

REPORT TO: CITY GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 25 SEPTEMBER 2023

REPORT ON: BEST VALUE THEMATIC REVIEW 2022/23

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 241-2023

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To present the findings and the Improvement Action Plan in response to the Best Value Thematic Review of Dundee City Council.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Committee is asked to:

- a review and consider the key messages and recommendations arising from the Best Value Thematic Review report attached as Appendix 1;
- b agree that the three recommendations described in paragraph 6.3 will be monitored via the Council Plan reporting process as set out in paragraph 7.3;
- c agree the arrangements for monitoring and reporting on attainment as set out in paragraph 7.5; and
- d remit the report to the Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Accounts Commission's new approach to auditing and reporting on the performance of councils against their duty of Best Value is set out in the new [Code of Audit Practice](#).
- 4.2 Part of the new approach is a requirement for the Controller of Audit to report on every council across the audit appointment round, covering the period October 2023 to August 2027. Unlike the previous approach, where Best Value Assurance Reports were based on a separate piece of audit work, the new approach consists of brief Controller of Audit reports accompanied by and reflecting on published annual audit reports.
- 4.3 This new approach requires reporting on Best Value thematic areas directed by the Accounts Commission within the Annual Audit Reports each year of the 5-year audit appointment. Auditors are also required to report on progress against previous Best Value audit reports and Commission findings.
- 4.4 The eight councils included in year one of the new approach have been selected on the basis that a mix of council types will be covered each year. For example, a split of urban/rural/island authorities, as well as variation in size and geographical spread. Dundee is included in Year 1 as an urban city council.
- 4.5 As with the previous approach, these Controller of Audit reports will be considered by the Accounts Commission in public and reported publicly. Dundee City Council's report is due to be presented by the Controller of Audit to the Accounts Commission on 9 November 2023.

5.0 SCOPE OF THE BEST VALUE THEMATIC REVIEW

5.1 For Year 1, the thematic work requires auditors to carry out an overview of the effectiveness of council leadership (officers and elected members) in developing new local strategic priorities following the elections in May 2022.

5.2 In carrying out this review, auditors considered the questions set out below:

Number	Questions
1	How clear is the new council vision and its priorities?
2	How effectively have the views of citizens and communities been reflected in the priorities and decisions taken by the council?
3	How effectively do the council priorities reflect the need to reduce inequalities and climate change?
4	How good are the delivery plans and is there alignment of financial, workforce, asset and digital plans with the council's priorities?
5	Overall, how effective has the leadership been (political and officer) in setting clear priorities and a sustainable approach to delivering them?

5.3 In addition to the thematic work, the review followed up on the improvement recommendations from the Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) in 2020, and also looked at the areas that they believe require additional focus, either to confirm that the judgements in the BVAR still apply, or to do additional work on themes that they did not look at in detail as part of the BVAR.

5.4 For Dundee City Council, the two areas that merit such coverage are:

- tackling poverty, reducing inequality and promoting fairness, due to the extent of the challenges facing the city and the increased external pressures that have emerged since they looked at this for the BVAR in 2020; and
- sustainable development and tackling climate change, due to the increased focus on this over the last few years.

5.5 As part of this process, council officers provided responses, additional information and supporting evidence for the areas set out above for the auditors to consider as part of this review.

6.0 FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

6.1 The full Best Value Thematic Review report from Audit Scotland is attached as Appendix 1 and sets out findings across the following seven areas:

- Section 1: Council vision and priorities
- Section 2: Performance
- Section 3: Citizen and community engagement
- Section 4: Reducing inequalities and tackling climate change
- Section 5: Alignment of delivery plans
- Section 6: Leadership
- Section 7: Progress since BVAR

6.2 The key messages from Audit Scotland are:

- a The Chief Executive and leadership team has worked together with elected members to provide effective leadership for the Council over the last 3 years. The overall vision of the Council remains clear. The Council Plan has been revised and sets out the Council's priorities.
- b The Council has an established performance framework which aligns with the Council Plan. In June 2023, the Council reported mixed progress against its first year of the new Council Plan. Performance is reported internally, and a clear and accessible summary is available on the Council's website. Performance compared to other councils has improved overall, but educational attainment measures have remained in the bottom quartile.
- c Council Plans are based on community engagement. The Council has a strong focus on community engagement, but participatory budgeting is not yet achieving its one per cent target. The Council is working with community groups to support residents struggling with rising living costs and has some good examples of this work.
- d The Council and its partners know that they need to do more to tackle the high levels of child poverty across the city. Inequality is a clear focus of the City Plan. Local Fairness Initiatives exist to address persistent and enduring issues with inequality, and the Council is working with the DWP and Scottish Government on a child poverty pathfinder project. Dundee is making good progress, with further activity planned to the end of 2024/25.
- e The Council is due to publish a Net Zero Transition plan in 2023. The Capital Plan includes £96 million of projects to help tackle climate change and reach Net Zero.
- f The Council's strategic services are currently preparing new service plans based on the priorities in the new Council Plan 2022-2027. The long-term financial strategy also needs updating.
- g A Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2028, which sets out the workforce transformation and planning required at a corporate level, was approved in July 2023. A Strategic Asset Management Plan and Digital Strategy are also in place.
- h The Dundee Partnership continues to work to address drug deaths. Recent data demonstrate some improvements.
- i The previous auditor concluded that "good progress had been made on BVAR recommendations" and Dundee City Council has now completed all of the outstanding recommendations.

6.3 There are three recommendations for improvement from this Best Value Thematic Review that are set out below along with the lead officers responsible for taking these forward and the timescales:

- a **Community Asset Transfers:** The Council should establish what else can be done to encourage and support community groups to manage and own facilities and deliver against its aim to increase community ownership of Council-owned assets.

Action Agreed: Replace the current asset transfer scheme with a community land and asset strategy as part of Community Wealth Building - Land and Property pillar. This will simplify the process and expand the range of options open to community groups to manage and own facilities.

Responsible Officer: Community Learning & Development Manager

Agreed Date: March 2024

- b **Participatory budgeting:** The Council should identify further areas where participatory budgeting can be used effectively to allocate resources based on the priorities of local residents.

Action Agreed: Council Leadership Team to review current position by October 2023 and consider further options to embed PB in mainstream budgets based on local needs.

Responsible Officers: Executive Director of Corporate Services and Service Manager - Communities

Agreed Date: March 2024

- c **Long-Term Financial Strategy:** The Council's long-term financial strategy needs to be updated to show how resources will be targeted towards priority areas over the next 10 years.

Action Agreed: The Long-Term Financial Strategy will be updated to reflect new Council Plan priorities.

Responsible Officer: Executive Director of Corporate Services

Agreed Date: March 2024

7.0 RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The Best Value Thematic Report 2023 is positive and demonstrates good progress since the previous Best Value Audit in 2020. The report confirms the completion of all of the improvement actions which were recommended in the Best Value Assurance Report of 2020 and provides assurance that Dundee City Council complies with its statutory obligations to secure Best Value.
- 7.2 The Council welcomes the many positive judgements contained in the report and believes that the overall findings give a fair and balanced assessment of its performance and progress.
- 7.3 The Council accepts the recommendations from the review as an important driver for further improvement. Recommendations 1 and 2 are included within the Council Plan, so progress against these will be reported every six months. Recommendation 3 will be actioned by the Executive Director of Corporate Services by 31 March 2024.
- 7.4 The Best Value Review relies heavily on the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) for its commentary on the Council's performance. Committees review reports on the LGBF data each year to identify priority areas for improvement and the Council makes all the data available on the Council's website. Many of the LGBF indicators are referred to in service plans and other reports as well. The Best Value audit notes the Council is fully compliant with its public performance reporting duty. The Council will take on board any feedback about its use of the indicators and will continue to report our relative position in our Family Groups and nationally, as appropriate.
- 7.5 Closing the attainment gap is a key outcome measure in the City Plan as part of the priority of reducing child poverty and inequalities in incomes, education, and health. Following on from this, the Council Plan 2022-27 specifically targets improving the average tariff score for school leavers living in SIMD 1. Closing the attainment gap has been a consistent priority in the Council's plans and will be reported on in Council Plan progress reports. Improving educational outcomes for all and narrowing attainment and achievement gaps is a key priority within the Children & Families Service Plan 2023-27, which will also be subject to separate, 6 monthly performance reports to the Children, Families and Communities Committee.
- 7.6 Follow up of the recommendations will be also considered as part of the Council's future Annual External Audits.

8.0 REPORTING TO THE ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

- 8.1 Audit Scotland has advised that the findings from the Thematic Review will be summarised within their Annual Audit Report for 2022/23 and will be issued at the end of October following the conclusion of the financial statements audit. It will be the Annual Audit Report that is taken to the Accounts Commission meeting accompanied by a covering report from the Controller of Audit. The covering report will include a statement from the Controller of Audit on the Council. It will also highlight the key judgements reported in the Annual Audit Report, the thematic report, and any previous reports.
- 8.2 It may also include extracts or links to other related documents (e.g., national performance audit reports or other inspectorate reports). The covering report will be shared with the Council to confirm the factual accuracy of the contents prior to it being finalised for inclusion in the Commission papers.

8.3 The Commission meeting will follow a similar format to that used for the BVAR meetings whereby the Controller of Audit (CoA) and the audit team will present the report and answer any questions Commission members have on their findings during the public session. The Commission will then agree during the private session what their findings are based on the report and the discussions at the public session. The Accounts Commission findings will then be published along with the CoA report a few weeks after the meeting. A press release will also be published with the report.

8.4 As the CoA report will be a formal statutory report (Section 102 report) this will go to Committee for consideration in the same way that the BVAR report did.

9.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 This report has been subject to the Pre-IIA Screening Tool and does not make any recommendations for change to strategy, policy, procedures, services, or funding and so has not been subject to an Integrated Impact Assessment. An appropriate senior manager has reviewed and agreed with this assessment.

