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**REPORT TO: CORPORATE COMMITTEE ON 7 NOVEMBER 2023**

**SUBJECT: BEST VALUE PROGRESS REPORT ON MORAY COUNCIL**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the latest progress on the Best Value Assurance Review Strategic Action Plan relating to the 2019 review and subsequent 2022 follow up report.
- 1.2 To outline the actions to be taken to address the Best Value related recommendations set out in paras 3.5 and 3.6
- 1.3 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section 103E of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended by the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**2.1 It is recommended that Committee:**

- i) **consider and note progress made on the Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) Strategic Action Plan shown in Appendix 1; and**
- ii) **note that the outcomes of the best value aspects of the 2023 annual audit report and the findings of the external adviser supporting the council on cultural issues associated with best value are being reviewed for future incorporation into the Best Value Action Plan**

**3. BACKGROUND**

**BV Action Plan Progress Monitoring**

- 3.1 Reference is made to the report to the Moray Council on 29 June 2022 when the Council approved the updated Best Value Action Plan to continue progress in response to the Best Value Audit and the follow up report (para 25 of the minute refers).

3.2 The report set out the background that had led to the most recent iteration of the Improvement Plan and the positive progress that had been made in reaching that point, as summarised below:

- i) A Best Value Audit of the Council took place in September 2019, published in August 2020;
- ii) the Council agreed a plan of strategic actions in response in October 2020;
- iii) Further report by the Controller of Audit on the progress made by the Council published February 2022;
- iv) the outcome of the follow up report was recognised that good progress and that challenges remained in delivering the council's strategic priorities;
- v) Plan of action to address remaining areas agreed by Council in June 2022.

3.3 On 25 April 2023, the Corporate Committee noted that since the Action Plan was agreed many of the actions had progressed well and a number had been concluded, albeit that in some cases timescales were more protracted than originally planned (para 7 of the minute refers). Progress has noted in:

- i) IMP project monitoring to CMT/SMT established and showing progress across a number of projects and shifts from red/amber to amber/green evidencing progress in maintaining pace;
- ii) Work on financial planning: hierarchical approach agreed, assumptions revised and contributions to budget gap identified, although gap remains;
- iii) Remit of Audit and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Guide agreed;
- iv) Improve Education Attainment – range of work progressing, including finalisation of curriculum progressions (BGE), extension of qualifications and accreditation in line with SCQF ambassador programme (Senior Phase) and working in partnership with key partners (SDS, DYW, ES) to progress work on learner pathways and skills.

3.4 Further progress has been made as noted in **Appendix 1** and the majority of actions are now completed. There are 2 areas where work is ongoing and both of these are part of ongoing significant work and it is proposed that further reporting is as noted below:

- i) Financial Planning – there is significant work required and in progress to address short, medium and long term financial planning. This is reported to the Council on a regular basis and a number of specific reports will come forward in the next few months, including the report to

the council on 25 October 2023 which proposed a range of savings for consideration. Active and challenging financial planning is likely to be an ongoing core area of council work that will continue to be specifically and regularly reported on to enable full consideration by the council of the issues. Therefore, it is proposed that this specific reporting is also used to track progress for best value purposes although high level reporting will continue through best value updates as attached.

- ii) Improve educational attainment – this is also a broad area of work that is overseen in more detail by the Education Children’s and Leisure Services Committee with regular reports on both broad general education and senior phase achievement to that committee. The final action that requires to be concluded is an overall improvement in attainment. Current trends indicate year on year improvements in Broad General Education Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence level data, notable improvement in the Annual Participation Measure, positive initial post-school leaver destinations against virtual comparator and improvements in literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 4 and 5 overall compared with virtual and national comparators. Positive achievement in line with Scottish Government Core Stretch Aims set for Senior Phase leavers (1+ at SCQF level 5 and 1+ at SCQF level 6) has been realised along with positive performance overall of S4 cohorts in particular across a number of measures, against virtual and national comparators. Work continues towards improvement in educational attainment across all schools, with revised and aspirational Stretch Aims set and reported through our National Improvement Framework Plan 2023-2024 as part of Scottish Government and Education Scotland’s framework for recovery and accelerating progress 2023. Ongoing reporting and monitoring of attainment will continue through ECLS Committee and it is proposed that this is also used to track progress for best value purposes, including beyond the February 2024 date in the BV action plan, although overview reporting will continue as above until that point.

3.5 As reported to the Council on 25 October 2023, changes have been made to the Best Value Audit process and the audit is now integrated into the annual audit process (para 8 of the draft minute refers). A new annual thematic focus to Best value reporting has also been introduced and is summarised in the Annual Audit and Thematic Review Reports each year. This report has four recommended areas for improvement that were reported to the Council at the above noted meeting: Community participation (PB) in council budget; review of capital plan; annual self-evaluation for continuous improvement and training of Audit and Scrutiny members. It was noted that work is already underway to address the actions identified in the Thematic Review and that process will be reported along with the wider Best Value action plan monitoring. In addition, there are another seven Best Value recommendations in the Annual Audit (Wider Scope section).

