

# North Lanarkshire Council Report

## Audit and Scrutiny Panel

approval  noting

Ref LJ/SL

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## The Plan for North Lanarkshire: Strategic oversight and governance in the new environment

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### Executive Summary

The council's response to COVID-19 remains unprecedented and continues to present challenges. As well as dealing with the impact of the virus and protecting communities through planned response activity, the council has continued to deliver critical services with some operating at a reduced level and others adopting new ways of working.

Notwithstanding this, finalisation of the Recovery Plan for North Lanarkshire, and its accompanying operating model, moves the council to a platform of stability from which resources can be redirected to fulfil the ambition set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire.

The shared ambition, of inclusive growth and prosperity for all, remains as relevant in the new environment as it was before. Even more so, given the impact of the pandemic on people who are in the most vulnerable situations.

There is no doubt that delivery of the council's planned day to day activities and achievement of the strategic priorities has been impacted by the pandemic. This in turn has impacted on the ability to undertake many of the business as usual activities associated with the maintenance of the four strategic frameworks (policy, governance, self-evaluation, and performance) that support The Plan for North Lanarkshire and Programme of Work.

This report therefore provides the Audit and Scrutiny Panel with an update of the work undertaken to date and the next steps required to reconfigure and realign the four frameworks in line with the new environment in which the council is operating, and to continue to ensure delivery of the council's ambition is supported by arrangements that facilitate good governance.

In addition, and more specifically, the report also provides Members with a suite of performance information (in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet) for further review and scrutiny. This aims to provide as live a picture of current performance as possible, given the changing environment and extent of more pressing and emerging priorities.

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### Recommendations

It is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Panel:

- (1) Note the contents of this report,
- (2) Note the progress update and next steps for each of the four frameworks, and
- (3) Review the performance presented in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet and

identify where further information is required to understand or investigate performance further.

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## The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority All priorities

Ambition statement All ambition statements

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### 1. Background

- 1.1 Members are aware of the unprecedented challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, the fast paced and flexible response provided by the council (working in partnership with a range of public and community organisations, local charities and volunteers) to support people and businesses across North Lanarkshire, and the uncertain environment within which local government is now operating.
- 1.2 Members are also aware of the impact that COVID-19 has had on the people and communities of North Lanarkshire (particularly for those in the most vulnerable situations, such as people living in poverty, older people, and young people's mental health), and that the threat of the virus will remain with us for some time to come.
- 1.3 In setting out how the council will recover services, the Recovery Plan for North Lanarkshire, and accompanying operating model, provides the foundations from which to ensure stability in the weeks and months ahead. This will enable many business as usual activities to be progressed in line with the long-term vision and intentions laid out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire, while still ensuring appropriate mechanisms remain in place to respond to emergency and COVID-19 situations.
- 1.4 The Plan for North Lanarkshire signifies recent successes across North Lanarkshire in terms of economic growth, inward investment, population growth, and rising employment, while recognising there are still considerable challenges to overcome. In this respect there remains unacceptably high levels of deprivation and child poverty, in work poverty, and clear areas of inequity and inequality across communities. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic will have added to these challenges.
- 1.5 The vision remains supported by a substantial Programme of Work which outlines the activities required to underpin delivery of The Plan and provides a consistent focus for resources and working practices; the Programme of Work for 2020 and beyond was approved at Committee in March 2020.
- 1.6 As previously reported to Audit and Scrutiny Panel, the Plan and Programme of Work are supported by four complementary frameworks designed to ensure continued good governance arrangements by enabling a regular structured approach to assessing progress, measuring success, and identifying (where necessary) areas requiring improvement. These are:
- **Strategic Policy Framework**, approved in September 2018 - regularly monitoring and evaluating the range of supporting strategies, policies and plans has ensured services and activities remain aligned to The Plan and enable the required resources and working practices needed to facilitate delivery of the shared ambition.
  - **Strategic Self-Evaluation Framework**, approved in February 2019 - asking the questions *How well are we doing? How do we know?* and *How can we do better?*

enables an ongoing assessment of the success of The Plan and Programme of Work and ensures a fully aligned programme of improvement.

