

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Audit and Scrutiny Panel

approval noting

Ref LJ/SL

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P075.1: Update on the five Frameworks supporting The Plan for North Lanarkshire and Programme of Work

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Executive Summary

With all five of the corporate inter-related Frameworks (Policy, Performance, Self-Evaluation, Programme and Project Management, and Governance) being stood back up in accordance with council and service recovery plans, this report sets out a current position statement for each Framework to provide a composite update in support of the Audit and Scrutiny Panel's strategic oversight and governance role.

This follows on from the annual update reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in September 2020 in this respect, and the work undertaken to reconfigure and realign the Frameworks in line with the environment within which the council is now operating.

Members are aware the five Frameworks are key to assessing the success of The Plan for North Lanarkshire and monitoring delivery of the Programme of Work - while ensuring each stage of delivery towards achieving the overall ambitions is appropriately planned, guided, implemented, and governed.

Delivering the council's long-term vision within such a fast moving, unpredictable, challenging, and complex local government environment means planning continually evolves and visibility into all programmes of work and their interconnections is essential. The ongoing effectiveness of the five Frameworks is therefore vital not only to support delivery of the long-term vision and business as usual activities, but also to ensure this is undertaken within the appropriate governance, performance, and control frameworks.

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, including the ongoing review programme for the five Frameworks to ensure each remains aligned to The Plan for North Lanarkshire and Programme of Work.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority

All priorities

1. Background

- 1.1 The Plan for North Lanarkshire is now well established as the long-term strategic direction for the council, partners, and other stakeholders and, most importantly, for each unique local community and the people who *Live, Learn, Work, Invest, and Visit* within North Lanarkshire. It's a Plan with a shared ambition of inclusive growth and prosperity for all and a fairer distribution of wealth across all local communities.
- 1.2 As a key resource for delivering and sustaining the long-term ambition, the Programme of Work (now in its third iteration), provides a clear roadmap for work across council services and with partners. It allows for plans of action and policies to be developed that inform the projects, activities, services, technologies, and resources that need to be harnessed in order to seize the most and best opportunities to deliver on the long-term strategy, while achieving value for money in the here and now.
- 1.3 The five strategic frameworks supporting The Plan for North Lanarkshire and Programme of Work are equally well established:
- Strategic Policy Framework
 - Strategic Performance Framework
 - Strategic Self-Evaluation Framework
 - Strategic Governance Framework
 - Programme and Project Management Framework
- 1.4 These five inter-related frameworks are key to assessing the success of The Plan for North Lanarkshire and monitoring delivery of the Programme of Work - while ensuring each stage of delivery towards achieving the overall ambitions is appropriately planned, guided, implemented, and governed.
- 1.5 To ensure these frameworks continue to align to, and support delivery of, The Plan for North Lanarkshire and Programme of Work, all five are on an annual review and refresh programme as part of the strategic oversight and accountability arrangements that support the overall Programme of Work. This also helps the council to ensure it is proactive in responding to social, economic, and environmental trends and changes in legislation and governance, as well as the broad range of national policy changes and new developments that have an impact locally.
- 1.6 Members of the Audit and Scrutiny Panel will recall the report in September 2020 which provided an update on work undertaken to further develop the Frameworks and ensure the contents of each was on a timetable for review at an appropriate interval and reported to the relevant committee, as appropriate. This report also advised the recovery status of these Frameworks in light of the pandemic; each was assessed in line with council and service recovery plans and assigned a recovery timescale of March 2021.
- 1.7 Notwithstanding this, work has continued throughout 2021 to continue to develop and update the Frameworks and various reports in this respect have been provided to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel throughout the year. This annual report sets out the current position statement for each of the five Frameworks to provide a composite update in support of the Audit and Scrutiny Panel's strategic oversight and governance role
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2. Update

1. Strategic Policy Framework

Background

- 2.1 Approved in September 2018, the Strategic Policy Framework provides a way to regularly monitor and evaluate the range of council strategies, policies, and plans. This aims to ensure services and activities remain aligned to The Plan for North Lanarkshire and enable the required resources and working practices needed to facilitate delivery of the long-term vision.
- 2.2 The composite *strategic oversight and governance* report presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in September 2020 updated on the further development of the Strategic Policy Framework and supporting review programme for the range of strategies, policies, and plans therein. This included work to:
- Ensure that specific strategies, policies, and plans were updated in line with the review programme and supporting guidance and reported to the relevant committee in accordance with the timeline.
 - Create a dedicated section on the website to hold all strategies, policies, and plans (<https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/your-council/council-strategies-and-plans>). This includes all sub policies which support higher level strategies. The launch of the new platform for the council's website in November 2020 saw further enhancements in this respect, with improvements in terms of the accessibility of pdf documents.
 - Continue to assess the range of strategies, policies, and plans for rationalisation and adaptation, for example the integration of the eight inter-related sub policies within the Digital and IT Strategy.