10.0 CONSULTATIONS

The Council Leadership Team was consulted in the preparation of this report.

11.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Best Value Assurance Report (Report No 284-2020).

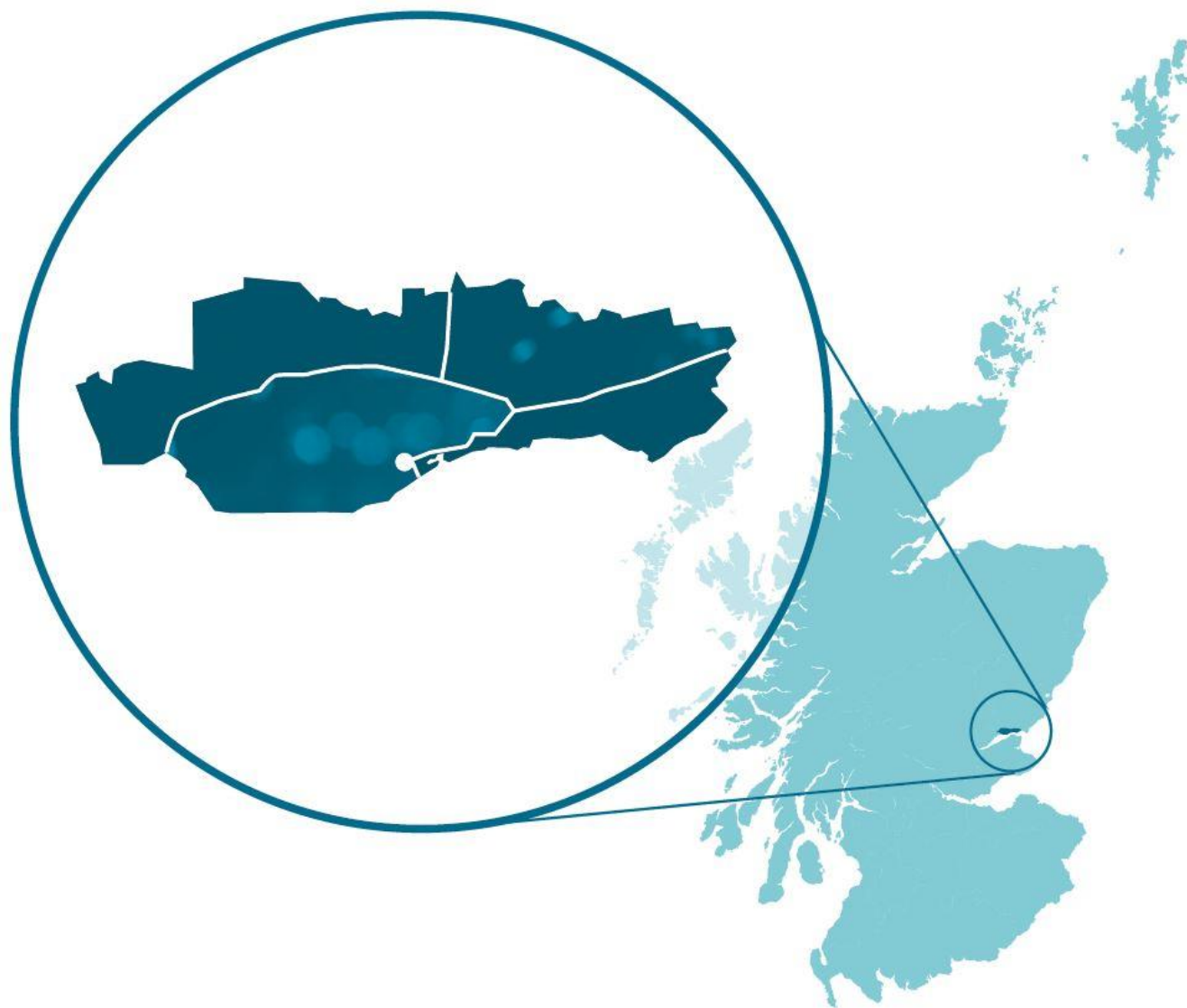
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SEPTEMBER 2023

Dundee City Council

Best Value Thematic Review 2022/23



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared by Audit Scotland
August 2023

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Key messages

- 1** The Chief Executive and leadership team has worked together with elected members to provide effective leadership for the Council over the last 3 years. The overall vision of the Council remains clear. The Council Plan has been revised and sets out the Council's priorities.
- 2** The Council has an established performance framework which aligns with the Council Plan. In June 2023, the council reported mixed progress against its first year of the new Council Plan. Performance is reported internally, and a clear and accessible summary is available on the Council website. Performance compared to other councils has improved overall, but educational attainment measures have remained in the bottom quartile.
- 3** Council Plans are based on community engagement. The Council has a strong focus on community engagement, but participatory budgeting is not yet achieving its 1 per cent target. The Council is working with community groups to support residents struggling with rising living costs and has some good examples of this work.
- 4** The Council and its partners know that they need to do more to tackle the high levels of child poverty across the city. Inequality is a clear focus of the City Plan. Local Fairness Initiatives exist to address persistent and enduring issues with inequality, and the Council is working with the DWP and Scottish Government on a child poverty pathfinder project. Dundee is making good progress, with further activity planned to the end of 2024/25.
- 5** The Council is due to publish a Net Zero Transition plan in 2023. The Capital Plan includes £96 million of projects to help tackle climate change and reach Net Zero.
- 6** The Council's strategic services are currently preparing new service plans based on the priorities in the new Council Plan 2022-2027. The long-term financial strategy also needs updating.
- 7** A Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2028, which sets out the workforce transformation and planning required at a corporate level, was approved in July 2023. A Strategic Asset Management Plan and Digital Strategy are also in place.
- 8** The Dundee Partnership continues to work to address drug deaths. Recent data demonstrate some improvements.
- 9** The previous auditor concluded that "good progress had been made on BVAR recommendations" and Dundee City Council has now completed all of the outstanding recommendations.

Scope of the audit

1. This report covers the thematic aspect of the Best Value audit requirements. For 2022/23 the Accounts Commission has directed auditors to report on the effectiveness of the council's leadership and the development of the council's strategic priorities.

2. In carrying out the thematic work auditors have considered the following questions:

- How clear is the new council vision and its priorities?
- How effectively have the views of citizens and communities been reflected in the priorities and decisions taken by the council?
- How effectively do the council priorities reflect the need to reduce inequalities and climate change?
- How good are the delivery plans and is there alignment of financial, workforce, asset and digital plans with the council's priorities?
- Overall, how effective has the leadership been (political and officer) in setting clear priorities and a sustainable approach to delivering them?

3. This report includes an update on the areas covered by recommendations in the [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) (BVAR).

4. A review of performance reporting arrangements and recent performance data has also been completed to assess the Council's progress in driving improvement in key priority areas since the BVAR.

5. An improvement action plan is included at [Appendix 1](#) of this report. This sets out audit recommendations in key areas, and the council's planned response, including responsible officers and dates for implementation.

6. The coverage of the work is in line with the expectations of councils for the seven Best Value themes set out in the [Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Best Value Statutory Guidance 2020](#).

Section 1: Council vision and priorities

The BVAR found the Council had an ambitious vision for Dundee to address poverty and inequality challenges.

7. The [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) identified that the council and its partners had an ambitious vision for Dundee. The City Plan and the Council Plan set out how they aimed to improve life in the city and that this was key to addressing Dundee's high levels of poverty and inequality.

8. The Report said that the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive provide effective leadership, and officers and councillors work well together.

The overall vision of the Council remains clear. The Council Plan has been revised and sets out the council's priorities.

9. The council's website includes the latest [Council Plan 2022-2027](#). The Council's vision consists of 3 statements around inequalities, environment and the economy:

- Dundee will be a caring city which has tackled the root causes of poverty and delivered fairness in incomes, education and health.
- Dundee will have a strong, creative, smart and sustainable city economy with jobs and opportunities for all.
- Dundee will be a greener city, made up of strong communities where people feel empowered, safe and proud to live.

10. This Council Plan has the following key priorities, which we consider to be both appropriate and focused.

- Reduce child poverty and inequalities in incomes, education and health.
- Design a modern council.
- Tackle climate change and reach Net Zero carbon emissions by 2045.
- Deliver inclusive growth (including Community Wealth Building).
- Build resilient and empowered communities.

The plan was developed in consultation with citizens, community planning partners and staff.

11. The council developed the current plan with input from Dundee Integration Joint Board, Leisure and Culture Dundee, staff from across the organisation (through an employee survey and follow up focus group) and communities.

12. The Dundee City Plan and Council Plan also incorporate the findings of public surveys and the Engage Dundee initiative. Engage Dundee is a biennial community engagement exercise that gives the people of Dundee an opportunity to tell public services, voluntary organisations and community groups what is important to them. The new plans were informed by the Engage Dundee 2021 exercise which focussed on Community Living, Community Support, Community Spirit and Community Travel.

The council had a good communication strategy for its plan.

13. The Plan was launched and communicated in different ways to stakeholders. This included:

- A staff leadership conference, covering the new priorities, was held in November 2022.
- A press release was issued to local print and broadcast media for publication on 1 February 2023, to coincide with the launch of the Council Plan on the council's [website](#), and posts on its [Twitter page](#) and other corporate social media channels.
- [A single-page summary document of the Council Plan 2022-27](#) was made available to the public on the Council's website.
- Posters were distributed to community centres and libraries for display in public areas, and digital adverts were shown on bus stops and other public screens.
- The [Chief Executive's Video Blog \(April 2023\)](#) focussed on the new Council Plan and the importance of designing a modern council that's fit for the challenges of the future.

The Council Plan links to other key strategies and plans.

14. The council has identified the key strategies and plans which underpin the Council Plan and these are demonstrated in [Exhibit 1](#).

Exhibit 1 Council Plan – How it all links together



Source: Dundee City Council Plan 2022-2027

The sixth phase of the transformation programme has been integrated within the new Council Plan.