- **Strategic Performance Framework**, approved in February 2019 - comprising a group of performance indicators at three levels, this collectively provides an overview of performance to help understand the impact of council activities on improving services and outcomes for the people and communities of North Lanarkshire.
- **Strategic Governance Framework**, approved in February 2020 - this has brought together legislative requirements, governance principles and management processes within a regular programme of review. This ensures delivery of The Plan for North Lanarkshire is supported by excellence in governance, accountability and transparency.

- 1.7 Since being approved at Committee, work has continued to ensure these four frameworks remain aligned to the long-term vision of the council and are on a regular review and assessment programme. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of planned day to day service activities and achievement of the shared ambition has, in turn, impacted on the information and resources available to support many of the business as usual activities required to maintain the four frameworks.
- 1.8 Work now needs to be undertaken to reconfigure and realign the four frameworks in line with the new environment in which the council is operating. This includes consideration of the impact of the Recovery Plan and accompanying operating model, and also the Programme of Work for 2020 and beyond.
- 1.9 This report therefore provides the Audit and Scrutiny Panel with an update of the work undertaken to date, and the next steps required to reconfigure and realign the four frameworks in line with the new environment in which the council is operating, and to continue to ensure delivery of the council's ambition is supported by arrangements that facilitate good governance.

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## 2. Update on the four frameworks, with next steps

### Strategic Policy Framework

- 2.1 Following approval of the Strategic Policy Framework at Committee in September 2018, 31 high level strategies, policies, and plans have been on a regular programme for review or development. This has resulted in 28 strategies, policies or plans being updated and approved at the respective Committee, to date.
- 2.2 In 2020 alone, this has included several strategies, policies, and plans key to delivery of The Plan for North Lanarkshire and supporting Programme of Work, such as:
- Risk Management Strategy
  - Workforce for the Future Strategy
  - Tenant Participation Strategy
  - Sport and Physical Activity Strategy
  - Tackling Poverty Strategy
  - Digital and IT Strategy
  - Diet and Nutrition Policy
  - Health and Social Care Strategic Commissioning Plan
- 2.3 Supporting the high-level strategies, policies, and plans in the Strategic Policy Framework are a number of sub policies. The Digital and IT Strategy, for example, includes eight sub policies which were all reviewed in the last year, as required.

- 2.4 Work has also been completed to create a central location on the council's website (<https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/spf>) to hold all strategies and make them easy to find and/or direct people to.
- 2.5 Moving forward, the uncertain, complex, and changing COVID-19 environment within which the council now operates will, to some extent, impact on the strategies, policies, and plans in the Strategic Policy Framework.
- 2.6 Policy development will require a more responsive and flexible approach as the evidence base needs to enable consideration of a more holistic picture. This needs to ensure that a positive impact of a policy on one segment of North Lanarkshire's population does not have a negative effect on others. It is also important that policy development doesn't proceed in isolation; cross service collaboration will be vital to avoid policies pulling in different directions.

#### Next steps

- 2.7 The next steps will include work to continue to keep the programme of strategies, policies, and plans under review and ensure services provide the required updates to the relevant Committee.
- 2.8 Work will also continue to assess the sub policies for rationalisation and adaptation, for example, the 11 sub policies of the Environment Strategy will be assessed to take account of the council's plans for Town and Community Hubs.
- 2.9 A further review of the guidance accompanying the Strategic Policy Framework will be undertaken to ensure strategies are developed in a standardised and consultative manner that also considers the inter-relationships between each and the current local government environment.

