These themes align with the priorities of the Council Connect Plan 2022 - 2027.

Exhibit 1

Sustainable Development and Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 key themes



Source: South Lanarkshire Council: Sustainable Development and Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027

84. The strategy contains 13 priorities with one of these being the achievement of net zero by 2045. The Council aims to achieve this in an equitable way that does not exacerbate existing inequalities. It recognises the achievement of these priorities will be challenging particularly given the rural and urban diversity of the Council.

85. The Council is working on an action plan to achieve these aims and objectives, and how they link to the 13 priorities noted in the strategy. The action plan will look at longer term objectives as well as detailing annual measures.

86. Whilst recognising the amount of work and investment required to achieve net zero, there is a clear commitment from the Council to work towards this target. The Council has embedded sustainability into its key plans and strategies and identified the failure to meet sustainable development and climate change objectives as one of the highest risks to the Council. It has established a separate Committee to scrutinise progress in this area ensure the climate change agenda has prominence and focus within the Council.

87. The Council's Climate Change and Sustainability Committee is responsible for overseeing the progress with the strategy, including consideration and scrutiny of the action plan measures aligned to it. These will be reported twice each year to the committee and performance information on the reduction in the Councils carbon emissions is also reported to the Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum.

88. In 2021/22 the Council's internal audit function undertook a review of the work to develop this new strategy. The review concluded that the council has a definitive plan in place albeit this needs to be developed and adopted. The financial implications of delivery were noted as was the need to ensure that sustainability was embedded into all decision making.

89. Following the review, the Council has reported a one year interim Sustainable Development and Climate Change Strategy Action Plan was being implemented for 2022/2023. Progress on the interim action plan, together with a full action plan covering the five year period of the strategy was approved by the Climate Change and Sustainability Committee in February 2023. A further progress report on the 2022/23 action plan was reported to the Committee on 20 September 2023.

90. In the Audit Scotland [Auditing Climate Change](#) 2021 report and the Accounts Commission's September 2022 briefing on [Scotland's councils' approach to addressing climate change](#), it was noted that while public bodies, including councils, have declared a climate emergency, there is a need to ensure the robustness of plans. The plans should include greater clarity on how targets and timescales will be achieved. The reports also reaffirmed the important role that citizens will have and the need for strong partnership working.

91. The Council recognises the need to build on its strategy. It has committed to the preparation of an action plan that will detail how the statutory requirements, including net-zero will be achieved. It has also committed to working with stakeholders to establish a more joined up and collaborative approach to tackling climate change.

92. In June 2023 the Climate Change and Sustainability Committee considered a report by Aether Ltd, as industry experts, to establish a baseline position on area wide carbon emissions and to identify actions to help the Council meet its long-term targets. There were eight key messages including four about working with other stakeholders. The report proposed the following four next steps which the Committee approved:

- to agree how to engage with key stakeholders and involve them in area wide emissions reduction
- to agree, along with key stakeholders to set targets for area wide emissions reduction
- to consider how to link area wide emissions reduction with the Net Zero Town project and Town Centre Visioning project, and other key Council strategies/policies/projects
- to ensure due consideration is given to climate justice and ensuring the transition to net-zero does not exacerbate poverty or inequalities.

5 Alignment of delivery plans

93. Making the best use of public resources is at the heart of delivering Best Value. With clear plans and strategies in place, and with sound governance and strong leadership, a council will be well placed to ensure that all of its resources are deployed to achieve its strategic priorities, meet the needs of its communities and deliver continuous improvement.

94. In our [Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022](#), we acknowledged that budget constraints and increasing cost pressures are putting councils' finances under severe strain. An increasing proportion of funding is ringfenced or directed for national policy initiatives. While this is important to help deliver national priorities, it prevents councils from making decisions about how funds can be used at a local level, to meet local need. Increasingly difficult choices about spending priorities and service provision are having to be made. Delivering services differently should be focused on improving performance and outcomes in ways that are innovative, affordable, and sustainable.

The Council priorities are clearly reflected in resource plans

95. The key financial strategies underpinning the Council's approach to financial planning include, the:

- Revenue Budget Strategy
- Future Capital Investment Strategy (Capital Strategy)
- Treasury Management Strategy
- Annual Investment Strategy.

96. The Council recognises the individual financial strategies that support the overall strategy are needed to support achievement of council priorities using limited resources. These policies continue to be aligned and approved by the Executive Committee annually as part of the budget setting process. This is particularly important in the current financial climate with significant cost pressures from inflation and the cost-of-living crisis on top of increased demand for services. These will present significant challenges to financial planning and the ability of the Council to deliver quality services.