15. The Council has reported savings of over £147 million through its transformational programme since 2008. The transformation programme is now integrated within the Council Plan as part of the 'Design A Modern Council' priority.

The Council Plan is consistent with the City Plan which was also revised in 2022.

16. The [City Plan 2022-2032](#) is Dundee's second Local Outcome Improvement Plan and replaces the City Plan 2017-2027. Although the end point of the original city plan had not yet been reached, the Dundee Partnership agreed that a new plan was required to reflect the significant changes in the external environment that have impacted upon the scale of the challenges faced by the city since the original plan was developed in 2017.

17. The new Council Plan is aligned with the new City Plan and shares a common vision for the city of Dundee.

The Council Plan has clear outcomes and performance measures.

18. The Council Plan clearly sets out the key actions to be taken in response to each priority and provides KPIs with 1, 3 and 10-year targets that the Council has committed to achieve.

19. Each action has a lead service area that will take responsibility for delivering the action. Each of the Council's strategic service areas are currently preparing new service plans based on the priorities in the new Council Plan 2022-2027.

20. Reports on progress towards meeting the new priorities will be presented to the Council twice per year.

Dundee City IJB has a new plan and is currently developing a performance framework.

21. Dundee City Integration Joint Board (DCIJB) is responsible for planning and commissioning adult health and social care services. The Strategic and Commissioning Plan 2022/23 (an extension of the previous three-year plan for 2019-2022) sets out in full, the priorities and associated actions for the delivery, improvement and transformation of health and social care services.

22. DCIJB, the Council, NHS Tayside and providers in the third and independent sectors, are responsible for implementing these priorities and actions.

23. The IJB approved its [Strategic Commissioning Framework 2023-2033 in June 2023](#). This sets out plans for working together in Dundee towards excellence in health and social care and includes 6 strategic priorities covering

Inequalities, Self Care, Open Door, Planning Together, Workforce and Working Together.

24. A resources framework and performance framework are now being developed to support the delivery of the priorities.

Section 2: Performance

The BVAR identified that the Council's performance had been improving.

25. The [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) identified that the LGBF Performance Indicators (2018/19 data) showed the Council's overall performance, in comparison to its family group of peers, had improved from the prior year. An audit analysis of the LGBF indicators also confirmed the Council's view that performance had improved over the six years to 2018/19.

The Council has an established performance framework which aligns with the council plan.






26. As described in [Section 1](#) of this report, the Council has established a clear reporting framework which aligns to the Council Plan and its priorities. There are 22 overall priority indicators in the plan, with a focus which is appropriate to the size of the council and the key challenges it faces.

The Council reports mixed progress against its first year of the new Council Plan.

27. The Council's first Annual Performance Report was issued in June 2023. This is very clear and presents a fair and balanced assessment of performance. It measures performance against the 22 indicators in the new Corporate Plan. As shown in [Exhibit 2](#), performance is mixed with 12 (55 per cent) of indicators showing improvement on the previous year and 11 (50 per cent) within 5 per cent of the year 1 target identified in the plan. Most progress has been achieved against the priority theme to "Build resilient and empowered communities".

Exhibit 2

First year progress against the Council Plan is mixed

Priority Theme	Within 5% of Yr 1 target	Improved over previous year	Total Indicators
 Reduce Child Poverty and Inequalities in Incomes, Education and Health	4 (66%)	3 (50%)	6
 Deliver Inclusive Economic Growth including Community Wealth Building	1 (25%)	2 (50%)	4
 Tackle Climate Change and achieve Net Zero Carbon Emissions by 2045	3 (75%)	2 (50%)	4
 Build Resilient and Empowered Communities	3 (60%)	4 (80%)	5
 Design a Modern Council	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	3
TOTAL	11 (50%)	12 (55%)	22

Source: Dundee City Council Annual Progress Report (June 2023)

An annual benchmarking report is also prepared.

28. The council prepares an annual performance benchmarking report. The latest of these was in May 2023 and was based on 2021/22 performance. This report focuses on Local Government Benchmarking Framework data, which enables comparison between Scottish councils. The report included comparison with the family group median for 8 councils (including Dundee), for 36 key indicators that are “most closely aligned with the Council Plan priorities”.

Performance against four LGBF measures have been identified for further consideration by management.

29. The annual benchmarking report shows where Dundee is on target compared to this family group benchmark or needs some focus to reach the family group median. A high-level overview shows 19 out of 36 (53 per cent) indicators met the benchmark (of the LGBF family group median) and are described as “on- target”, with 17 areas identified “for improvement”. The report identifies 4 areas for further consideration by management:

- Average total tariff for Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintile 1 (Quintile 1 is the most deprived SIMD group and represents the most deprived 20 per cent of the population. The number and level of qualifications a young person gains by the point they leave school provides the tariff score for this measure)

- Claimant count as a percentage of working age population.
- Percentage of total household waste arising that is recycled.
- Percentage of internal floor area of operational buildings in satisfactory condition.

30. An update is also provided on the areas identified for improvement in the previous year's annual benchmarking report and these are shown in [Exhibit 3](#).

Exhibit 3

Update on areas identified for improvement in Council's 2021/22 benchmarking report

Area for Improvement	Progress since last report
Average total tariff SIMD quintile 1 and quintile 2	<p>The average total tariff score for SIMD Quintile 1 for Dundee City has shown a steady improvement from the 2011-12 baseline with a 13.9 per cent long term improvement. Dundee City continues to be in the bottom half of its family group for both measures.</p> <p>Reducing Child Poverty and inequalities in education is a strategic priority in the Council Plan 2022-2027 and includes closing the attainment gap.</p>
Average time per business and industry planning application (weeks)	<p>The average time per business and industry planning application (weeks) has increased by 7.4 per cent from the previous year. This has happened across the family group and Dundee City are closing the gap on the family group median.</p> <p>Timescales for determining applications were impacted during the last financial year due to staff vacancies in the planning team. These posts have now been filled and there is a focus on improving performance in this area.</p>
Percentage of internal floor area of operational buildings in satisfactory condition	<p>Property rationalisation is a key priority in the Council Plan within the "Design a Modern Council" theme. The next closures and demolitions include Construction House, Camperdown Park Sawmill, Marchbank Depot's old weighbridge building, old wash bay and 1950's lean-to shed, which are all older poorer condition properties. The East End campus will replace two poor condition schools. The next phase of property rationalisation will continue to look at the poorer condition properties across the portfolio.</p>

Source: Dundee City Council annual performance benchmarking report (May 2023)

Performance is reported internally, and a clear and accessible summary is available on the council website.

31. The Council's [Performance Management Framework 2021-2024](#) sets out its requirements for reporting council and partnership performance, including public performance reporting.

32. Performance against the previous Council Plan, and City Plan, was reported through the Policy and Resources Committee every six months. Performance against Service Plans was also reported to the relevant service committees every six months during 2021/22.

33. Performance against the Council Plan and Service Plans was also a standing item on the agenda for the Council Leadership Team which enabled officers to review KPI data and request additional information on areas of focus or concern.

34. The [Dundee Performs](#) section of the council's website is used to report performance to the public and contains clear and accessible data on performance, including the Annual Performance Report against the Council Plan and the LGBF Annual Benchmarking Report.

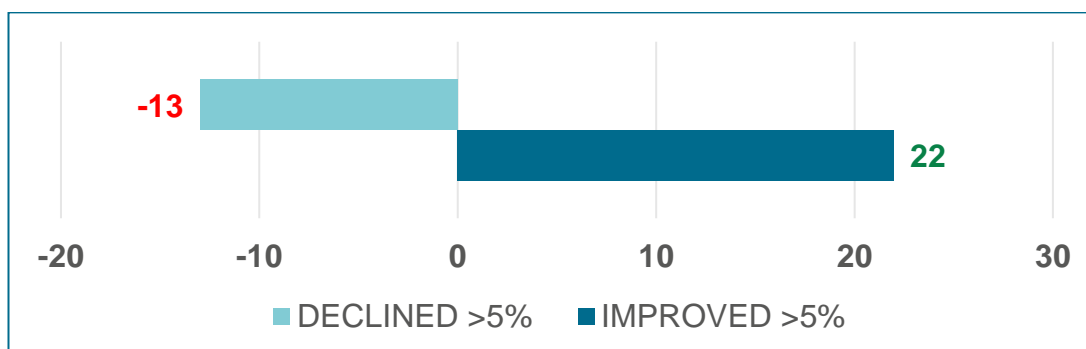
The Council's LGBF performance improved since 2018/19, in line with improvements across Scotland over that period.

35. 88 of the 105 Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) indicators can be used to compare annual performance, of which 33 are cost indicators and 12 had no recent data to compare. The remaining 55 indicators measure (non-cost) performance. [Exhibit 4](#) is a performance comparison since the [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#), and shows that 22 of these indicators improved by 5 percent or more and 13 indicators deteriorated by 5 percent or more, with the remaining 20 indicators remaining relatively unchanged. This change was consistent with overall changes in performance at a whole of Scotland level.

Exhibit 4

Comparison of 55 LGBF indicators from 2018/19 to 2021/22

22 indicators have improved by more than 5 percent



Source: Audit Scotland analysis of LGBF data

36. The key areas where performance improved included:

- **Economic Development and Planning indicator 1:** Percentage of unemployed people assisted into work increased by 41 per cent, from 19 to 26 percent. The national average is 20 percent.

- **Economic Development and Planning indicator 7:** Proportion of people earning less than the living wage improved by 45 percent, reducing from 19 percent to 10 percent. The national average is 14 percent. The annual performance report identified that the city has passed the milestone of 100 organisations accredited as living wage employers.
- **Financial Sustainability indicator 1:** The council's total useable reserves as a proportion of its annual budgeted revenue increased by 190 percent from 8 to 22 percent. The national average is 24 percent.

