



REPORT TO: MORAY COUNCIL ON 29 JUNE 2022

SUBJECT: BEST VALUE PROGRESS REPORT ON MORAY COUNCIL

BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To ask the council to agree an updated best value action plan to continue progress in response to the Best Value Audit report in 2020, incorporating additional actions to address the findings in the Best Value Progress Report on Moray Council by the Controller of Audit and the Findings of the Accounts Commission reported to the council on 15 March 2022.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Council 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 **The Council is invited to approve the updated Best Value Action Plan (Appendix 1) to continue progress in response to the Best Value Audit and the follow up report.**

3. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 A Best Value Audit of the Council took place in September 2019. The subsequent Report by the Controller of Audit containing recommendations was reported to the Accounts Commission and the Commission's findings, along with the report subsequently published in August 2020. The Commission accepted the Controller of Audit's report and endorsed the recommendations.
- 3.2 The Commission required a further report by the Controller of Audit no later than February 2022 on the progress made by the Council. The Council's annual external audit process for 2020/21 also monitored and reported progress.
- 3.3 The areas of improvement recommended in the Controller of Audit's report and endorsed by the Accounts Commission in terms of the Commission's findings were integrated into a plan of strategic actions which following approval by the Council in October 2020 were the subject of regular monitoring reports to Full Council. The most recent report was to the Council

on 15 March 2022 when the outcome of the follow up report was also considered. In broad terms, the follow up report recognised that while good progress had been made in a number of areas there were challenges remaining in delivering the council's strategic priorities. The Council agreed an approach to developing indicative areas for action to continue planned improvement and address the high level areas of improvement to be taken forward to the Moray Council following the local government elections in May 2022 (para 5 of the minute refers).

- 3.4 The approach agreed was to take a three stranded approach by completing current actions, developing transformation and working on committed and decisive leadership. The specific actions for carry forward from the existing action plan were noted as:-
- Complete the development of performance management reporting by delivering scrutiny training for new elected members;
 - Improve educational attainment – completion of planned actions within revised timescales taking account of covid impact;
 - Further development of the medium to long term financial strategy.
- 3.5 In addition two broad high level areas of improvement from the current plan and as identified in the follow up report were identified to be assessed and developed into an Action Plan for consideration by the new Council:
- Increase the pace of transformational change through the Improvement and Modernisation Programme (IMP) whilst monitoring staff capacity and wellbeing;
 - Committed Decisive Leadership – add a revised workstream to support and advance the leadership role of Members and create a positive culture and to work together and with officers to deliver council priorities
- 3.6 Finally, in terms scrutiny, conduct of meetings and the effective conduct of council business, the Council agreed to produce a clear statement of the member objectives for scrutiny and for officers to provide options to conclude the outstanding element of the review of governance arrangements and to embed effective scrutiny in the Council's governance arrangements.
- 3.7 A further theme that emerges in the Best Value Audit follow up report relates to workload and capacity to deliver strategic change and maintain pace of transformation alongside business as usual and recovery. In addition recruitment challenges were noted and the need to continue to develop approaches to agreeing priorities and programme management. In response to this, to ensure that these issues are addressed and monitored, it is proposed that a further heading is added to the improvement plan: workforce and capacity and this has been included in **Appendix 1**.

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

The Council has set aside £14.6 million for transformational change and Council priorities. £1.3 million has already been allocated to support transformational change and there may be further calls on these reserves to develop the capacity to deliver the action plan, in particular in regard to maintaining pace of transformation and change.

(d) Risk Implications

As the Council operates with small teams/specialists there is an ongoing risk associated with workforce issues. Accordingly it will be important that continuous improvement in delivery of Best Value is resourced properly and/or other work reprioritised given the tight resourcing across current services.

Improved results from less resources will require even more rigorous prioritisation than previously seen. Failure to do this is likely to introduce other risks such as the capacity for IMP and other improvement activity which is at the core of the Report and Findings. Prioritisation is noted as an area for development to ensure that key progress continues. Careful consideration will be required to ensure high value work is prioritised and that return on investment of time and resource is carefully assessed against council priorities. There is a risk that desirable work of lower importance has extended timescales or is placed on hold until resources to be allocated.

There is a considerable risk that delayed progress in some of the significant actions has a substantial impact on the Council's future financial position.

There remains a risk that lack of progress towards making the significant changes in the Council to produce the required improvements in performance and outcomes may result in further intervention.

The issues that remain are the most difficult and tackling these with a new council which will need time to settle and give direction has both opportunity and challenge. Relationships and leadership are issues that do not have simple tangible remedies and will need ongoing attention. There is a need to focus on these as both significant and challenging if the Council wants to improve.

Prioritisation of resources and focusing of agendas and priorities will be needed if the council is to deliver more and increase the pace of improvement and modernisation as budgets and other resources will be limited. The financial climate adds to this when once again there will have to be considerable political and officer attention given to unprecedented levels of savings in a climate where we have already delivered savings for many years.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no implications arising directly from this report and actions will be incorporated into existing resources. The development of the officer capacity to deliver the required improvements related to the transformation programme and other specific pieces of work will require to be costed as the projects are considered and initiated. However, there are recruitment challenges, especially relating to temporary appointments and this could impact on pace and progress.

(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

CMT have been consulted in terms of development of the action plan.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Council made good progress on the actions to address the recommendations of the Best Value Assurance Report in 2020 in particular in relation to the strategic decision-making and milestones the council has achieved since August 2020. It is recognised, however, that there is still a significant amount of work ahead. The very challenging economic and financial background and the need for recovery and renewal to address the social and economic harms as a consequence of Covid-19 set a challenging context in which to continue the Council's positive progress in delivering best value recommendations. It is recommended that the action plan in Appendix 1 is approved by the council to enable continued positive progress in taking the recommendations of the follow up review forward.**

Author of Report:

Roddy Burns

Background Papers:

Report to Council 15 March 2022

Letter dated 2 February 2022 from Secretary to Accounts Commission enclosing the Controller of Audits Best Value Assurance Report on Moray Council.

Letter dated 18 February 2022 from Secretary to Accounts Commission enclosing a copy of the finding of

the Accounts Commission on the Control of Audits Best Value Assurance Report on Moray Council.
Best Value Assurance Report Detailed Plan Strategic Summary (SPMAN-1108985784-334)
[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)
[BVAR Action Plan Quarterly Report 006](#) (19.01.22)
[Best Value Assurance Report Strategic Action Plan \(Appendix 1\)](#) – Moray Council on 28 October 2020

Ref:

SPMAN-1108985784-766 / SPMAN-1108985784-767