

## **AGENDA ITEM NO 8**

**REPORT NO 204/20**

### **ANGUS COUNCIL**

#### **SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE – 25 AUGUST 2020**

#### **ACCOUNTS COMMISSION REPORT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SCOTLAND OVERVIEW 2020**

#### **REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC POLICY, TRANSFORMATION & PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This report is to make the Scrutiny and Audit Committee aware of the 'Local Government in Scotland: Overview 2020' report recently published by the Accounts Commission.

#### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Scrutiny and Audit Committee:
- (i) Note the 'Local Government in Scotland: Overview 2020' report, recently published by the Accounts Commission, which is included in Appendix 1;
  - (ii) Note the Supplement to the main report including 'Questions for Councillors', which is included in Appendix 2; and
  - (iii) Note that a development session for all members is to be arranged covering the 'Local Government in Scotland: Overview 2020' report, along with the Accounts Commission Financial Overview 2018/19 Report considered by the Committee in January 2020 (Report 19/20 refers).

#### **2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COMMUNITY PLAN AND COUNCIL PLAN**

- 2.1 This report provides valuable insight from a national perspective, which will help to inform this Council's approach in order to support delivering the outcomes described in the Community Plan and Council Plan, which focus on the Economy, People, Place and Our Business.

#### **3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SCOTLAND: OVERVIEW 2020**

- 3.1 The 'Local Government in Scotland: Overview 2020' report was published by the Accounts Commission in June 2020 (Appendix 1 refers). It is noted that the report was produced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, however only recently issued.
- 3.2 There is also a Supplement to the main report including 'Questions for Councillors' covering the key recommendation areas to support Councillors with their scrutiny role (Appendix 2 refers).
- 3.3 The report provides a useful summary of information highlighting the key challenges and performance issues that local government across Scotland is currently facing. The 5 key messages in the report are summarised as follows:
- 1. Councils are working hard to deliver services in their communities. The cumulative effect of pressures is beginning to show across service performance and use of financial reserves.
  - 2. Scottish Government revenue funding has reduced in real terms over the period 2013/14 to 2020/21 by 3.3 per cent. Medium and long term financial planning are important tools for making well-informed decisions and to effectively manage continuing financial challenges.

3. Alongside the uncertainty of funding levels, the scale and complexity of the challenges for councils and integrated joint boards will continue to grow in the coming years. More radical thinking is needed for long-term solutions.
4. Councils alone cannot improve outcomes for communities and achieve local priorities. The full potential of collaborative working with partner organisations and communities is not yet being realised.
5. Workforce planning is fundamental to ensure that councils have the staff, skills and leaders they need to deliver change.

3.4 The report includes a number of recommendations (pages 6 and 7 of the report refers). The main themes of these recommendations are set out below, along with evidence of how the Council is progressing against these. It is highlighted that these recommendations apply to councils and also integrated joint boards.

(i) *Governance*

- *invest leadership capacity in analysing the challenges and planning for the future*
- *monitor and report on delivery of local priorities and outcomes while improving public performance reporting*

**Evidence of Progress**

- ✓ The Council's Medium Term Budget Strategy 2020/21 to 2022/23 was developed and agreed in September 2019 (Report 288/19 refers).
- ✓ The Council Plan, the Finance & Change Plan and Workforce Plan were developed and agreed by the Council at its budget setting meeting in February 2020 (Report 74/20 refers).
- ✓ Strategic Planning is undertaken consistently on a cross-Council thematic basis relating to Economy, People, Place and Our Business. These themes are also used in the Community Plan and the associated Locality Plans, supporting the cross organisational work through the Community Planning Partnership arrangements.
- ✓ The Council's Change Programme is a corporate portfolio of change projects which are developed with all Council services by identifying and delivering areas for future service improvement and transformation.
- ✓ The most recent Council Performance Report (2018/19) and associated Case Studies.
- ✓ The most recent Community Plan Performance Report (2018/19).
- ✓ Mechanisms are also in place through self-assessment to identify areas for improvement alongside progressing work to improve our public performance reporting (see reference to our Performance Led Programme objectives below).