#### **Strategic Self-Evaluation Framework**

- 2.10 Members will recall the Strategic Self-Evaluation Framework, approved at Committee in June 2018, was developed to ensure the council has a way of regularly assessing practices, recognising strengths, and identifying areas for improvement.
- 2.11 The subsequent development of The Plan for North Lanarkshire and Programme of Work provided the strategic framework for assessment purposes, enabling alignment with the 25 ambition statements. This approach was approved in February 2019.
- 2.12 The council's Best Value Assurance Report, published in May 2019, concluded that "*the council has a good approach to self-evaluation*"; with the subsequent recommendation focussing on improvement plans arising from self-evaluation exercise which "*should include measurable actions and clear deadlines*".
- 2.13 Following this, a Strategic Self-Evaluation Programme was developed for 2020 along with a set of evaluation criteria which comprised six areas:
  - a) Vision and leadership.
  - b) Policy development and implementation.
  - c) Effective use of resources.
  - d) Partnership and collaborative working.
  - e) Process design, maintenance, and improvement.
  - f) Results - impact and outcomes.

- 2.14 The 12 week Self-Evaluation Programme (scheduled to take place from February to May 2020) was led by the Business Solutions team and comprised four steps:
- (1) A desktop exercise that involved gathering evidence for each of the 25 ambition statements to be assessed against the evaluation criteria.
  - (2) A comprehensive exercise which involved reviewing and assessing the evidence with nominated service representatives.
  - (3) An independent peer review with nominated Heads of Service and representatives from cross cutting services (such as legal, finance, communications, and human resources).
  - (4) A session with the Corporate Management Team to review the findings, and agree improvement actions, deadlines, and responsibilities.
- 2.15 At the time that the country moved into the COVID-19 lockdown on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, and home working became the default position where practicable, Step (2) of the 12 week Self-Evaluation Programme was underway.
- 2.16 With COVID-19 planning and response being the council's number one priority, and resources understandably being deployed elsewhere, this meant there would be a resultant impact on delivery of council services and achievement of the strategic ambition. It also meant the capacity of the Business Solutions team and service representatives, to continue with the self-evaluation review and assessment exercises, was reduced.
- 2.17 This, combined with the assumptions and objectives within the Recovery Plan (which themselves incorporate a degree of self-reflection), the associated risks, and the processes underway to recover services, necessitates a recalibration of the Strategic Self-Evaluation Programme and timelines.

#### Next steps

- 2.18 The next steps will involve a review of the Strategic Self-Evaluation criteria and process in conjunction with the Recovery Plan and Programme of Work for 2020 and beyond to ensure all are aligned. This is required to ensure that the resulting improvement actions from any self-evaluation exercise ensure service resources remain directed towards the relevant recovery priorities and are relevant to, and aligned with, the future direction for the council. A revised programme and relevant timelines will be developed thereafter.

#### **Strategic Performance Framework**

- 2.19 Members will recall the Strategic Performance Framework, approved at Committee in September 2019, aims to produce evidence that allows for day to day activities, and progress towards achieving the shared ambition articulated in The Plan for North Lanarkshire, to be regularly monitored, reported, assessed, and scrutinised.
- 2.20 Reporting arrangements aligned to the Strategic Performance Framework were subsequently implemented through service committees and the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in cycle 4 of 2019.
- 2.21 Following the emergence of COVID-19 and emergency response implemented by the council, a desktop review of the performance indicators in the Strategic Performance Framework was undertaken. This found that all measures either related to services which were temporarily suspended (in all, or all but the most critical, aspects of a service), or to services which were operating at a reduced level, or to services which

had changed to accommodate new ways of working in order to continue to deliver a service.

### Local results

2.22 In light of the above, and in order to highlight those areas where there had been a significant change in performance, the Corporate Management Team instigated the development of a performance review of monthly results to ensure a focus on key areas requiring attention.

