

An overview of local government in Scotland 2015

## **Self-assessment tool for councillors**

**Prepared by Audit Scotland**

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This self-assessment tool is designed to help councillors review progress in implementing the recommendations in our report, ***An overview of local government in Scotland 2015***. They should consider each issue listed and decide which statement most accurately reflects their current situation. This approach will enable them to identify what actions need to be taken.

The last column in the checklist can be used to record sources of evidence, supplementary comments to support the assessment or to highlight actions to take forward.

<b>Assessment of current position (continued)</b>						
<b>Issue</b>	<b>No action needed</b>	<b>No but action in hand</b>	<b>Yes in place but needs improving</b>	<b>Yes in place and working well</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>	<b>Officer Comments/Observations</b>
<b>Skills and expertise (paragraphs 97 to 99)</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Councillors review and update their own training needs and identify areas where they require further training.</li> </ul>						Each Councillor has a Personal Development Plan which is updated regularly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Councillors work together with officers to ensure the council provides or arranges relevant training for them in appropriate areas, including assessing financial and service performance.</li> </ul>						Training, briefings and workshops have been a feature of how Members and Officers have worked in Angus. Members may nevertheless have specific training requirements which have still to be addressed.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillors ensure they get support from officers when they identify gaps in knowledge and understanding.</li> </ul>						Members to advise
<b>Financial and performance information (paragraphs 90 to 96)</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officers are working to improve the way they report financial and performance information to councillors to make it clearer and easier to understand.</li> </ul>						Reporting of financial performance information is well established and covers revenue, capital and special funds and a specific outturn report is prepared at the year end rather than relying only on the Accounts. Members views on the clarity and adequacy of current arrangements are invited
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officers provide councillors with relevant, up to date performance data, including benchmarking the council's performance with other relevant organisations or services.</li> </ul>						Provided in part through Directorate Annual Reports and other publications but there is room for improvement in ensuring members have a full and rounded picture of the performance of services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officers report performance information to the public in a way that helps them understand the council's performance.</li> </ul>						Angus Council has been recognised by Audit Scotland as one of the best performers for public performance reporting but further improvements are still planned
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officers make councillors aware of future funding gaps and provide them with information to help make decisions on how to close the gaps.</li> </ul>						We have a rolling 4 year Medium Term Financial Strategy which identifies future funding gaps and considers high level plans on how these might be addressed.

## Appendix 2 to Report 169/15

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Officers make councillors aware of changes to the proportion of the council's budget that will be required to repay debt.</li> </ul>						<p>Covered in budget reports including the prudential indicators report and the long term capital budget affordability report</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Officers make councillors aware of the financial impact of national and local policies (eg, taxes on land and buildings transactions, waste disposal to landfill and the implications of the Smith Commission agreement).</li> </ul>						<p>The impact of national developments tends to be reported through the budget process or in updating the medium term financial strategy. For developments of a more immediate nature a specific report would normally be produced.</p>
<p><b>Using local data and working with communities (paragraphs 53 to 61)</b></p>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council uses local socio-economic data and works in close co-operation with service users to understand their needs, explore ways of meeting them, and deliver the services.</li> </ul>						<p>Use of data and consultation with service users is becoming more widespread particularly in service reviews and redesigns but members may consider that more needs to be done here</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Officers make councillors aware of population trends in the area and the implications for service demand and capital budgets.</li> </ul>						<p>Picked up mainly through Directorate Improvement Plans and the budget setting process</p>

<b>Service delivery options (paragraphs 62 to 68)</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council is reviewing all practical options for delivering services in new ways to help save money and improve services. It is identifying the benefits and risks of each option and monitoring the impact of the option chosen, including the risks associated with change</li> </ul>						Service delivery options are being reviewed across the Council either as part of the Transforming Angus Programme or as part of Directorate Service Review Programmes. Benefits, risks, etc. are identified as part of that process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Councillors are aware of what actions the council has taken so far to make savings and the extent of staff reductions to date, and the impact of these on service delivery.</li> </ul>						Covered in budget documentation which identifies financial saving as well as staff numbers impact, etc. Savings options are evaluated for their impact on the Single Outcome Agreement, equalities and service quality Workforce Planning is an integral part of the new Workforce Strategy being developed to ensure that we have a workforce of the right size with the right skills to allow us to meet service delivery requirements for the future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council is investing in preventative approaches to help manage future demand for services</li> </ul>						This is part of our transformation programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council has a comprehensive workforce strategy to help plan and manage the impact of staff reductions</li> </ul>						A fully updated Workforce Strategy will come before Councillors in June 2015

<b>Financial planning (paragraphs 69 to 73)</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council has financial plans for the short (1-2 years), medium (3-5 years) and long term (5- 10 years).</li> </ul>						Our budget financial planning has a 4-5 year horizon at present but we do have a 25 year planning horizon for capital budget affordability purposes. Officers will be looking at whether the benefits of having a longer term plan for budget purposes merits the allocation of resource to produce this given the scale of uncertainty with longer term plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The strategies set out financial commitments, identify problems with affordability of services and allow members to understand whether the financial position is sustainable over an extended period.</li> </ul>						Covered mainly through our medium term financial strategy and planning and this has been backed up by briefings and workshops for members to help explain the position in more detail
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council's budget targets resources effectively at its priorities, including shared priorities identified with partners in the Single Outcome Agreement</li> </ul>						This is an area which requires improvement – its challenging to demonstrate that the whole of our budget has been allocated based on our priorities. Officers are looking at how this could be improved so we have a full priority based budget approach
<b>Governance arrangements (paragraphs 74 to 89)</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council reviews governance arrangements following significant changes in staff, management or political</li> </ul>						Governance issues were given specific attention as an area of risk in the 2012 Senior Management Restructure

structures.						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council's senior management team has the skills and capacity to provide effective leadership and management of finances, services and improvement programmes.</li> </ul>						The Senior Management Restructure was intended to deliver this. This is also subject to a separate scrutiny review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Councillors understand the role and statutory responsibilities of the S95 officer, the monitoring officer and the chief social work officer.</li> </ul>						This was covered in part through member induction after the last election but members may wish further clarification here
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The scrutiny or audit committee has:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a chair who is not a member of the political administration</li> <li>- clear terms of reference</li> <li>- adequate support and access to independent advice</li> <li>- members who have the necessary skills and training.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>						The Angus Council Scrutiny & Audit Committee is considered to comply with this best practice but members may feel further training or support is needed in specific areas