37. Areas where performance deteriorated included:

- **Children Services indicator 22:** Percentage of child protection re-registrations within 18 months deteriorated from 4 to 8 percent. The national average is 8 percent.
- **Economic Development and Planning indicator 3:** Average time per business and industry planning application increased by 81 percent from 8 to 15 weeks. The national average is 12 weeks. The annual performance report notes that timescales for determining applications were impacted during the last financial year due to staff vacancies in the planning team. It also notes that posts have now been filled and there is a focus on improving performance in this area.
- **Housing indicator 2:** Percentage of rent due in the year that was lost due to voids increased by 89 per cent from 1.5 to 2.8 per cent. The national average is 1.6 per cent.

38. The changes highlighted above were also some of the areas of the most significant performance deterioration across Scotland over this period, so Dundee City Council's performance reflects these national challenges.

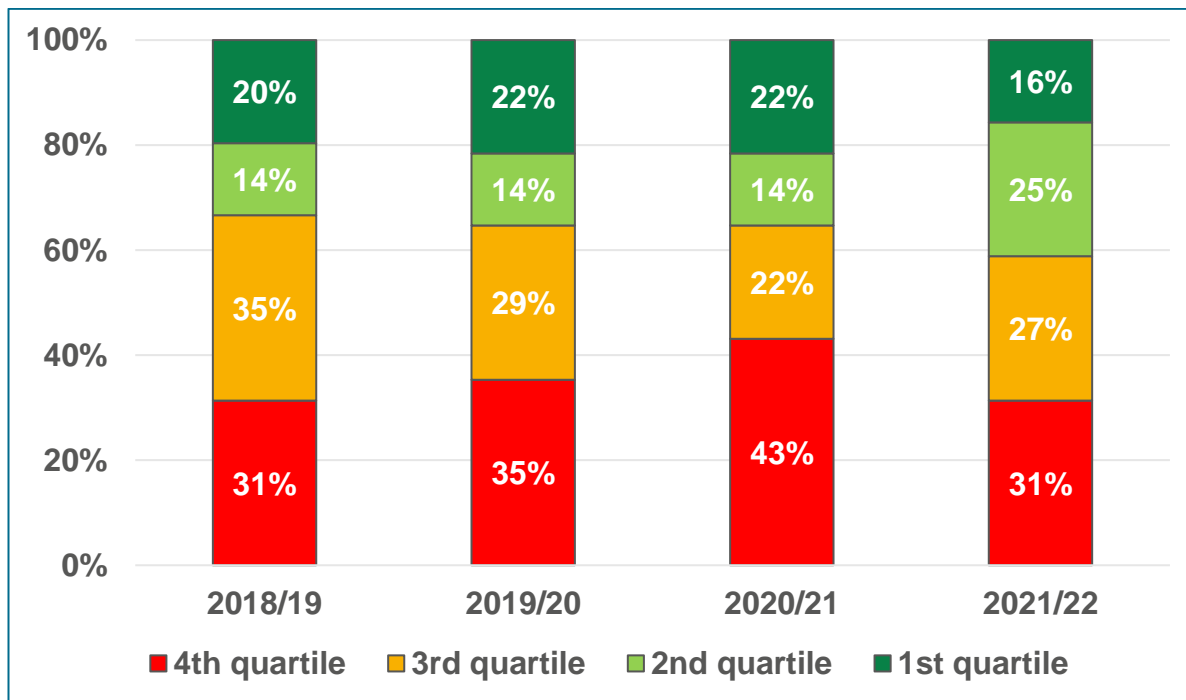
Performance compared to other councils has improved overall, but educational attainment measures have remained in the bottom quartile.

39. An overall comparison of LGBF performance to the other 31 councils across Scotland shows a definite increase in the number of indicators where Dundee features in the top two quartiles, as shown in [Exhibit 5](#). Over the period 2018/19 to 2021/22 the percentage of indicators in the top two quartiles has grown from 34 to 41 per cent, so while overall Dundee is below average on this comparison, its relative performance has improved.

Exhibit 5

LGBF data comparison across all 32 Scottish councils

The Council has been increasing its relative performance, with 41 per cent of indicators in the top two quartiles in 2021/22



Source: Audit Scotland analysis of LGBF data available at August 2023

40. There have been some significant changes over the four years in relative performance against individual indicators. Areas where the Council's ranking has moved up include:

- **Children's Services indicator 17:** Percentage of children meeting developmental milestones. The council moved up from 24th to 16th in Scotland.
- **Children's Services indicator 18:** Percentage of funded early years provision which is graded good or better. The council moved up from 22nd to 13th in Scotland.
- **Children's Services indicator 22:** Percentage of child protection re-registrations within 18 months. The council moved up from 23rd to 17th in Scotland. Despite deterioration in the Council's performance against this indicator ([paragraph 37.](#)), the national performance has deteriorated even more leading to the relative improvement, as Dundee's performance didn't decline as much as other councils.
- **Corporate Services indicator 6a:** Teacher sickness absence days. The council moved up from 20th to 7th in Scotland.
- **Financial Sustainability indicator 1:** The council's total useable reserves as a proportion of its annual budgeted revenue. The council moved up from 31st to 20th in Scotland.

41. Areas where the Council's ranking has moved down include:

- **Children's Services indicator 12c:** Average total tariff for SIMD quintile 2 (Quintile 2 is the second most deprived SIMD group and the number and level of qualifications a young person gains by the point they leave school provides the tariff score for this measure). The council moved down from 21st to 29th in Scotland.
- **Children's Services indicator 23:** Percentage of looked after children with more than one placement in the last year. The council moved down from 27th to 31st in Scotland.
- **Adult Social Care indicator 7:** Proportion of care services graded good or better in Care Inspectorate inspections. The council moved down from 12th to 28th in Scotland.

42. Approximately half of the educational attainment measures have remained in the bottom quartile as local improvements year-on year have been matched by overall improvements across Scottish Councils. In broad terms, the performance noted above suggests some relative improvements in early education, but a deterioration in social care.

The Council uses the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) to drive continuous improvement in service priorities.

43. As reported in the [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#), the Council uses the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) to drive continuous improvement in service priorities. A PSIF assessment is currently being carried out for the Dundee Partnership and will include how partners work together on self-evaluation to support continuous improvement in city-wide priorities.

44. The Council is also developing a new method of process mapping. To offer services and project teams a way of researching the business case for improvements and to include stakeholders in the process. It is also training officers in service design. It used the Change Fund to procure process mapping software ([Engage Process](#)), so the efficiency savings of process improvements can be robustly calculated. This is intended to support the development of business cases for transformation and benefits realisation of transformation projects in the future.

The council reports responses to inspection reports to the Scrutiny Committee.

45. The Scrutiny Committee's remit enables it to examine and review external inspection reports, including details of the actions being taken to address recommendations, and any best practice identified that can be shared across the service. The committee also reviews the Council's annual complaints report which includes details of improvement actions taken in response, and the outcome of any PSIF self-assessment reviews ([paragraph 43.](#)).

The council demonstrates good compliance with the SPI direction.

46. The Accounts Commission issued a new [Statutory Performance Information Direction](#) in December 2021 which applies for the three years from 2022/23. It requires a council to report its:

- performance in improving local public services (including those provided with its partners and communities), and progress against agreed desired outcomes (SPI 1). The Commission expects this reporting to allow comparison both over time and with other similar bodies (drawing on Local Government Benchmarking Framework and/or other benchmarking activities)
- own assessment and audit, scrutiny and inspection body assessments of how it is performing against its duty of Best Value and how it has responded to these assessments (SPI 2).

47. As detailed within this section of the report, the Council has demonstrated good compliance with the SPI direction, with clear and focused improvement targets based on council priorities and clear and balanced reporting of performance with easily accessible reports on its website. The assessments cover the whole of the council and provide an overall view of strengths and weaknesses.

48. The comparisons include trend information and comparisons to other councils, including reporting of performance and key priorities of the Council against its family group. The Improvement Service website provides further data analysis for any interested users and a direct link to the [My Local Council LGBF data](#) is provided via the Dundee Performs section of the Council website.

Section 3: Citizen and community engagement

The BVAR identified that the Council had embraced the requirements of the Community Empowerment Act.

49. The [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) identified that the Council, and its partners, had embraced the requirements of the Community Empowerment Act and built upon existing arrangements to encourage further community-based activity. “The Dundee Partnership has embraced the requirements of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Eight Local Community Planning Partnerships deliver local projects to communities. Citizens’ views informed how £1.2 million was spent on local projects in 2018/19”.

50. The report recommended that communication to citizens on the rationale for policy decisions should be reviewed. This was completed in 2021/22 when the auditor noted that “Dundee Partnership approved a participation and engagement framework for use when undertaking consultation and engagement with citizens. The Council has also consolidated the learning from Dundee Decides by embedding participatory budgeting into mainstream budgets from 2021/22”.

Community empowerment is strongly reflected within the high-level plans of the Council.

51. As detailed [Section 1](#) of the report, community empowerment is reflected in the priorities in the Council Plan and four key actions have been identified for services to support this:

- Work with Scottish Government on a Local Democracy Bill to further empower councils and local communities (Corporate Services)
- Maximise participatory budgeting in all forms (Neighbourhood Services)
- Increase community ownership of Council-owned assets (City Development and Neighbourhood Services)
- Support communities to be partners and leaders in each of the 8 Local Community Planning Partnerships (Neighbourhood Services)

52. Community Empowerment is also a key element of the “Changing for the Future Transformation Plan” ([paragraph 15.](#)), which will be critical in supporting future financial plans and long-term sustainability, better services to citizens and improving outcomes for all.

No community asset transfers were completed during 2021/22 or 2022/23.

53. The [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) identified that “the council has a well-established history of supporting community groups to manage and own facilities...and had resulted in five transfers of ownership and four long-term lease arrangements since 2015.”