97. Resource Plans are prepared annually by each Resource, and they reflect the outcomes detailed in the Council Plan. They also provide an overview of the Resource's main areas of activity, the key areas of focus for the year ahead and the measures and actions planned for maintaining and improving services. The five resource areas (or service departments) are detailed in paragraph 23 above.

The Council is forecasting a budget deficit of £29.207 million for 2024/25

98. The 2024/25 Revenue Budget paper was considered by the Executive Committee in June 2023. The paper concluded that taking account of the Corporate Solutions including the efficiencies from the ongoing reviews, the Budget Gap for 2024/2025 was forecast to be £29.207 million. The paper highlighted that the size of the Budget Gap was very different to those managed in recent years and will require reconsideration of what the Council does for its communities, as well as making difficult decisions.

99. It is proposed that options to meet the budget gap will be developed for members consideration and brought back to a future meeting. Officers are presenting information to the Budget Sounding Board that have identified areas of budget that could be developed into savings options. However, the extent of the budget gap will mean that options will have to go significantly beyond the level of efficiencies made in previous years.

There is a revised Council-wide Workforce Plan to consider the workforce requirements as a result of the pandemic response

100. The Council has a comprehensive and coordinated approach to workforce planning which also supports succession planning. Each Resource reviews their workforce plan and related action plan to better understand workforce capacity issues, further challenges, and opportunities to ensure that resources are in the right place, at the right time and people have the right skills. The Council-wide Workforce Plan has been revised to consider the workforce requirements as a result of the pandemic response. The following actions have been undertaken:

- Workforce Plans were updated and reported to the relevant Resource Committees in September and October 2022
- a grow your own approach is being used in key areas (recruited graduates in Procurement)
- increasing social media recruitment and use of job fairs
- employability routes are being defined for skills shortage areas
- enhanced employee support arrangements are in place but also being reviewed for development.

The Council's capital strategy includes community infrastructure projects

101. As part of the Glasgow City Deal, four community growth areas with funding of £60.3 million, have been identified in the South Lanarkshire area, Newton, Hamilton, Larkhall and East Kilbride. The scheme is delivering a number of individual education, transport and community infrastructure projects to enhance the lives of the people living in each of the four areas and beyond.

102. Progress and performance on Glasgow City Deal projects and spend are regularly reported to the Glasgow City Region Cabinet. The most recent performance report for quarter one of 2023/24 reported to Cabinet on the 8 August 2023 summarised the following progress:

- **Newton Community Growth area:** has five sub-projects with three completed by 2019. The Council reported an increasing number of housing development completed as a follow-on investment, with 838 New Residential Units delivered in early summer 2022. The remaining two projects are scheduled for completion in 2025/26.
- **Hamilton Community growth area:** there are seven sub-projects, three of which have been completed in 2019 and are fully operational. The remaining four are scheduled for completion in 2024/25.
- **Larkhall community growth area:** is made up of seven sub-projects with the Glengowan Primary School extension having been completed in July 2022. The remaining projects are scheduled for completion in 2025/26.
- **East Kilbride community growth area:** is made up of three sub-projects relating to a Park and Ride Facility at Hairmyres, the construction of a new Primary School (Jackton primary school) and the extension of Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School that will be funded from reprofiling of existing works.

The Council's digital inclusion strategy assists those people who are unable to get online to access services digitally

103. A new Digital Strategy 2022 to 2027 was approved by the Council on 15 June 2022 and is aligned to the new Council plan and the national digital strategy published by the Scottish Government in March 2021. It sets out how the Council will use new technologies to help deliver the Council's vision and how service delivery will take a digital first approach whilst being focussed on customer and business needs.

104. One of the eight key themes of the new Digital Strategy 2022-2027 maintains a focus on tackling digital exclusion and sets out the actions the Council is taking to assist people who are unable to get online to access services digitally. The Council continues to lead on a partnership Digital Inclusion Group to develop and deliver an action plan for Digital Inclusion.

6 Leadership

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

106. Leaders need to be skilled in effective strategic thinking, decision-making and collaborative working and able to learn lessons from new ways of working. Councillors and officers must be clear on their roles in setting the vision and planning for its delivery.