(ii) *Collaboration*

- *maximise the potential of collaborative working*
- *Increase the opportunity for communities to influence or take control of local decision making and, demonstrate how communities are supported to help design or deliver local services and improve outcomes*

**Evidence of Progress**

- ✓ Community Council collaborative workshops.
- ✓ Joint workshop sessions with 3<sup>rd</sup> sector voluntary and community organisations.
- ✓ Regular engagement with Voluntary Action Angus, the Third Sector Interface for Angus – this has been particularly important as part of the Humanitarian Assistance Angus Response Team (HAART) response to those in need through the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ✓ Locality Plan area partnership meetings.
- ✓ Angus Health & Social Care Partnership Locality Implementation Group meetings.
- ✓ Community Asset Transfer engagement and support.
- ✓ Participatory budgeting.
- ✓ Ongoing day-to-day engagement through the Council's Communities teams.
- ✓ Development of the Tayside Collaborative for children, young people and families.
- ✓ Establishment of the Angus Child Poverty Action Plan through the Angus Community Planning Partnership.
- ✓ Development of the Community Justice Partnership.
- ✓ Collaboration in relation to the opportunities emerging from Tay Cities Deal.

*(iii) Capacity and skills*

- *develop leadership capacity and workforce planning arrangements*

**Evidence of Progress**

- ✓ Workforce development plans have been progressed for each service area of the Council with the aim of trying to predict the future skills, knowledge and behaviours needed by our staff in order to deliver our ever changing, new and improved services that form part of our Council Plan ambitions. These have formed the basis for the latest Workforce Plan.
- ✓ Elected Members' training and development which has included sessions on Governance, Corporate Self-Assessment, Choice Based letting, Participatory Budgeting, Unplanned Housing Repairs, Annual Accounts, Challenges & Performance 2019 and MAPPA.
- ✓ Corporate Leadership Team development.
- ✓ Senior Leaders' forum (Directors and Service Leaders).
- ✓ Leadership forum (Directors, Service Leaders and Managers).
- ✓ Middle Leaders' forum.
- ✓ Change Programme forum.
- ✓ Staff briefings on Strategic Plans and other significant developments.
- ✓ Other staff engagement opportunities in a variety of forms.

*(iv) Services*

- *consider how these recommendations relate to each service*
- *for planning services consider specific aspects*

**Evidence of Progress**

- ✓ The Council is progressing a holistic 'Performance Led Programme' which involves all the above matters across Council services, and with the objectives to:
  - Improve performance management, creating a consistent approach to how measures, actions and outputs from services are linked to Council measures and outcomes.
  - Improve and develop a 'Performance-led culture' in services, including increased use of data.
  - Ensure all services are undertaking a programme of self-evaluation through How Good Is Our Council (HGIOC), or by aligning services traditional approaches to self-evaluation to the HGIOC framework.
  - Making Pentana a user-friendly means by which staff at all levels of the organisation can manage all of the key actions assigned to them as well as monitoring service performance.

- Review and refresh the approach to linking staff appraisals to performance information.
  - Redesign how Pentana is used for managing risk within teams, services and the council in aligned risk registers.
  - Develop 'Golden thread' of performance information to show links from actions, appraisals, PI's, risks, outcomes and self-evaluation.
- ✓ Planning is an important service for supporting delivery on national policy outcomes such as inclusive, sustainable economic growth and protecting and enhancing our environment. Planning Services have been significantly affected by reduced budgets and staff numbers in recent years. At the same time services have been subject to a range of national policy developments such as the new Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 which changes the role and responsibilities of the service. As a result of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, Planning services need to do things differently to be able to meet national policy priorities while maintaining and improving services. This includes:
  - Leadership: Strong leadership of planning services to meet the challenge of performing new duties with reducing resources.
  - Change and Improvement: Planning services have improved performance over recent years but need to widen their focus from the regulation process to engaging with communities and partners.
  - Workforce planning: the workforce in planning services is ageing and reducing in number. New skills will be needed to deliver the Act's objectives.
  - Partnership Working: planning services need to build relationships with other council services, external partners and communities.
  - Community empowerment and engagement must become a core activity for planning services to deliver the letter and spirit of the Planning Act and Place Principle.

The above bullet points are all actively being progressed as part of the Council's Planning service response to the new Act.

- 3.5 Angus Council is addressing each of these recommendations as part of its ongoing commitment to quality improvement, performance and change throughout all service areas of the Council. The examples highlighted are intended to provide members with a snap-shot of progress.
- 3.6 However, in light of the importance of these recommendations and the broader content of the report, members of this Committee are asked to note that a development session for all members is to be arranged covering the 'Challenges and Performance 2019' report as well the Accounts Commission Financial Overview 2018/19 Report considered by the Committee in January 2020 (Report 19/20 refers).

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1: Accounts Commission: 'Local Government in Scotland: Overview 2020' Report  
 Appendix 2: Supplement to Main Report