3.6 At a special meeting of Corporate Committee on 4 October 2023 (para 6 of the minute refers) received a report regarding work that had been undertaken to advance the actions under the heading ‘Need for Clear and

Decisive Leadership'. The Committee supported the action going forward in relation to one of the recommendations from that work and agreed that the other eight recommendations in the Briefing Note will be integrated along with the appropriate actions and activities into the Action Plan.

- 3.7 The summary action plan and progress monitoring at **Appendix 1** now has a heading to incorporate future reporting on the above recommendations. These require to be developed into specific measurable actions with plans and timescales in order to be advanced and reported as part of future monitoring of progress on Best Value actions. The actions from the annual audit review have not yet been added due to the timing of these reports but will also be incorporated moving forward to ensure monitoring of progress.

#### **4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

**(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

The Council is committed to delivering better public services year on year through Best Value and its key principle of continuous improvement.

**(b) Policy and Legal**

The Council has a legal duty to deliver Best Value and to address any findings containing recommendations arising from any Best Value Assurance Reports.

**(c) Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this monitoring report.

**(d) Risk Implications**

There are risks associated with the council's ability to deliver the actions in the Best Value Action Plan alongside a challenging agenda including addressing the Council's significant budget gap. The challenge of prioritisation and resourcing was reported to the Council on 8 March 2023 in the Chief Executive's report Corporate Overview of Council Priorities and it is planned to update this to take account of current circumstances. The balancing of operational priorities and planned development work and the potential stop/start impact on planned work has been recognised in the series of best value reviews the Council has experienced and is one of the biggest challenges in ensuring sustained progress.

In order to mitigate this, the Corporate and Senior Management team monitor progress on the Improvement and Modernisation Programme and the Best Value Action Plan and as noted in this report, progress is being made with many actions well advanced and the majority of the overall work arising from the Best Value Review completed.

Prioritisation of resources and focusing of agendas and priorities will be ongoing to continue to deliver planned actions and maintain the pace established for improvement and modernisation.

The financial climate adds demands that will require considerable political and officer attention to be given to unprecedented levels of savings in a climate where the council has already delivered savings for many years. This may require further review and prioritisation of the remaining Best Value actions in the context of the priority required to be allocated to the delivery of savings to address financial sustainability.

**(e) Staffing Implications**

There are no additional staffing implications arising directly from this report. Work is being accommodated within existing resources which increases the risks of delivery and risks to other work. As noted above, this is monitored through reporting at the Management team and Committee.

**(f) Property**

None.

**(g) Equalities/Social Economic Impact**

This is covered in terms of the inspection regime itself and the Council's duty to deliver Best Value.

**(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impact**

There are no implications for climate change or biodiversity arising from this report.

**(i) Consultations**

The progress reports that contribute to the **Appendix 1** have been provided by Heads of Service and considered by CMT/SMT.

**5. CONCLUSION**

**5.1 The Council continues to make progress on the Action Plan to address the recommendations of the Best Value Assurance Report and follow up report (Appendix 1). This is set in a continuing challenging environment where priorities must be carefully balanced to ensure ongoing progress. However, there has been progress across the majority of planned actions with a number now concluded and work progressed on the workforce actions that had been delayed due to vacancies. Attention will now focus on incorporating and addressing actions from the work on the need for clear and decisive leadership and the eleven areas identified through the new annual audit process that incorporates Best Value.**

Author of Report: Denise Whitworth

Background Papers: [Best Value Assurance Report Strategic Action Plan \(Appendix 1\)](#) – Moray Council on 28 October 2020

[BVAR Action Plan Report 001](#) (20.01.2021)  
[BVAR Action Plan Report 002](#) (10.03.2021)  
[Covid Related Pressures and Service Prioritisation Report and Appendix](#) (10.3.21)  
[BVAR Action Plan Report 003](#) (12.05.2021)  
[BVAR Action Plan Report 004](#) (30.06.2021)  
[BVAR Action Plan Report 005](#) (15.09.2021)  
Scottish Government published advice and guidance on Coronavirus (COVID-19) protection levels and decision making framework  
[BVAR Action Plan Report 006](#) (19.01.2022)  
[Report to Council 15 March 2022](#) (Item 03)  
[Best Value Progress Report 29 June 2022](#) (Item 17c)  
[Best Value Progress 25 April 2023](#) (item 7)  
[Best Value Progress Update 4 October 2023](#) (Item 6)  
[Best Value Thematic Review 25 October](#) (Item 6)  
SPMAN-1108985784-901 / SPMAN-1108985784-918

Ref: