



AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 FEBRUARY 2021

SELF ASSESSMENT - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Report by Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to inform the Comhairle of the completion of the Self-Assessment of Community Engagement using Audit Scotland Best Value Toolkits.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Based on corporate needs going forward and in anticipation of the Comhairle's Audit of Best Value the current programme of self-assessments for 2019/20 were adapted to include Audit Scotland's Best Value toolkits whilst still following the PSIF ethos. The full programme of 18 themed self-assessments have now been rolled out across the Comhairle, some of which apply to only one service area whilst others are cross cutting.
- 2.2 The self-assessments relating to Community Engagement has now been completed. On the whole evidence demonstrates that acceptable standards are being achieved with pockets of good performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle:**
 - (a) **notes the responsible persons and timescales in the Appendix to the Report; and**
 - (b) **approves the recommendations detailed in paragraph 8.1.**

Contact Officer: Carmen Macdonald, Organisational Development Officer
Appendix: BVAR Self-Assessment Recommendation Summary
Background Papers: None

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

| Resource Implications | Implications/None |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Financial | None. The Comhairle is under a legal duty to set a balanced budget and in doing so must plan to secure best value. |
| Legal | Councils have a statutory duty, introduced in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 to plan to secure Best Value. The Comhairle has a statutory duty of community planning under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. |
| Staffing | None |
| Assets and Property | None |
| Strategic Implications | Implications/None |
| Risk | None |
| Equalities | In achieving Best Value, the Comhairle must be able to demonstrate compliance with all statutory duties in relation to equalities and human rights. |
| Corporate Strategy | By using the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) since 2015, the Internal Strategy and Organisational Change Team provide a robust approach to continuous improvement to support performance management and continuous improvement through business planning to work towards the outcome of strategic priority <i>“4.1.1 - The Comhairle has achieved a systematic approach to improving organisational effectiveness that aligns strategy, people and processes and the service provided is high quality, continually improving and cost effective.”</i> Under the Corporate Strategy 2020-2022: Recovery and Renewal, the Comhairle aims <i>“to promote and support community ownership, empowerment and resilience, capitalising on our natural and cultural assets, to improve population stability and balance”</i> . |
| Environmental Impact | None |
| Consultation | None |

BACKGROUND

5.1 The statutory duty of Best Value was introduced by the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. Best Value is about ensuring that there is good governance and effective management of resources, with a focus on improvement, to deliver the best possible outcomes for the public. Audit Scotland developed Best Value toolkits, although primarily designed as an audit tool, they are recognised as a useful tool when carrying out organisation reviews and provide a set of questions against which an organisation can assess its Best Value arrangements.

- 5.2 Based on corporate needs going forward and in anticipation of the Comhairle's Audit of Best Value the current programme of self-assessments for 2019/20 was adapted to include Audit Scotland's Best Value toolkits whilst still following the PSIF ethos. The full programme of 18 themed self-assessments have now been rolled out across the Comhairle, some of which apply to only one service area whilst others are cross cutting.
- 5.3 A total of 13 self-assessments have now been completed; the Appendix to the Report provides a full summary of the resulting recommendations. A recurring corporate theme is emerging relating to the Comhairle's ability to demonstrate outcomes and impacts for service users. This area for improvement is links to several recommendations and should be a corporate priority moving forward.
- 5.4 The current programme of self-assessments supports organisational wide continuous improvements at a strategical level. Services are encouraged to continue this work by developing an operational and systematic approach to monitoring and evidencing best value out with the corporate programme of self-assessments.
- 5.5 As part of the roll out an inter-departmental Best Value Action Plan (BVAP) working group was established with the aim of supporting the identification of readily available high-level corporate evidence. Members of the BVAP working group are liaising with Directors and Heads of Service to collate information. In order to streamline the process a specific online shared drive has been created to support the storing and sharing of information. The Organisational Development Team provide support and guidance as required.