54. Since 2019/20 the Council has published an Annual Community Empowerment Report on the [Community Empowerment section](#) of its website to meet its requirements under the Act to produce an annual report on participation requests and community asset transfers. The [Community Empowerment Report 2022/23](#) showed that no participation requests and only one community asset transfer request were received during the year. No community asset transfers were completed during 2021/22 or 2022/23.

55. While there has been a reduction in community asset transfers in recent years the Council has continued to support community groups and charities to take on responsibility for operating council owned assets for the benefit of local residents. This has included [Street Soccer Scotland’s investment in the Lynch Centre](#) and [working with Dundee social enterprise the Circle to regenerate Dudhope Castle](#).

Recommendation 1

The Council should establish what else can be done to encourage and support community groups to manage and own facilities and deliver against its aim to increase community ownership of Council-owned assets.

Council Plans are based on community engagement.

56. As noted in [paragraph 11.](#), the Council consulted with communities about what the priorities were in preparing the Council Plan. This started with Engage Dundee exercises in 2020 and 2021. This broad consultation was followed up by focussed Community Collectives throughout the first half of 2022, which aimed to distil those community responses into Local Community Plans. Local Community Plans for each of the 8 wards were produced in December 2022.

The Council has a strong focus on community engagement.

57. [Dundee’s Locality Leadership Scheme 2022-2027](#) was launched in December 2022 and outlines how the Dundee Partnership will adopt a locality approach to reduce inequalities in the Dundee City Council local authority area.

58. The city has a Local Community Planning Partnership (LCPP) in each of the eight wards. They have a nominated senior officer (Locality Leader) and include local elected members and partners from across the public and voluntary sectors.

59. Each Local Community Planning Partnership produces and works to a Local Community Plan which is reviewed every five years. These contain

partnership actions to meet the needs and aspirations of local people. They are co-produced with the community and reflect the priorities for each ward at a community level, providing a local focus to city-wide issues. The key focus of the new local plans for 2022-2027 is reducing inequalities, which clearly links to the City Plan's priorities.

Participatory budgeting is being used, but the Council is not yet achieving the target of 1 per cent.

60. The Council has used participatory budgeting in a range of areas to allocate resources to local initiatives based on the priorities of residents. Recent examples include:

- £0.8 million each year is allocated to the Dundee Partnership Community Regeneration Fund. This is for projects that aim to reduce deprivation and provide additional opportunities to close the gap for those living in the city's Community Regeneration Areas (incorporating places in the 15 per cent most deprived data zones in Scotland).
- A trial took place in 2022 to devolve money from the Dundee Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (ADP) to community groups, including people with lived-experience of substance misuse. This resulted in £80,000 being allocated (£10,000 to each of the city's eight electoral wards) to set up community cafes or to commission agencies to set up support projects accessible in localities across the city and to deliver priorities in the ADP Action Plan at a local level. An evaluation of the trial was undertaken in February 2023 and this confirmed the positive impact this funding has had on facilitating innovative local partnership responses which support the ADP's strategic priorities. The next step is to request that this funding model is now rolled out over the next 5 years across the Protecting People agenda.
- The Council's Community Learning and Development Youth Work Team worked with Young Scot to move their £0.025 million youth fund to a participatory budgeting model, where young people can suggest and vote on projects.
- [Dundee's Voice](#) launched in 2023 along with the [Dundee Climate Fund](#) which allocated £0.75 million (£0.5 million capital funding and £0.25 million revenue funding) to support community-led climate change projects. Following the first round of voting, funding was approved for [12 local projects totalling £0.385 million](#) based on the votes of 4,376 respondents. These included money for the Dundee Heritage Trust Green Verdant Works (0.09 million), Campy Growers food for the future (£0.06 million) and Heart Space Yoga and Bodyworks Fit for the Future (£0.05 million) programmes.

61. COSLA and the Scottish Government developed a framework agreement that at least 1 per cent of local government budgets should be subject to participatory budgeting by the end of 2021. Dundee City Council has made progress in this area but is not yet achieving this target and allocated around 0.7 per cent to participatory budgeting during 2022/23. The Council is

committed to meeting this target and the new Council Plan sets out its aim to maximise participatory budgeting in all forms.

Recommendation 2

The Council should identify further areas where participatory budgeting can be used effectively to allocate resources based on the priorities of local residents.

The Council is continuing to work together with partners as part of its Covid-19 recovery plan.

62. The Council's Covid-19 recovery plan was split into two stages, a recovery stage which lasted until the end of 2020/21, and a restructuring phase covering 2021-2024 to align with the previous three-year service plans.

63. The recovery plan identified that those most adversely affected by the pandemic were those already in poverty and those with protected characteristics. A multi-agency response is being strategically managed through community planning with leadership by the Dundee Partnership.

The Council is working with community groups to support residents struggling with rising living costs.

64. Dundee City Council was the first Local Authority in Scotland to declare a cost-of-living crisis in June 2022. The new Council Plan recognises the impact on its priority to reduce child poverty and inequalities in incomes, education and health.

65. Community groups are key to the Council's response, with multiple groups involved in the decision-making process for local services. Examples of where the council has learned from innovative ways communities were involved in developing and delivering support during the Covid-19 pandemic include:

- **Community Food Network:** This was formed in March 2020 in response to the pandemic and is now helping to design a sustainable approach to food security. It represents a strong partnership developed between the Council and voluntary and community organisations, which prevented people from going hungry and ensured they had access to other services. These services included income maximisation and mental health support. Moving forward the Food Strategy will contribute to reducing the need for emergency provision and reducing food waste across the city.
- **Open Doors Initiative:** This came into effect during the emergence of the cost-of-living crisis in late 2022. A range of partners, services and community groups provide free or low-cost activities in accessible local community venues. Hot drinks and meals are available where possible. Over £50,000 of Community Regeneration Funding was used, shared over 50 different venues and groups across the city to support around 2,000 local people attending. Dundee City Council's Community Learning and Development Service evaluated the impact of the scheme at the start of 2023/24 and reported that it helped reduce social isolation; alleviate the

effects of poverty and pointed people in the right direction for additional support.

- **The Fairness Leadership Panel:** This replaced the previous Fairness Commissions and is driving the Partnership's efforts to reduce poverty for children, families, and communities. The Panel is a collaboration between people with lived-experience of the impact of low incomes, and representatives of influential bodies and groups in the city. During 2022/23 the focus of the Panel has been on the local implications of the national child poverty drivers. There has also been further work on the costs of food and fuel, access to benefits and debt advice and the reshaping of local employability services to support people towards jobs that offer incomes that will help them to escape poverty.

66. To assist residents who are struggling with rising living costs to access the full range of support available to them, the Council has created a [Help with the cost of living](#) section on its website. This page contains links to sources of help and advice from the Council, community groups, partner bodies and external organisations. A link to this section is provided on the Council's homepage and also promoted via its social media channels.

Section 4: Reducing inequalities and tackling climate change

The BVAR identified that better poverty and inequality outcome measures were needed.

67. The [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) recommended that the Dundee Partnership “develop an outcome framework to better measure the true impact of local initiatives targeting poverty and inequality in Dundee”. The auditor reported that they found it hard to fully assess the impact on poverty and inequality across the city as “there is limited data available to measure actual outcomes over time against predicted outcomes”.

68. This was completed in June 2021, when the Dundee Partnership devised an outcomes framework as part of the development of the latest iteration of the Fairness and Child Poverty Action Plan. The Partnership also approved changes to the performance reporting arrangements to ensure performance against the City Plan is reported on a 6-monthly basis and there is a clear focus on the impact of the measures taken, and corrective action being taken to address areas where agreed targets are not being met.

The Council and its partners know that they need to do more to tackle the high levels of child poverty across the city.

69. A combined Fairness and Local Child Poverty report to the Policy and Resources Committee, in June 2023, highlighted the scale of the challenge facing the Council and its partners with latest figures showing that 27 per cent of children in Dundee are living in relative poverty. The report also highlighted that effective long-term action is required to respond to the ongoing challenges associated with low incomes and insecure employment, substance use and mental health issues as well as the poverty-related attainment gap. The report noted that the escalating cost of living crisis will make these challenges even greater.

Inequality and climate change are clear focuses of the City Plan.

70. The City Plan 2022-32 identifies three strategic priorities with a focus on reducing inequality and poverty, improving the city’s economy, and tackling climate change.

71. The Council has set itself a goal of reducing child poverty by half by 2030. As set out in [Exhibit 1](#) on page [7](#), the key strategies and plans that focus on reducing child poverty and inequalities in the city include:

- Fairness and Child Poverty Action Plan,
- National Performance Framework 2016,
- Children and Families Service Plan,
- Not just a roof housing options and homeless strategy, and
- Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.

There are local fairness initiatives to target areas that have persistent enduring problems with inequalities.

72. The council has recognised that two areas in the city, Linlathen and Stobswell West, have persistent enduring problems with inequalities. These two areas are the focus of Local Fairness Initiatives. These involve a range of Council services, and other organisations, working with the communities to design services that tackle financial inequalities and address other outcomes associated with poverty, such as poor health and wellbeing and poor housing.

73. The current local fairness initiatives activities include a child poverty pathfinder project in Linlathen. This is a collaborative project between the Council, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Scottish Government and other partners to work together. It focusses on families in Dundee who are looking for employment, with a view to supporting them out of poverty on a sustained basis through person-centred and holistic support. This pilot project is still ongoing but has already brought additional income into households as well as a range of other positive impacts, such as training and employment.

The Council has identified seven equality outcome priorities.

74. The council's Mainstreaming Equalities Outcome Action Plan 2021-2025 sets out 7 outcomes and activities to achieve these. The outcomes were developed to reflect the needs of the citizens of Dundee and consider the impact of Covid-19. Each has a lead officer and linked service area. The outcomes also feed into the City Plan. The 7 equality outcome priorities are:

- 1) Ensure that the equality and human rights of residents and employees from protected groups are safeguarded and promoted.
- 2) Increase opportunities for protected groups to secure Fair Work.
- 3) Implement community justice services that increase access and protection for people from protected groups.
- 4) Close the gap in educational attainment experienced by young people from protected groups.
- 5) Improve access and transportation to places in Dundee.
- 6) Improve health outcomes by promoting access and equality of service for people with protected characteristics.
- 7) Reduce the additional social inequalities experienced by people in poverty and in protected groups.