Current position

- 2.3 A recent update in respect of the Strategic Policy Framework was reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in June 2021 as part of Audit Scotland's interim management report for 2020/21. This updated on implementing the recommendation from the Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) in respect of this framework, i.e. *"Revised strategies, policies and plans should be developed to deliver the programme of work that underpins the council's ambitious vision, based on its five priorities"*.
- 2.4 The Audit Scotland interim management report acknowledged the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the council's usual activity of maintaining the strategic frameworks which support The Plan for North Lanarkshire and Programme of Work and ensure good governance. This report also recognised the clear commitment from the council to realign these frameworks in light of the impact of the pandemic on council operations and noted that 28 of the 31 policies and strategies included in the Strategic Policy Framework had been updated and approved at committee since the implementation of the Framework in 2018.
- 2.5 The interim management report concluded by categorising the BVAR recommendation as *complete* given the *"robust process in place to ensure policies and strategies are kept up to date and regularly reviewed to ensure they are aligned to The Plan and any laws and regulations"*.

Next steps

- 2.6 As Members of the Audit and Scrutiny Panel are aware, all five Frameworks that support The Plan for North Lanarkshire and Programme of Work are themselves an item on the Programme of Work for 2021/22 for an annual review and refresh. The refreshed Strategic Policy Framework is therefore scheduled to be reported to Policy and Strategy Committee in cycle 4 of 2021.
- 2.7 Work to review and refresh the Strategy Policy Framework is already underway and includes the following:
- An update of the review programme to ensure all strategies, policies, and plans are kept under review, updated as required, and reported to the relevant committee.
 - Identifying any gaps in terms of strategy or policy development in line with the five priorities set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire.
 - A further review of the guidance accompanying the Strategic Policy Framework to ensure strategies, policies, and plans are developed in a standardised manner, consistently use a common format, and roles and responsibilities are clear. This also includes further strengthening the guidance to ensure appropriate consultation and engagement with all relevant stakeholders continues to take place.
 - Consideration of the uncertain, complex, and changing local government environment within which the council now operates and the impact this may have on strategy and policy development moving forward. This includes consideration of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the resultant social and economic effects on the people and communities of North Lanarkshire.
 - Enhancing cross service collaboration to avoid strategies or policies pulling in different directions and ensure a positive impact of a policy on one aspect of North Lanarkshire's population, for example, does not have a negative effect on another.
 - The integration of particular impacts into the development of strategies, policies, and plans, as appropriate, e.g. similar to the impacts on the committee report template, i.e. carbon, technology/digital, equalities, and the Fairer Scotland Duty.
 - Further development of the hierarchy approach supporting the Strategic Policy Framework. This aims to provide a clear structure for the development of strategies and policies that identifies lines of authority and reporting, improves accountability for actions or decisions at different management levels, and differentiates between strategies or policies that are designed to ensure compliance with laws and regulations, facilitate delivery of the ambitions set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire, or standardise internal processes.

2. Strategic Performance Framework

Background

- 2.8 Members will recall the detailed Strategic Performance Framework, approved at committee in September 2019, sets out the framework for performance measurement at three levels. This approach to strategic performance measurement aims to collectively provide 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. The evidence presented through this framework allows for day to day activities, and progress towards achieving the long-term vision set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire, to be regularly monitored, reported, assessed, and scrutinised.
- 2.9 The composite *strategic oversight and governance* report presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in September 2020 updated on:

- Performance reporting arrangements, aligned to the Strategic Performance Framework, implemented for service committees and the Audit and Scrutiny Panel during 2019 and 2020.
- The results of a desktop exercise which highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the availability of resources and information across services and the corresponding ability of services to be able to provide performance results to be reported. This also highlighted that all measures in the Strategic Performance Framework related to services that had either been suspended, were operating at a reduced level, or which had changed ways of working in order to continue operating.
- The introduction of a tailored suite of monthly performance measures which were regularly monitored by the Corporate Management Team. This included a national data dashboard of Covid indicators through which important aspects of the local government response were monitored.
- The next steps which included a review of the indicators in the Strategic Performance Framework to ensure they remained fit for purpose and aligned to The Plan for North Lanarkshire.