2.23 Indicators were included in the suite on the basis of the following criteria:

- Performance results are expected to demonstrate a significant increase in the volume of business going through the service as a result of COVID-19 (e.g. registrations, lair certificates).
- Performance results are expected to show an adverse effect on council resources as a consequence of the impact of COVID-19 (e.g. collection of council tax).
- Performance results are meaningful when distilled down into monthly comparisons (e.g. when comparing results from April 2020 with April 2019).
- Performance results are expected to show the extent of council support provided to communities at this time, as well as any potential detrimental impacts on individuals as a result of the pandemic (e.g. benefits checks and claims).
- Performance results are expected to demonstrate the extent to which the council has maintained compliance with statutory and legislative requirements (e.g. gas safety inspections).
- Performance results relate to a frontline service which has continued to operate, albeit at a reduced level or with changes to ways of working.
- Additional indicators, or information, are added to the reporting arrangements to ensure as complete a suite of information as possible in order to facilitate the most appropriate assessment of performance within the current context.
- Performance measures are adapted as appropriate for monthly reporting purposes at the current time (e.g. number of households presenting as homeless as opposed to the measure in the framework which looks at decisions made within 28 days).

2.24 This suite of indicators is listed in Appendix 1 and latest results are now presented to the Panel in the **accompanying Excel spreadsheet** for Members' consideration and scrutiny.

### National results

2.25 In May 2020, COSLA advised local authorities that the COVID-19 pandemic had underlined the importance of securing accurate meaningful information (reported regularly) for use by a wide range of public sector organisations.

2.26 As a result, a national data dashboard of indicators was developed by the Improvement Service, largely built from existing data returns, through which important aspects of councils' response could be monitored. This suite of indicators is listed in Appendix 2 and latest results are also included in the **accompanying Excel spreadsheet** for Members' consideration and scrutiny.

### Next steps

2.27 As the Recovery Plan is implemented and services are fully recovered, the suite of performance indicators in the Strategic Performance Framework will be kept under

review to ensure they are still relevant for future performance monitoring, management, and reporting purposes. This work will involve consideration of any ensuing impact from changes to elements within the Programme of Work for 2020 and beyond.

- 2.28 In addition, results for Level 1 indicators (which capture the North Lanarkshire context) will be reviewed to assess changes in performance from the previous figures reported to Committee in February 2019. Work will also be undertaken to consider the alignment of performance with risk, and to review further indicators from the Strategic Performance Framework which can be added as a third element to the suite in the Excel spreadsheet (with the inclusion of benchmarking information where available), for current monitoring and scrutiny.

### **Strategic Governance Framework**

- 2.29 Members will recall approving the Strategic Governance Framework at the Panel meeting in February 2020. This framework is structured around core and sub principles of good governance (as defined by CIPFA). It shows the elements and mechanisms - strategies, policies, plans, frameworks, codes, registers, and procedures - which the council employs to demonstrate compliance with good practice.
- 2.30 The accompanying report on today's agenda, *PoW PO75.1 Strategic Governance Framework*, outlines the progress that has been made to date. The next steps are also identified in order to ensure the framework remains up to date and elements are assessed in line with CIPFA good practice guidelines.

### Good governance

- 2.31 CIPFA define good governance (in its strategic oversight context) as:
- enabling an authority to pursue its vision effectively as well as underpinning that vision with control and the management of risk
  - ensuring that resources are directed in accordance with agreed policy and according to priorities
  - ensuring there are sound and inclusive decision making and clear accountability for the use of those resources in achieving defined outcomes for service users and the wider community
- 2.32 Continued good governance therefore remains as important now as it has always been, if not more so if the council is to realise the shared ambition and deliver on the intentions set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire within the current COVID-19 environment. The four complementary frameworks therefore play a central role to the successful delivery of the ambition.

### **Next steps**

- 2.33 As a consequence of COVID-19, the Recovery Implementation Plan for Business Solutions has assessed the Strategic Governance, Policy, Self-Evaluation, and Performance Frameworks all as Level 3 priorities. This means that the implementation timescale for full recovery is the end of March 2021.
- 2.34 As this work progresses, further reports will be presented to Members of the Audit and Scrutiny Panel to allow ongoing review in line with the Panel's programme of scrutiny.

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## **3. Equality and Diversity**

### 3.1 **Fairer Scotland Duty**

There is no requirement to carry out a Fairer Scotland Duty assessment based on the recommendations in this report; no new decisions are being made.