There are good examples of actions to improve accessibility and use of services.

75. The council continues to engage with key stakeholders and groups to improve accessibility and use of services and there are a range of activities that demonstrate that equality is embedded within the organisation. These include:

- Completion of equality impact assessments for all new and developing policies. ([Paragraph 77.](#))
- Preparation of a British Sign Language (BSL) Plan to enable BSL users (those individuals whose first or preferred language is BSL) to be fully involved in daily and public life as active, healthy citizens able to make informed choices about all aspects of life.
- The Council's website offers a Dyslexia friendly version and a translation facility that enables visitors to select from a drop-down list of over 50 languages and dialects.
- With over 90 languages spoken in the City's schools, the Accessibility and Inclusion Service (AIS) is designed to assist schools, teachers and learners to encourage and develop their home language whilst acquiring English.

Equality impact assessments and Fairer Scotland assessments are core considerations in strategic decision-making.

76. During 2021/22 the Community Planning and Equality and Fairness Team led a project to re-design, develop and improve the council's Integrated Impact Assessment Guidance, systems and processes. This reflected an understanding that doing these assessments well will help the council make better decisions, improve the transparency and accountability of decision-making, and reduce the risk of making bad decisions.

77. The review resulted in the Council revising its approach to equality impact assessments (EIAs) and replacing the separate EIA reports with a new Integrated Impact Assessment (IIAs). The IIAs consider four components: equality and diversity, fairness and poverty (including the Fairer Scotland requirements), environment, and corporate risk. A pre-screening tool was also developed to determine whether an IIA is required for changes to strategy, policy, procedures, services, or funding.

78. To support the roll-out of the new IIA model the Council also developed equality impact assessment training. This was designed to ensure that officers know when and why an IIA should be carried out and understand the revised IIA process. This includes the use of the IIA pre-screening tool and the re-developed IIA tool. The IIA Workshop Programme has been delivered to staff across the Council; health and social care partnership and leisure and culture trust.

79. The completed IIAs are included in committee papers alongside relevant proposals to allow elected members to scrutinise the potential equality implications.

Dundee is making good progress on their equality actions, with further activity planned to the end of 2024/25.

80. The Council reports every two years on progress on equality under the Specific Equality Duty Regulations (Scotland) 2012. This is reported to committee and is publicly available on the council website. The report looks at progress on the seven equality outcomes. The latest [Mainstreaming Equalities Progress Report](#) in April 2023 reported that 32 (37 per cent) of the 87 actions were completed. Some of the key highlights included:

- Developed and implemented a new integrated impact assessment tool and process ([Paragraph 77.](#))
- Development of Dundee Faith Covenant to build relationships and trust with faith groups, adopt strategies for the engagement and support of faith communities and work together to tackle religious intolerance.
- Development of Violence Against Women Partnership to reduce violent incidences, and to increase public understanding of the nature, causes and impact of violence against women.
- Partnership with [AccessAble](#) to provide and promote access guides for over 380 key buildings across the city to enable the public to identify if a place is going to be accessible to someone based on their individual needs.

81. There are currently 5 actions which are overdue. This includes:

- Implementing 'Our Promise' for Care Experienced Children, Young People and Care Leavers. This was originally due by June 2022, but a revised date of March 2025 has now been set.
- Targeted work to the most disadvantaged communities, including focused local fairness initiatives in Linlathen and Stobswell West ([paragraph 72.](#)). This was originally due by March 2023, but a revised date of March 2025 has now been set.

82. For both actions the planned activities were completed by the original target date, but new actions have now been identified for the next stages that are required to embed the new approaches and ensure they link up with other related initiatives. The impact of this activity and delivery of the intended outcomes will be monitored and reported across the life of the current equalities action plan which covers the period up to the end of 2024/25.

Climate change considerations are embedded in Council plans.

83. In 2019, Dundee City Council declared a climate emergency, recognising the serious and accelerating environmental, social and economic challenges

presented by climate change. The Council has several plans and strategies that are focussed on tackling climate change and reaching net zero by 2045. These include:

- [Dundee Climate Action Plan](#),
- [Waste and Recycling Strategy Action Plan 2020-25](#),
- [Dundee Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-30](#),
- [Local Food Growing Strategy](#), and
- [Tayside and Central Scotland Regional Transport Strategy 2024-2034 \(Draft for Consultation\)](#).

84. Within the new Council Plan there are nine actions linked to the priority of Tackling Climate Change and reaching Net Zero carbon emissions by 2045. The City Plan has the same priority, with six associated actions. Both plans have their own performance targets.

85. The Council and its partners have formed a Climate Leadership Group to provide strategic leadership for the city in this area. This oversees the [Sustainable Dundee](#) network which is a partnership of organisations from across the city and is chaired by the Council's Sustainability and Climate Change Team. The purpose of the group is to coordinate and collaborate on public engagement, events and projects that build on the City's Climate Action Plan.

86. £14 million was awarded to Dundee in January 2023, as part of round two of the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund. This money will go towards redeveloping the Bell Street Car Park in Dundee into a sustainable transport hub, creating 350 electrical vehicle charging points, car share spaces, and an e-bike hire scheme.

87. Dundee is the first local authority in Scotland to use the [ClimateOS](#) platform to digitise its climate data in a bid to speed up climate action and reach its goal of Net Zero emissions by 2045. The platform is also designed to assist the Sustainable Dundee partners in co-designing and modelling new actions, and ensuring the plan is digitised and dynamic.

88. As noted at [paragraph 77.](#), the environment is a consideration of the new integrated impact assessments. The environmental assessments consider the potential impact of new policies on climate change, resource use, transport, the natural environment and the built environment.

The Council is due to publish a Net Zero Transition plan in 2023.

89. The Council is planning to publish a Net Zero Transition plan in 2023. The plan will outline Dundee City Council's organisational approach and emissions

reduction programmes to achieve their goal of Net Zero by 2045. The plan aims to:

- Set out a clear roadmap for the Council's transition to become a net zero organisation, with a set of corporate actions over the next four years across Net Zero Emissions, Circular Economy, Climate Resilience and Just Transition.
- Implement a carbon budgeting process that will embed delivery across all Services.
- Ensure activities and infrastructure are resilient to a changing climate.
- Engage and involve staff, customers, and the public in the journey to become a net zero organisation.
- Ensure the Council acts as a local leader and supports the city of Dundee and Scotland in ambitions for a net zero society.

The changes required to deliver Net Zero carbon emissions by 2045 will place pressure on future revenue and capital budgets.

90. Investing in new assets and the other energy efficiency initiatives will be costly in the short to medium-term. This expenditure should lead to longer-term savings and the anticipated costs of some projects may reduce as the related technologies develop and become more widely used. However, delivering against the Council's key priority to tackle climate change and reach Net Zero carbon emissions by 2045, will place pressure on future revenue and capital budgets.

The Capital Plan includes £96 million of projects to help tackle climate change and reach Net Zero carbon emissions by 2045.

91. The Council reviewed its [Capital Plan 2023-28](#) in November 2022 in response to meeting the challenges of the current financial environment. Sustainability is a key focus for the Council with the planned investment of £96 million in tackling climate change to help deliver the Council's Net Zero ambitions, making up over a fifth of the plan. This spend includes:

- active travel projects,
- modernisation of energy systems in council buildings,
- energy efficiency measures in council housing,
- investment in the electric fleet, and
- low carbon projects and the low emission zone.

92. The largest project in the programme is the East End Community Campus. The principles for the project are to deliver high quality, suitable, sustainable, low carbon, digitally enabled learning environments. Accordingly, the Council will be designing the facility to meet the Scottish Government energy target which is set at a new benchmark level above the current technical standards. This will be achieved by using low and zero carbon technologies.

Section 5: Alignment of delivery plans

The Council is currently revising its delivery plans to ensure they reflect the new Council Plan priorities.

93. [Section 1](#) of the report confirmed that the overall vision of the Council remains clear and the Council Plan clearly sets out the council's priorities. As shown in [Exhibit 1](#) on page 7, the council has also identified the key strategies and plans which underpin the new Council Plan. The plan sets out the key actions to be taken in response to each priority and provides KPIs for these. Each action has a lead service area that will take responsibility for delivering the action. Arrangements are in place to ensure that other delivery plans are revised to reflect the new council priorities, as discussed below.

Service plans are being revised to align with the new Council priorities.

94. The Council's strategic service areas are currently preparing new service plans based on the priorities in the new Council Plan 2022-2027. The plans will also set out the other service priorities and identify measures to monitor performance against these. This will allow managers to focus on priorities for their department and provide a framework for reporting service level performance. This will assist members in scrutinising performance at service committees and identifying areas where corrective action is required.

The Council's long-term financial strategy needs to be updated to show how resources will be targeted towards priority areas.

95. The [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) found that "financial management was effective with a budget focused on the council's priorities and a long-term financial strategy covering the next ten years."

96. The Council prepares a medium-term financial outlook that sets out the financial projections for the next 3-year period. The latest revision was considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in September 2022 and detailed the financial plans and projected savings requirements up to the end of 2025/26. This took account of the key financial challenges facing the council in the medium-term, but also aimed to provide sufficient financial resource to services to meet the Council's new strategic priorities.

97. The Council's Long-Term Financial Strategy is still being updated to reflect the new Council Plan.

Recommendation 3

The Council's Long-Term Financial Strategy needs to be updated to show how resources will be targeted towards priority areas over the next 10 years.

The approved budget reflected the results of a budget consultation.