DETAIL

- 6.1 Community empowerment is defined by the Scottish Government as "*a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them*". The theme of Community Engagement aims to evaluate how well public bodies engage with and listen to the communities they serve in addition to being able to demonstrate resulting impacts. The theme comprises of five high level questions both with seven sub question. The key findings are detailed below under the relevant subheadings.

KEY FINDINGS

How well does the Comhairle demonstrate a commitment to engaging with communities?

- 7.1 The first set of questions aim to identify levels of commitment, leadership, culture and partnership working in relation community engagement activities.
- 7.2 As a local authority, the Comhairle has a statutory duty of community planning under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 ("the Act") aims to enhance community involvement in community planning by a number of means including the creation of new opportunities for influencing public service provision and decision-making.
- 7.3 The Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP) acts as a vehicle for community engagement. This partnership brings together public sector, private sector, voluntary sector partners and the community to agree priorities and local actions.
- 7.4 Through the use of Community Participation Requests the Comhairle welcomes requests from community bodies to participate in decisions and processes that are aimed at improving outcomes. Individual services across the Comhairle now consult via online consultations on a regular basis.

How well does the Comhairle understand the needs and aspirations of communities?

- 7.5 The second set of questions aims to identify how well a public body understands the needs and aspirations of communities and show how they are reflected in the organisational vision and relating plans.
- 7.6 In 2016, the Comhairle adopted the Scottish Government's consultation approach of "We Asked, You Said, We Did" to engage with communities more effectively and to make it as easy as possible for those who wish to express their opinions on a proposed area of work to do so in ways which will inform and enhance that work.
- 7.7 Larger scale Community Conversations are now held prior to key changes such as budget planning. These involve Councillors, Directors and Senior Managers. There is regular communication with Community Councils which are attended by local elected members and residents. Individual services engage with service users and local communities in several ways including Locality Planning Groups, consultation exercises and conferences.
- 7.8 The above engagement activities demonstrates the Comhairle's commitment to ensuring that the community can actively engage with the authority and have their needs and aspirations heard.

How well are communities involved in decision-making?

- 7.9 The third set of questions aims to identify how well a public body involves communities in decision making processes.
- 7.10 Consultation and engagement happens on a day-to-day basis across the Comhairle through day-to-day contact with customers and listening to feedback provided through the Complaints, Criticism and Compliments process.
- 7.11 The Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP) acts as the vehicle for community engagement. Larger scale Community Conversations and regular on-line consultations allow individuals an opportunity to engage on a range of issues. There is regular communication with Community Councils which again provides an opportunity for two-way communication with local residents.

Do the Comhairle's plans reflect a commitment to community engagement?

- 7.12 The fourth set of questions aims to identify how well a public body is committed to community engagement, how progress is monitored and to establish if there is sufficient challenge and scrutiny of progress.
- 7.13 An example of the level of commitment to community engagement is the Comhairle's Transformational Change programme which is driven by priorities identified by the community through engagement. This is inclusive of public meetings, consultations and consultation reports.
- 7.14 The formal Committee structure allows the continual monitoring of progress in addition to an element of scrutiny and challenge for all Comhairle activities. The Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP) produces an annual Progress Review which summaries progress across a range of local plans and activities.

What has community engagement achieved?

- 7.15 The fifth set of questions aims to identify what community engagement has achieved and what communities' perceptions are relating to levels of engagement.

- 7.16 The We Asked, You Said, We Did consultation format ensures that there is feedback provided following a consultation. The feedback provided during community engagement exercises will normally be reported back through formal committees and form part of Councillors decision making process.

CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Based on the information received through this self-assessment exercise and taking account of the evidenced strengths and weaknesses, it is recommended that the priority area for corporate improvement focuses on the development of a corporate and coordinate approach in regard to community engagement through the use of a Community Engagement and Participation Policy. It is also recommended that an area for future development include reviewing methods to support equality monitoring becoming a more streamlined part of community engagement.