

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**8 SEPTEMBER 2022**

**ACCOUNTS COMMISSION BEST VALUE AUDIT REPORT 2022**

**REPORT BY MARGO WILLIAMSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**ABSTRACT**

This report presents the Accounts Commission report on the Best Value Audit of Angus Council undertaken and concluded during the period between November 2021 and July 2022. It covers the period 2016 – 2022. The Council is invited to consider and comment on the findings set out in the report.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1.1 It is recommended that the Council:

- (i) formally receives and notes the publication of the 2022 Best Value Audit;
- (ii) accepts the findings and recommendations set out in the Best Value Assurance Report published by the Accounts Commission;
- (iii) acknowledges the significant progress made by Angus Council since 2016 as outlined in the report; and
- (iv) considers and comments on the draft Action Plan to address the recommendations as part of our continuous improvement work.

**2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COMMUNITY PLAN/COUNCIL PLAN**

2.1 The Best Value Audit relates to all Council functions/ activity and is therefore relevant to the achievement of all the priorities set out in the Community Plan and the Council Plan.

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 Angus Council has been the subject of a Best Value Audit (BVA) on four occasions with previous audits being reported in 2004, 2010 and 2016 ([Report 328/16](#) and [Appendix 1](#) refer). The 2016 report acknowledged progress in a number of areas since the Accounts Commission report in 2010 and identified scope for further improvement in a number of areas.

3.2 Since the publication of our BVA in 2016, the Council has worked diligently to focus improvement activity on identified areas, along with many others. The 2022 Controller of Audit judgement on progress with these areas is set out in the 2022 BVA Report (Exhibit 16 on pages 49 to 51 refers). Overall, the findings demonstrate noteworthy progress since 2016.

3.3 Audit Scotland's preparations for the 2022 Best Value Audit included a review of its evidence from their annual audit work since 2016, along with other relevant information. Auditors identified key areas of focus for the 2022 Best Value review as follows (Exhibit 2 on page 6 of the 2022 BVA Report refers):

- *“How the council plans the use of its resources to support the delivery of its priorities, including reducing inequalities and ensuring sustainability. This includes the effectiveness of service planning, financial planning, asset management, workforce planning and digital/ICT strategy.*
- *How the council works with partners to tackle its specific challenges (e.g. ageing population; services across seven burghs and rural areas).*

- *How the council encourages and supports community engagement, in setting its priorities and the delivery of services. This includes the effectiveness and impact of public engagement.*
- *How the council's self-assessment framework drives continuous improvement and drives the council's Change Programme.*
- *How effectively the council assesses its outcomes and performance and reports them to both elected members and the general public."*

#### 4. THE 2022 BV AUDIT (BVA) REPORT

4.1 The fieldwork required to undertake the BV audit was undertaken by Audit Scotland commencing November 2021. This included scoping sessions with elected members, partners and officers, leading to desk-based research, interviews and the gathering of a wide-range of evidence. The fieldwork concluded around March 2022 and the report was compiled for submission to the Controller of Audit. It was considered at the Accounts Commission meeting on 9 June 2022 and formally published on 5 July 2022.

4.2 Audit Scotland's webpage '[Publication: Best Value Assurance Report: Angus Council](#)' contains the main report, along with a range of summary information and videos summarising key information from the report. The Audit Scotland webpage summarises overall findings in its introductory headline as:

***“Angus Council serves its communities well, has made impressive improvements to services in recent years and benefits from effective leadership and a clear vision. There is strong partnership working and collaboration to help deliver services that benefit local people.”***

4.3 The key messages from the report are as follows (pages 8 and 9 of the 2022 BVA Report refer):

- “1 The council has demonstrated a good pace of improvement since the last Best Value report in 2016. It has reshaped services and is an organisation that is focused on its priorities, working well with partners and keen to learn from good practice.*
- 2 The council and its partners have a clear vision for Angus. There is strong partnership working and collaboration. Partners across Angus worked well together to deliver services to those most in need during the Covid-19 pandemic. The council is looking to learn from others how to engage effectively with communities on the service redesign required.*
- 3 The pandemic has increased existing inequalities, hitting the most disadvantaged groups hardest. Reducing inequality is a priority for the council and it is engaged in a range of local projects to provide support and increase opportunities for its most disadvantaged citizens.*
- 4 The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive provide effective leadership. Officers and members have constructive working relationships. Effective arrangements are in place to support decision-making and public scrutiny. Elected members have worked together to make difficult decisions to deliver financial sustainability.*
- 5 Angus Council has effective financial management and medium-term financial planning but has yet to fully develop its long-term financial plan. The council has delivered significant financial savings in recent years through its Change Programme, including comprehensive service reviews. Now increasing financial pressures mean even more radical change is required to the range and scale of services and how they are delivered.*
- 6 Annual performance reports are used to inform elected members and the public of progress against council priorities. These reports are improving year on year, but performance reporting needs to be more frequent to help drive improvement. Clearer links between performance data and the impact of improvement actions is also necessary.*
- 7 Progress in embedding a council-wide performance management framework to drive improvement activity has been slow. Covid-19 disrupted progress. Further change is needed if the council is to realise its ambition to be a performance led council.*

- 8 *The council's performance has improved or been maintained across three of the four key priority areas within its Council Plan. But in its priority area of the local economy, where many indicators do not have performance information available, there were already challenging performance issues before March 2020.*
- 9 *The Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicators for 2021/22 show a mixed picture, with good performance in areas such as waste management alongside the need for improvement in the key area of housing. The proportion of indicators in the top quartile is the highest since 2016/17.*
- 10 *Across the majority of areas the people of Angus are more satisfied with their council services than the Scottish average.*
- 11 *The Angus Health and Social Care Partnership is a key partner for the delivery of health and social care services. Good progress has been made in shifting care from hospitals to community and home-based care settings, but changes in the demand for care and recruitment challenges are resulting in unmet need. New models of service delivery are being introduced, but further change is needed to ensure services remain financially sustainable."*

4.4 It should be noted that the 2022 BVA Report has statutory status and is made by the Controller of Audit under section 102(1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (as amended by subsequent legislation including the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003). The Council is obliged to supply a copy to each elected member and to make copies of the report available for public inspection.

## **5. PROPOSALS**

5.1 It is proposed that Council considers and comments on the findings set out in the 2022 BVA Report published by the Accounts Commission (Appendix 1 refers).

5.2 In addition, the 2022 BVA Report includes four recommendations as follows (pages 52 of the 2022 BVA Report refers):

*"Recommendation 1 - The council and AHSCP must develop and deliver significant savings plans over the next few years to secure financial sustainability. This will require changes to the range and scope of services being delivered.*

*Recommendation 2 - The council needs to work better and more meaningfully with communities to engage with them to identify needs and opportunities and implement service changes that deliver the required savings.*

*Recommendation 3 - The council should complete its implementation of the PLED programme which will improve the use of performance information and better demonstrate the impact of improvement actions.*

*Recommendation 4 - The council should introduce its partially developed long-term financial planning framework."*

5.3 A draft Action Plan has been prepared taking cognisance of the recommendations in the report, along with other related matters that have been identified as part of the process – the draft Action Plan is included in Appendix 2. Members are invited to consider and comment on the draft Action Plan to address the recommendations as part of our continuous improvement work.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report but it is worth highlighting that the period covered by the BVA has been one of the most challenging financially for the Council and has also included the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

**NOTE:** No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Best Value Assurance Report: Angus Council  
Appendix 2 – draft Action Plan