98. On 23 February 2023, the Council approved a balanced revenue budget for 2023/24 based on a band D council tax rise of 4.75 per cent. The approved budget reflected the results of a budget consultation survey, where residents identified Education as the key spending priority. It also included new areas of spend to support the Council's other strategic priorities. For example, to support food networks, provide community support and diversionary activities, tackle social inequality, provide community environmental improvements and investment in economic development to support city events.

The Council's Capital Plan has been revised.

99. As detailed at [paragraph 91.](#), the Council's [Capital Plan 2023-28](#) was reviewed in November 2022 in response to inflationary pressures. As part of this review the Council had to find an additional £23.6 million to balance the overall plan. Budget reductions were identified through discussions with senior officers (Capital Governance Group) to enable the reprioritisation of the existing budget in line with the strategic priorities included in the Council Plan 2022-27. The revised plan invests almost £460m in these priorities over the period of the plan.

The Council has a 5-year strategic workforce plan.

100. The [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) found that "The council was slow to develop a workforce strategy and is still to put in place workforce plans for each service, to demonstrate that the council has the capacity and skills to deliver the council's priorities." The report recommended that: "Workforce plans need to be developed for all services to demonstrate that staff have the capacity and skills to deliver the council's priorities."

101. The importance of good workforce planning has increased further since the BVAR, with workforce shortages and pay inflation pressures, and councils across Scotland facing a challenge to recruit and retain suitably qualified staff.

102. The Council has identified that 38 per cent of its employees are over the age of 51 and 10 per cent are over the age of 61. Management acknowledge that to maintain service delivery, it is essential that the Council has a strategy in place to plan for the ageing workforce.

103. Workforce plans have now been developed for each service. These were prepared using the Council's interactive workforce data tool which assists management in services to examine their current workforce. The service level workforce plans informed the overarching Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2028 which was approved in July 2023. This sets out the workforce transformation and planning required at a corporate level.

104. The Council has also introduced new policies around workforce change and quality conversations to improve engagement and performance.

The Council recently approved its Corporate Asset Management Plan 2023-28.

105. The [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) reported that “The council is developing a Strategic Asset Management Plan. This will align with the financial and strategic service delivery plans to maximise the use of the entire asset base of the council.”

106. The Council approved the Corporate Asset Management Plan 2023-28 at the Policy and Resources Committee in June 2023. The plan is intended as a framework to identify assets, their value, their use and how they support the council’s overall aims and objectives; and therefore plays a key role in the planning of capital and revenue expenditure. It is underpinned by more detailed plans for the 6 main subgroups of assets (Property, Housing, Roads, Open spaces, Fleet, and ICT) which are maintained by the relevant Asset Manager within that business area.

The Digital Strategy 2023-2027 reflects the Council’s priorities and the national digital strategy for Scotland.

107. The Council approved its new [Digital Strategy 2023-2027](#) in March 2023 (its first Digital Strategy was developed in 2016). The strategy aligns with the Council Plan and details how the Council: “aims to maximise the potential of Digital technologies to improve outcomes and services for all our citizens and employees, in a way which supports the delivery of the Council’s priorities and in particular to design a modern digital Council.”

108. The strategy vision is for services to be flexible, accessible and delivered with the customer’s needs in mind, adopting a digital-by-default approach and meeting customer needs at the first point of contact. This will be achieved by:

- Digital transformation being recognised as an integral part of the council’s transformation to a modern Council, aligned with the corporate vision and supported by strong leadership.
- Digital tools and transformative digital solutions being integrated throughout the organisation.
- Digital initiatives being led and owned by services, supported and enabled by a dedicated Digital team and powered by IT.
- The Council’s people being engaged, skilled and committed to a transformative digital culture where they take pride in constantly learning and evolving their skills to meet customer needs.

109. The strategy is also aligned with the national digital strategy for Scotland ([A Changing Nation: How Scotland Will Thrive In A Digital World](#)) as recommended in Audit Scotland’s [Digital Progress in Local Government Report \(January 2021\)](#). This is key to ensuring the Council develops its approach in a way that works in synergy with the National priorities as these evolve over time.

Section 6: Leadership

The BVAR identified that the council had effective leadership and officers and councillors worked well together.

110. The [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) concluded that “the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive provide effective leadership, and officers and councillors work well together. The council’s committee structure is unusual as all 29 councillors sit on all strategic service area committees. The Scrutiny Committee comprises eight members drawn from all political groups on the council. The Leader of the Opposition is the appointed Convener of the Committee and we are satisfied that this committee provides effective scrutiny over decision-making and undertakes its business in an open and transparent manner. The committee structure and meeting arrangements work well for a council of this size.”

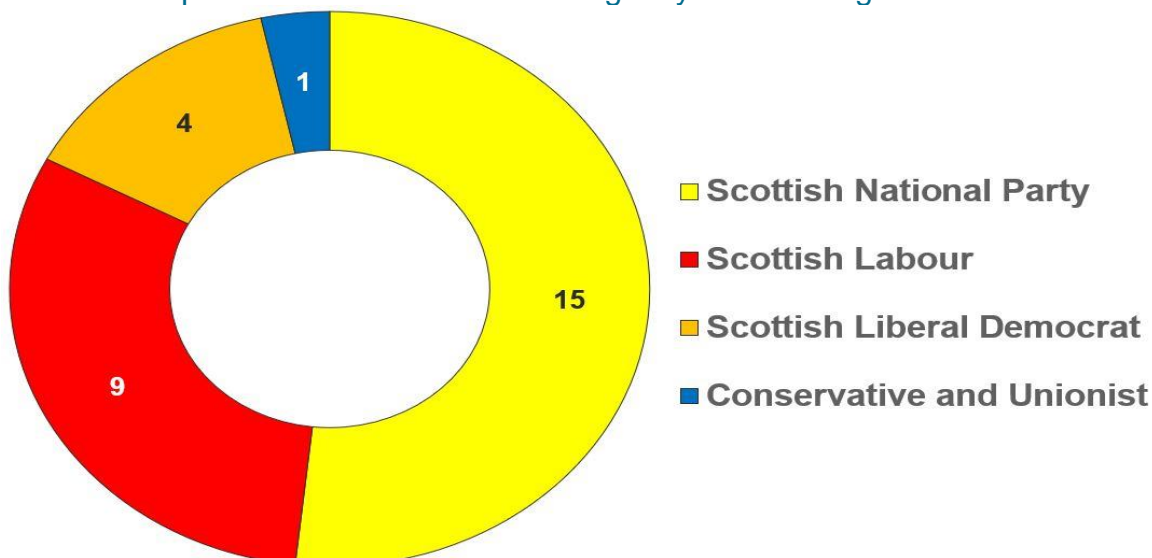
Following the May 2022 local government elections, the council has had an SNP majority administration.

111. Following the local government elections in May 2022, 29 members representing 8 multi-member wards were elected across Dundee. The political composition is shown in [Exhibit 6](#).

112. Councillor Alexander, as the leader of the SNP majority administration, was re-appointed as the Leader of the Council, having previously held the post as part of the SNP minority administration who led the council in the preceding five years.

Exhibit 6

Political composition of the council following May 2022 local government elections



Source: Dundee City Council website

The Council has recently revised its committee structure.

113. At the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 26 June 2023, it was agreed to establish a revised committee structure to better reflect the council's priorities. There are now five service committees: (1) Children, Families and Communities; (2) Climate, Environment and Biodiversity; (3) Fair Work, Economic Growth and Infrastructure; (4) Neighbourhood Regeneration, Housing and Estate Management; and (5) City Governance. Revised Orders of Reference have been prepared for each committee. The revised structure retains the existing Licencing, Planning and Scrutiny committees.

114. The Head of Democratic and Legal Services is to review the Council's Standing Orders and Schemes of Administration for Financial Regulations, Tender Procedures and Delegation of Powers to Officers with revised documents to be prepared in due course for agreement by the council.

Effective collaborative working between members and officers continues.

115. Based on our participation and observation of committee meetings, and discussions with officers and members, we are satisfied that there remains effective collaborative working arrangements between members and with officers.

116. It is also clear that there is a good degree of cooperation and consensus between members on the vision and priorities for the council and the city, and members continue to have a clear focus on working in the interests of the residents of Dundee.

The Chief Executive and leadership team has worked together with elected members to provide effective leadership for the Council over the last 3 years.

117. The Council's former Chief Executive stepped down at the end of 2020, following the publication of the [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#), and Gregory Colgan was appointed as the new Chief Executive in December 2020. Prior to this he had held the post of Executive Director of Corporate Services at the Council.

118. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and the period since, the Council's Chief Executive and leadership team have worked together with elected members to focus on addressing the key challenges facing the city. As detailed at [Section 1](#) of the report, the Council recently approved its new [Council Plan 2022-2027](#) and we are satisfied that this sets out clear and focussed priorities for the next 5 years.

119. Based on our discussions with management, and observation of senior officers at Council and committee meetings, we do not have any concerns about their capacity and skills. We also do not have any concerns about the skills of elected members or the arrangements in place to support them in undertaking their roles.

Section 7: Progress since Best Value Assurance Report

The BVAR reported that the council had demonstrated a steady pace of improvement since the previous BV audit in 2011.

120. The Accounts Commission findings in the [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) highlighted that Dundee City Council had “strong leadership, was self-aware about how it performs, and its services were improving in many areas. It had sound financial management and made good use of longer-term financial planning. The council, as part of the Dundee Partnership, had successfully delivered high profile capital investment projects to transform areas of the city, most notably the redevelopment of the Dundee waterfront.”

121. The Commission also found that, “despite progress, Dundee continues to face complex and deep-rooted challenges. The city has the highest rate of drug related deaths in Scotland, and pressures around poverty and mental health remain significant. The financial sustainability of the integration joint board (IJB) remains a risk.”

122. The Commission acknowledged that the “Council is aware of these challenges, but in striving with its partners to address them, it needed to increase its pace of change. It needed to understand, and demonstrate more clearly, the social impact of its capital investment and prevention and early intervention initiatives on inequality and poverty, particularly in the less advantaged areas of the city. It also needed to move from incremental to transformational change across all its services, in particular, in education, to make quicker progress in narrowing the attainment gap for more vulnerable or disadvantaged children.”