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

There is effective collaborative working between members and with members and officers to achieve the Council's priorities

108. Following the local government elections in May 2022, 64 members representing the 20 multi-member wards were elected across South Lanarkshire. The political composition is as follows:

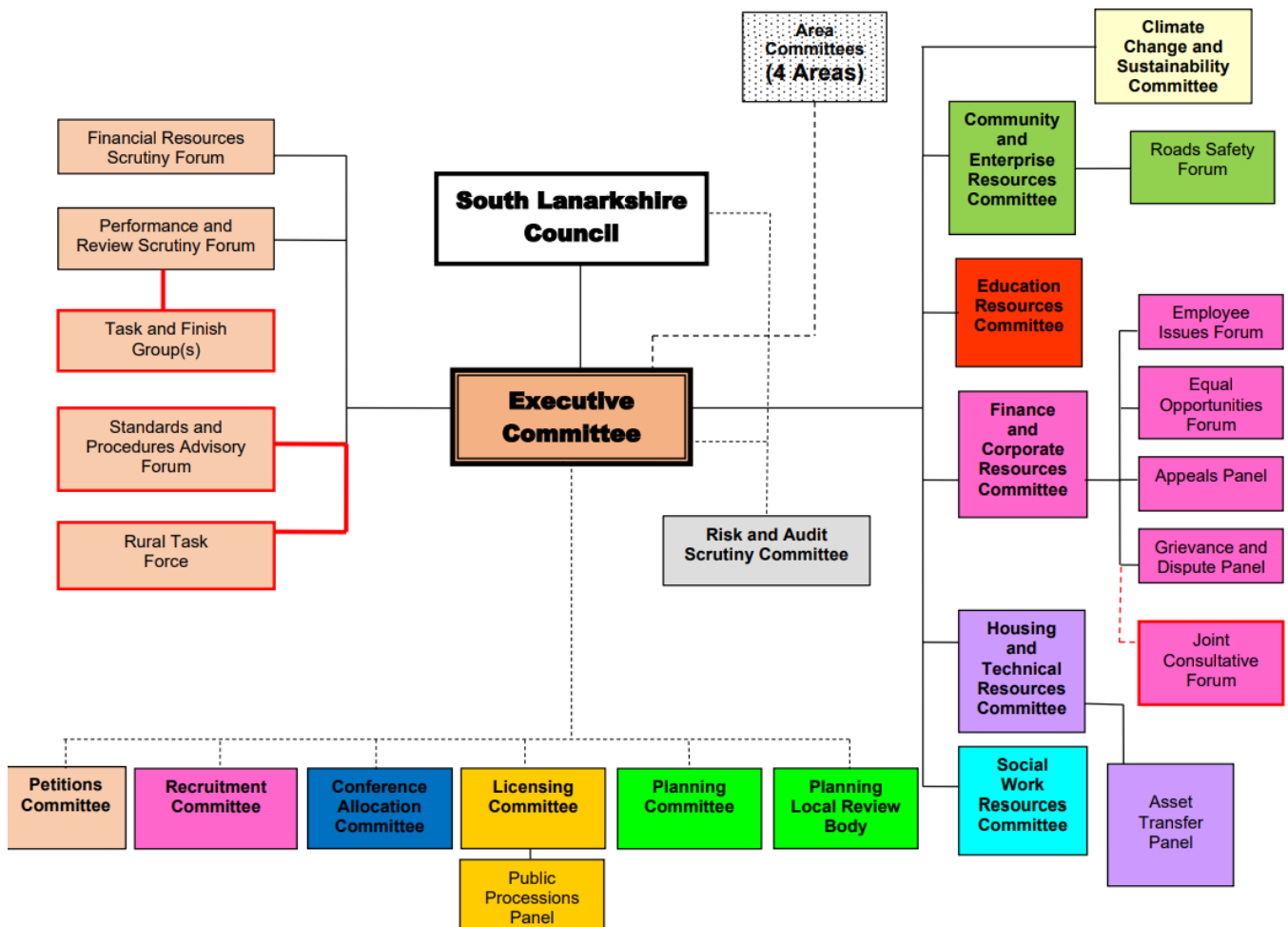
- Conservative - 7
- Green - 1
- Labour - 24
- Liberal Democrats - 3
- Independent - 2
- Scottish National Party – 27

109. In May 2022, at the first meeting of the new Council, the new minority administration (a Labour-Liberal Democrat-Independent agreement to work in partnership) was put in place succeeding the Scottish National Party who led the Council in the preceding five years.