Current position

- 2.10 A report to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in March 2021 provided an update in terms of:
- Presentation of the latest results from the Level 1 indicators in the Strategic Performance Framework to the Policy and Strategy Committee in March 2021. These results were presented in conjunction with the achievements from the 2020 Programme of Work.
 - The extent of statutory and strategic performance reporting which continued to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel and service committees from cycle 4 in 2019 to cycle 1 in 2021, notwithstanding the impact of the pandemic on availability of resources and information.
 - Implementation of a performance reporting schedule for 2021/22 for statutory, strategic, and service reporting.
 - Implementation of five non negotiable standards to be applied when reporting performance (i.e. aligned, consistent, transparent, in context, and balanced).
- 2.11 A presentation to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel meeting in March 2021 by the Improvement Service facilitated Members' oversight of the latest performance benchmarking results from one of the benchmarking frameworks aligned to the Strategic Performance Framework. A separate report and presentation on the Audit and Scrutiny Panel agenda today (*The Plan for North Lanarkshire - Performance benchmarking*) provides a further update in this respect.
- 2.12 In addition, a Strategic Performance Framework pilot is underway that aims to report the latest performance results for the:
- Head of Regulatory Services and Waste Solutions to the Environment and Transportation Committee on 25 August 2021
 - Head of Business Solutions to the Transformation and Digitisation Committee on 1st September 2021.
 - Head of Financial Solutions to the Finance and Resources Committee on 23rd September 2021.
- 2.13 This approach reaffirms the responsibilities of the service committee in terms of the Strategic Performance Framework and sets out the latest performance results to allow Elected Members to monitor, assess, and scrutinise performance in order to identify areas requiring improvement and inform future decision making. This also aims to

ensure performance reporting remains effective in achieving the best fit between reporting on progress against the council's long-term vision and delivering on what matters today locally.

- 2.14 Trends from previous years performance results are presented to enable an assessment of the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of council services over time. Latest results, based on available information at the time of reporting, are also included to provide as live a picture of performance as possible. The suite of performance indicators also includes information from the nationally developed Covid data dashboard, set up to enable important aspects of the council's response to the pandemic to be monitored. This also means that the suite of performance information presented reflects as full and complete a picture of service performance as possible.

Next steps

- 2.15 In line with the annual review and refresh for the Strategic Performance Framework, as outlined in the Programme of Work for 2021/22, further work is underway to provide a progress update in cycle 4 of 2021 in this respect. This will include:
- An assessment of the effectiveness of three pilots to the service committees in August/September 2021. This will inform the process to be implemented for performance reviews at service committees for the remaining Heads of Service, and the corresponding reporting timetable to be implemented moving forward.
 - An update to the Strategic Performance Framework document itself which will incorporate changes to the three levels of performance measures therein following the review of the performance indicators.
 - Work undertaken with Heads of Service to review and update the corresponding targets and thresholds.
 - An update of the Strategic Performance Framework annual reporting schedule for 2022/23.

3. Strategic Self-Evaluation Framework

Background

- 2.16 Approved in 2018, the Strategic Self-Evaluation Framework asks the questions *How well are we doing? How do we know? and How can we do better?* to ensure the council has a way of regularly assessing practices, recognising strengths, and identifying areas for improvement.
- 2.17 The subsequent approval of The Plan for North Lanarkshire and Programme of Work in 2019 provide a clear strategic framework for self-evaluation purposes with alignment to the 25 ambition statements enabling the relationship between strategy and delivery to be assessed in order to identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement that can be fed back into the decision making process.
- 2.18 The composite *strategic oversight and governance* report presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in September 2020 advised the following:
- A 12 week self-evaluation programme to assess the 25 ambition statements was scheduled to take place from February to May 2020, but at the time that the country moved into lockdown in March 2020, step 2 of the 4 steps in the 12 week programme was underway. The subsequent impact of the pandemic and implementation of council and service recovery plans meant delivering the 12 week programme because impracticable and unable to be resourced and did not

- progress further as planned.
- The council maintained its commitment to self-evaluation during 2021/21 by undertaking an exercise to assess the council's response to the pandemic. The findings from this exercise were subsequently reported to the Policy and Strategy Committee in October 2020.
- Following progression of recovery work, a review of the Strategic Self-Evaluation criteria and assessment programme would be undertaken to ensure this process remained relevant to, and aligned with, the future direction for the council.

Current position

- 2.19 The accompanying report on the agenda for the Audit and Scrutiny Panel agenda today (*P075.1: Review and refresh of the Strategic Self-Evaluation Framework*) provides a detailed update in terms of the annual review and refresh of the Strategic Self-Evaluation Framework and presents the updated Framework document itself. This also sets out the rolling review programme of review for 2021 and 2022.
- 2.20 This aims to formally deliver on the BVAR recommendation to ensure the council complies with the requirements of Best Value and Good Governance and, more importantly, ensure a mechanism is in place to assess the council's functions and activities and identify areas for improvement within the context of delivering the Programme of Work and fulfilling the ambitions set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire.