123. The Commission urged the Council to “put workforce plans in place for all services to ensure it has the required skills and capacity to deliver its aspirations.”

124. The BVAR included eight recommendations which were endorsed by the Accounts Commission.

Good progress has been made in implementing the actions to deliver the recommendations for improvement in the BVAR.

125. At its meeting on 16 November 2020, the Council approved a Best Value Assurance Report Improvement Plan which set out 21 actions to address the eight recommendations in the BVAR. For each of these actions the plan detailed the lead officer responsible for delivering the action, the proposed timescale for it to be completed, and the success criteria that the impact of the action would be measured against. The plan also included a further 10 actions

to address other areas highlighted in the Accounts Commissions findings, or linked to areas covered by the scope of the BVAR:

- The Council must work with partners to ensure it addresses the City's complex and deep-rooted challenges including drugs related deaths, pressures around poverty, significant issues within mental health services, and the financial sustainability of the IJB.
- Continue to improve monitoring of segmented absence data, to discover the root causes of employee absence.
- Address recurring areas for improvement in public protection in external scrutiny reports and internal self-evaluation activities.

126. Reports on the progress were taken to the Policy and Resources Committee every six months for members consideration.

127. In the [Annual Audit Report 2021/22 \(October 2022\)](#), the external auditor concluded that good progress had been made in implementing the actions to deliver the recommendations for improvement in the BVAR, with 4 of the 8 recommendations fully completed, and 2 of the 4 outstanding recommendations substantially completed, by June 2022.

128. [Exhibit 7](#) on page [36](#) summarises our assessment of progress against the 4 outstanding recommendations. This shows that good progress has been made on progressing previous BVAR findings, with all 4 of the outstanding recommendations now completed.

Exhibit 7**Council progress against outstanding recommendations**

Recommendation	Council response and progress to date
<p>1. Consideration should be given to extending the support provided, to non-elected committee members.</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>Progress with this recommendation was initially delayed due to the involvement of Learning and Organisational Development Service staff in the council's Covid-19 response.</p> <p>Following the local government elections in May 2022, induction training was rolled out to all committee members. An engagement plan is in place within the elected member induction programme including a portal of resources. Further work will also be done with committee members on a process of self-assessment.</p>
<p>2. Regular performance reports need to be presented to councillors which include performance data for the current year, covering all services.</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>A revised Performance Management Framework (PMF) 2021-24 was approved in March 2021. New 3-year service plans were also approved in June 2021 and performance against these was reported during 2021/22. Awareness sessions are provided to new members to ensure they understand the performance information being reported and are able to appropriately scrutinise and challenge service performance.</p>
<p>3. Workforce plans need to be developed for all services to demonstrate that staff have the capacity and skills to deliver the council's priorities.</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>As detailed at paragraphs <u>100.</u> to <u>104.</u>, workforce plans have now been developed for each service. The service level workforce plans informed the overarching Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2028 which was approved in July 2023. This sets out the workforce transformation and planning required at a corporate level.</p>
<p>4. A strategic asset management plan, is to be developed, aligned to the financial and strategic service delivery plans.</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>As detailed at paragraphs <u>105.</u> and <u>106.</u>, the Council recently approved its Corporate Asset Management Plan 2023-28.</p>

Dundee Partnership continues to work with the third sector and those with lived-experience, to address drug deaths.

129. The [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#) reported that the Dundee Partnership has faced a major challenge in tackling the city's drug problems and delivering sustainable solutions that will prevent and reduce drug use across the city.

130. The Dundee Drugs Commission (the Commission) is an independent commission, which was established by the Dundee Partnership (including Dundee City Council) in 2018 to tackle the city's drug problems and deliver sustainable solutions that would prevent and reduce drug use across the city. In 2019, the Commission published its findings from an independent enquiry, "[Responding to Drug Use With Kindness, Compassion and Hope Report](#)". This included 16 recommendations over the immediate (within 12 months), transitional (within 3 years) and longer-term (within 5 years) periods.

131. An 'Action Plan for Change' was developed by the Dundee Partnership as a response to the Dundee Drugs Commission's report, with the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership Implementation Group responsible for monitoring the implementation and impact of the actions within the plan.

132. In March 2022 the Commission published a follow-up report, "[Time for Kindness, Compassion and Hope: The Need for Action Two Years On](#)". This concluded that extensive and genuine improvement efforts had been made by all partners to address drug deaths in the city, but these have not gone far enough, deep enough or fast enough. The Commission also made 12 further recommendations for improvement and Chair of the Dundee Drugs Commission, Dr Robert Peat, stated: "We remain of the view that with determination, clear communications, and a willingness to work as a true partnership, particularly with the third sector and those with lived and living experience and an acceptance that support is required, then Dundee can effectively address the Public Health crisis of drug deaths."

Recent data on drugs deaths demonstrates improvements in Dundee.

133. In August 2023 National Records for Scotland published the annual statistics for [Drug-related deaths in Scotland in 2022](#). These showed that 1,051 deaths had been attributed to drug use in 2022 across Scotland (the lowest number of drug misuse deaths since 2017). National Records for Scotland's analysis highlighted that despite this fall, drug misuse deaths are still more common than they were two decades ago and, after adjusting for age, there were 3.7 times as many drug misuse deaths in 2022 compared with 2000.

134. At a local level the figures for Dundee showed there were 38 drug related deaths during 2022. This was a reduction from 52 in 2021, and a high of 72 deaths in 2019, which followed seven consecutive years where the number of drug deaths had increased. This suggests that the action being taken by the Dundee Partnership is starting to have an impact on drug deaths in the city. However, partners know that delivering sustainable improvements in the city's drug problems, against the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis, continues to

present a significant challenge; and they remain focussed on reducing drug use across the city, as well as the levels of drug deaths.

The strategic framework and plan have been revised and monitoring improved.

135. In February 2023, the Dundee Alcohol and Drug Partnership published a [5-year Strategic Framework](#) and [2-year Delivery Plan](#).

136. A report summarising key developments in drug and alcohol service provision was submitted to the Council in February 2023. This identified progress made toward implementation of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) standards. This includes expansion of direct access clinics and same day prescribing; implementation of a new residential rehabilitation pathway; and development of shared care arrangements with GPs. Further evidence of progress made in implementation of MAT standards is demonstrated by the latest Public Health Scotland / Scottish Government assessment of partnerships across Scotland, published in June 2023. This provided a provisional assessment for 2022/23 and showed that Dundee ADP had 1 assessed as amber, and 4 assessed as green, against MAT standards 1-5 (1 assessed as red and 4 assessed as amber in 2021/22). Dundee ADP had also been assessed as amber against each of the MAT standards 6-10 (no comparative assessment in 2021/22).

137. In November 2022, the IJB agreed a dataset of key drug and alcohol services indicators to improve their oversight of drug and alcohol services performance and improvements. Key areas of improvement demonstrated by data to quarter 1 of 2022/23 include:

- A sustained reduction in non-fatal overdose incidents reported by Scottish Ambulance Services and Police Scotland over a 12-month period (302 in Q1 2022/23 compared to 382 in Q1 2021/22, with more recent data not included in the report indicating 202 in Q3 2022/23).
- Increase in the number of alcohol brief interventions provided in Dundee (192.8 at Q1 2022/23 compared to 128.5 at Q1 2021/22).
- A significant reduction in the number of unplanned discharges from treatment services (128 at Q1 2022/23 compared to 293 at Q1 2021/22).

Appendix 1 – Improvement Action Plan

Recommendations from Best Value thematic review 2022/23

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
<p>1. Community asset transfers</p> <p>The Council Plan sets out its aim to increase community ownership of Council-owned assets but no community asset transfers were completed during 2021/22 or 2022/23.</p> <p>Risk: The lack of community asset transfers could impact on the delivery of the aims in the new Council Plan.</p>	<p>The Council should establish what else can be done to encourage and support community groups to manage and own facilities and deliver against its aim to increase community ownership of Council-owned assets.</p> <p>Paragraphs 53. and 54.</p>	<p>Replace the current asset transfer scheme with a community land and asset strategy as part of Community Wealth Building – Land and property pillar. This will simplify the process and expand the range of options open to community groups to manage and own facilities.</p> <p>Responsible officer: Community Learning and Development Manager</p> <p>Agreed date: March 2024</p>
<p>2. Participatory budgeting</p> <p>COSLA and the Scottish Government developed a framework agreement setting down that at least 1 per cent of local government budgets should be subject to participatory budgeting by the end of 2021. Dundee City Council allocated around 0.7 per cent to participatory budgeting during 2022/23.</p> <p>Risk: The allocation of resources may not reflect the priorities of local residents.</p>	<p>The Council should identify further areas where participatory budgeting can be used effectively to allocate resources based on the priorities of local residents.</p> <p>Paragraphs 60. and 61.</p>	<p>Council leadership team to review current position by October 2023 and consider further options to embed participatory budgeting in mainstream budgets based on local needs.</p> <p>Responsible officer: Executive Director of Corporate Services and Service Manager – Communities</p> <p>Agreed date: March 2024</p>

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
<p>3. Long-Term Financial Strategy</p> <p>The Council's Long-Term Financial Strategy is still being updated to reflect the new Council Plan.</p> <p>Risk: The Council's longer-term financial planning does not reflect its new priorities.</p>	<p>The Council's Long-Term Financial Strategy needs to be updated to show how resources will be targeted towards priority areas over the next 10 years.</p> <p>Paragraphs 95. to 97.</p>	<p>The Long-Term Financial Strategy will be updated to reflect new Council Plan priorities.</p> <p>Responsible officer: Executive Director of Corporate Services</p> <p>Agreed date: March 2024</p>

Dundee City Council

Best Value Thematic Review 2022/23

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