### 3.2 **Equality Impact Assessment**

There is no requirement to carry out an equality impact assessment based on the recommendations in this report; no new decisions are being made.

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## 4. **Implications**

### 4.1 **Financial impact**

There is no financial impact arising from the recommendations in this report; financial impacts from performance levels achieved are considered by services.

### 4.2 **HR/Policy/Legislative impact**

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced the duty of Best Value; this requires that councils “*make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in performance*”.

This duty remains unchanged, the Accounts Commission do however recognise the challenges and have adopted the following set of principles (in May 2020) to help guide their work and ensure they fulfil their responsibilities during the COVID-19 emergency:

- The Commission recognises the significant pressures under which local government finds itself as a result of the current COVID-19 emergency.
- The Commission is of the firm view that the principles of sound financial management, good governance, public accountability, and transparency are vital in this emergency situation, although how these are delivered and achieved are likely to be different.
- The Commission therefore expects audit quality to be maintained in accordance with international standards and the Code of Audit Practice.
- The Commission is mindful of both the capacity of local authorities to prepare good quality financial reports, and the auditors they appoint to deliver high quality audit, when considering timescales for 2019/20.

### 4.3 **Environmental impact**

There is no environmental impact arising from this report.

### 4.4 **Risk impact**

Work is ongoing to align performance and risks information to ensure more informed decision making, forward planning, and identification of areas requiring improvement.

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## 5. **Measures of success**

5.1 In the short to medium-term, assessing the impact of COVID-19 on the council's planned delivery of day to day activities and achievement of strategic priorities to ensure continued good governance.

5.2 In the longer-term, effective scrutiny of the information presented to ensure a positive impact on day to day operations, improved outcomes for the people and communities of North Lanarkshire, and delivery of The Plan for North Lanarkshire.

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**6. Supporting documents**

6.1 Appendix 1 - Local suite of performance indicators

6.2 Appendix 2 - National suite of COVID-19 related performance indicators

6.3 Appendix 3 - Excel spreadsheet: Performance summary

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katrina M Hassell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Katrina Hassell**  
**Head of Business Solutions**

### Local suite of performance indicators

- Lair certificates - % turned round within 28 days
- Registrations - number of death registrations
- Wide area network (WAN) - % availability
- IT systems - number of priority 1 outages per month
- IT service desk - % of reported incidents resolved by service partner within SLA
- IT service desk calls - % customer satisfaction
- IT incidents and requests
- Council tax - % of income due from council tax collected in the year to date
- Non domestic rates - % collected in the year to date
- Housing benefits - average number of days taken to process new claims / changes of circumstances
- Council tax reduction scheme - number of new claims / changes of circumstances
- Benefit checks - number carried out for NL residents
- Households - number of households presenting as homeless
- Gas safety - number of times statutory obligation to complete gas safety check in 12 months was not met
- Housing repairs - average time, hours, taken to complete emergency repairs
- Housing rent - arrears as a % of total rent due monthly
- First reports - % issued within 20 days
- Pest control visits, high priority - % made within 2 working days
- Antisocial behaviour - complaints reported in the last month that were resolved
- Refuse collection complaints, overall waste - number per 1,000 household visits
- Reablement - number of service users completing reablement process / number of hours provided in week
- Home support - number of home support referrals / number of referrals from hospital
- Care home placements - rate per 1,000 population, age 65+ and age 75+ / admissions and discharges

**National suite of COVID-19 related performance indicators**

- Number of individuals on shielding list in contact with local authority
- Number of individuals calling wellbeing / helpline calls
- Number of child protection register additions in the last week
- Number of children who had face to face contact with a social worker in the last 2 weeks
- Average number of monthly homeless applications
- Number of adult support and protection investigations started in the last week
- Number of adult risk referrals in the last week
- Number of adult wellbeing referrals in the last week
- Business grants - applications and value awarded
- Education - hubs and free school meals
- Sickness absence