110. The new Council approved the same decision-making structure as had been used for the previous administration. This means that all committees and forums report to the Council through an Executive Committee, [exhibit 2](#).

Exhibit 2

South Lanarkshire Council decision-making process



Source: South Lanarkshire Council

111. The Council has a two cross-party working groups: a Budget sounding board and Equal opportunities Forum. The Budget sounding board was the successor to the Budget working group and was established after the May 2022 elections. The Equal opportunities forum was already established and took on the remit of the Equity Working Group after the May 2022 elections. These cross-party working groups help strengthen relationships between members. It was recognised that member to member relationships also demonstrated good cross party working at a ward level, to achieve local goals.

Two Councillors received sanctions following hearing by the Standards Commission for Scotland

112. All local councillors are expected to adhere to the [Councillors' Code of Conduct](#) as issued by Scottish Ministers in December 2021. Complaints of breaches of the code are investigated by the Ethical Standards Commissioner and adjudicated upon by the Standards Commission for Scotland.

113. In 2023, two South Lanarkshire Council Labour councillors had cases heard by the Standards Commission for Scotland relating to the inappropriate disclosure of confidential information in 2021. The resulting sanctions were a two month suspension for the Leader of the Council, Councillor Joe Fagan after a hearing in June 2023 and censure for Councillor Monique McAdams following a hearing in August 2023.

There is an experienced management team in place to support the Council in delivering its objectives, however the Chief Executive will retire in January 2024

114. The Council has an experienced management team in place that has been relatively stable in recent years. Two new Executive Directors have been permanently appointed within the last two years. These were the Executive Director for Housing and Technical Resources and Education resources. During August 2023 the current Chief Executive, announced his intention to retire in January 2024. The process to appoint a replacement has already started and will require careful consideration around the future strategic direction of the Council.

115. In addition to a Management Development programme for all managers, the Council developed and launched a leadership challenge programme in 2021/22 to develop 'rising stars' identified by the CMT and assist with succession planning. As part of the Best Value thematic work for 2023/24 the topic will be looking at workforce challenges.

A comprehensive induction training programme was delivered. Officers should continue to work with elected members to support their training and development requirements

116. Following the local government elections in May 2022, both newly elected and returning members have taken part in a number of training courses, including a comprehensive induction programme. This comprised of welcome sessions, outlining members' key roles and responsibilities as councillors together with specific training on areas such as risk and audit awareness training. The Council has put in place an ongoing training plan with this updated as required during the year. The plan includes access to a library of Learn on Line material which cover a wide range and variety of courses to help develop members skills. Officers advised that a needs based approach is taken to training for members, including specific training for committees such as recruitment, appeals, planning and licencing.

117. Members have a responsibility to take advantage of the training opportunities provided to ensure that they have the skills required to effectively fulfil their scrutiny and challenge roles. Members we spoke to recognised the training available to them including the online learning material but said it might be helpful to establish formalised personal development plans for members.

118. Discussions with elected members identified that they felt working relationships between officers and elected members were good and communication worked well. Council officers have also provided a number of relevant members briefing sessions on key topics.

119. Members who were chairs or vice chairs of committees said they felt supported in their role, receiving detailed explanations from officers in relation to committee papers. However other committee members felt overwhelmed by the volume, complexity and technical nature of some committee papers, and this impacted on their ability to undertake their scrutiny role effectively.

120. Elected members who were newly elected in May 2022, reflected that now they better understand their role it would be helpful to have refresher training in some of the induction sessions provided after the elections.

Recommendation 2

Officers should continue to engage with elected members to support their training and development requirements, including specific training to build confidence and allow scrutiny.

Appendix 1

Improvement Action plan

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
<p>1. Fairer Scotland Assessment</p> <p>The Fairer Scotland Duty came into force from 1 April 2018. It places a legal responsibility on local authorities to actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions.</p> <p>Risk – There is a risk that the Council is not fully complying with the Fairer Scotland Duty.</p>	<p>The Council should continue its work to embed its Fairer Scotland duties by completing and referencing Fairer Scotland assessments in council papers, strategies and plans. It should also check all assessments are listed online.</p>	<p>Management Response:</p> <p>We will continue to embed Fairer Scotland duties, and remind all officers on the Council's Fairer Scotland Duties and the use of Fairer Scotland Assessments by reissuing the guidance and arranging further training as appropriate. We will ensure that reference to Fairer Scotland assessments are made in committee reports (where carried out). All Fairer Scotland Assessments will be posted online.</p> <p>Responsible Officer:</p> <p>Head of Administration and Legal Services</p> <p>Date:</p> <p>31 December 2023</p>
<p>2. Ongoing support for elected members</p> <p>In May 2022, the Council put in place a comprehensive induction programme. Committee members feel overwhelmed by the volume, complexity and technical nature of some committee papers.</p> <p>Risk – There is a risk that the current suite of training is not tailored to the individual needs of Elected members.</p>	<p>Officers should continue to engage with elected members to support their training and development requirements, including specific training to build confidence and allow scrutiny.</p>	<p>Management Response:</p> <p>The programme of engagement with members on training requirements will continue. The annual needs assessments will be carried out to inform ongoing training plans.</p> <p>Responsible Officer:</p> <p>Head of Personnel</p> <p>Date:</p> <p>31 March 2024</p>

Appendix 2

Best Value improvement recommendations from the 2019 Best Value Assurance Report have now been addressed

121. The [Best Value Assurance Report](#) (BVAR) was issued in March 2019. The BVAR contained ten improvement recommendations, in areas including how community engagement is used to shape services, the role of the Community Planning Partnership Board and the need for elected members to review their training needs. In the 2021/22 Annual Audit Report (AAR), the previous external audit team concluded that the Council has put in place arrangements to address the six recommendations that were still open at that time, as detailed below.

Progress against BVAR recommendations

BVAR recommendation	Audit Scotland view on progress to date
<p>1. To increase the impact of the council's efforts in achieving its strategic objectives, links between the council plan (Connect Plan) and the LOIP (Community Plan) should be made clearer with a sharper focus on the key areas of activity. Locality plans should be prepared without further delay.</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>The new Connect Plan for 2022-2027 was published in June 2022. The new plan has three priorities: people, progress, and planet. These are in line with the three key ambitions outlined in the new Community Plan 2022-2032 which was also published in June 2022.</p> <p>These plans have been designed as companion publications and share the same vision, priorities, and outcomes.</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>To date, eight neighbourhood plans have been published, with a further three in progress.</p>
<p>2. Elected members need to improve the public scrutiny of key decisions, performance, and financial reports.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Management have advised that the overall level of scrutiny has improved over the last Council term.</p> <p>Work is ongoing to provide newly elected members, including those on the Risk and Audit Scrutiny Committee, with training to assist them in their scrutiny and challenge role.</p> <p>Member engagement and scrutiny will be an area of focus for the new audit team.</p>
<p>3. Members should, with the assistance of the personnel service, review their personal training and development needs and agree a plan to ensure that they have the</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>Since the local elections in May 2022, elected members have undertaken a comprehensive training and induction programme, covering key areas to enable them to fulfil their scrutiny and challenge roles.</p>

skills required to effectively fulfil their scrutiny and challenge roles.	Members also have access to a library of “Learn on Line” courses which cover a wide range and variety of courses to develop members skills. A training plan for the remainder of the financial year is in place which will support members in effectively carrying out their roles (see paragraphs 139 to 140 for further details).
4. Management should review arrangements for assessing resident satisfaction, to ensure these are providing meaningful data to help shape future services.	<p>Complete</p> <p>Since January 2020, the Organisational Development Team have carried out 941 surveys. Of these, 116 relate to customer satisfaction. The results of these surveys inform decisions taken on future services of the council.</p>
5. The Community Planning Partnership Board should take a more active role in driving partnership working, monitoring outcomes, and feeding back to thematic subgroups.	<p>Complete</p> <p>The Community Planning Partnership Board is well developed and is providing oversight and driving partnership working. The Board has established a number of groups to promote partnership working such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Community Planning Outcomes Leads Group • The Partnership Community Participation Engagement Group • The Community Planning Communications Group • The Community Partnership Website Review Group <p>The Board has also recently worked with North Lanarkshire Community Planning Partnership to identify shared priorities for action.</p>
6. Management should implement revised arrangements for community engagement to improve how it is used to shape services. Consistent and high-quality consultation across all services should be part of this.	<p>Complete</p> <p>The Community Participation Engagement Group oversaw the engagement activity around the new Connect and Community Plans which were built from the communities up using engagement to identify resident’s views and aspirations.</p> <p>‘Community Conversation’ focus groups took place, involving more than 200 residents. This was the largest consultation carried out to date by the council and added to a body of existing knowledge that had already emerged from community events and work developing neighbourhood plans.</p>

Source: Audit Scotland

South Lanarkshire Council

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