Next steps

- 2.21 The Strategic Self-Evaluation Framework outlines the key challenge and scrutiny role of the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in line with their responsibility to provide an independent review of the council's governance, risk management, performance, and control frameworks. To support this, updates will be provided to the Panel on the findings from the rolling review programme to enable an ongoing assessment of the success of The Plan for North Lanarkshire and Programme of Work and ensure a fully aligned programme of improvement.
- 2.22 The rolling review programme will be updated as new evaluations are identified and kept on an annual review and refresh programme to ensure the Framework, and supporting Assessment Process, remain fit for purpose and support enhancements to the delivery of the Programme of Work and achievement of the long-term ambition set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire.

4. Programme and Project Management Framework

Background

- 2.23 Members will recall the council's corporate Project Management Model was launched in April 2018 to enable each stage of delivery towards achieving the overall objectives of a project to be planned, guided, and implemented through a systematic and consistent approach.
- 2.24 At this time the comprehensive Model developed comprised matrices, process maps, a set of guidance, control documentation, and toolkits. This was supported by an extensive rollout of training across the organisation to enhance skills and understanding and ensure confidence in using the Model. A review programme was in place through the Audit and Scrutiny Panel to provide the required assurances that projects were being managed efficiently and effectively.

- 2.25 An Internal Audit in December 2019 identified four areas where it was considered further action was required and/or there was scope for improvement. A report to the Corporate Management Team in April 2020 outlined the management actions proposed to address the Internal Audit recommendations but the ensuing impact of the pandemic and implementation of recovery plans meant the timescale for recovery of this work was assessed and identified to be March 2021. This also meant that the detailed enhancements outlined in the management actions became impracticable and unable to be resourced, and therefore did not progress as planned.

Current position

- 2.26 The Corporate Management Team continue to recognise the necessity for the ongoing use of good project management and governance practices to effectively manage the scale of the challenge and investment in respect of delivering on the council's long-term vision. This is especially critical given the fast moving, unpredictable, challenging, and complex local government environment within which the council is now operating and where planning continually evolves and visibility into all programmes of work and their interconnections is essential.
- 2.27 For this reason, a review and refresh of the corporate Project Management Model is underway in line with the corresponding Programme of Work for 2021/22 (i.e. P075.1 Strategic oversight and accountability - *Update on the review and refresh programme to ensure each element in the supporting frameworks is up to date, on a timetable for review at an appropriate interval, and reported to the relevant committee. This includes use of the project management model implemented across the council to ensure a consistent, corporate approach to managing projects and programmes of work.*

Next steps

- 2.28 The review is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2021/22. In line with the key role the Audit and Scrutiny Panel has in respect of providing that "*independent review of the council's governance, risk management, performance, and control frameworks*", the updated Programme and Project Management Framework will include a continuation of the review programme as a means of providing the required assurances that projects are being managed efficiently and effectively. This will also aim to ensure project teams adhere to the recommended guidance, use the control documentation, and follow each of the relevant stages in the Framework and will include opportunity for Members' scrutiny in this respect.

5. Strategic Governance Framework

Background

- 2.29 Approved in February 2020, the Strategic Governance Framework brings the principles of good governance together with legislative requirements and management processes by which the council is directed and controlled and through which it is accountable to, engages with, and leads the local community. It sets out the council's local code of governance in line with the national *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework* (2016).
- 2.30 The Strategic Governance Framework recognises the importance of good governance in terms of meeting statutory Best Value obligations and ensuring the council is able to effectively pursue the long-term ambition set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire, while ensuring this is underpinned with control and the management of risk.

2.31 The composite *strategic oversight and governance* report presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in September 2020 updated on the progress undertaken to date to ensure each element or mechanism within the Strategic Governance Framework was up to date, on a timetable for review at an appropriate interval, and subsequently reported to committee. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on resources available to deploy to this work was noted as was the recovery timeframe of March 2021 allocated in line with the council and service recovery plans.

Current position

2.32 An extensive programme of activity has since been undertaken during 2021 to carry out the annual review and refresh of the Strategic Governance Framework. This has included work to:

- Update the Framework document itself to set the council's local code of governance within the context of the national *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework*, the environment within which the council operates, and The Plan for North Lanarkshire.
- Improve alignment with the creation of the Annual Governance Statement through the development and implementation of a process map that clearly outlines the nine steps in the annual review and assessment process and the roles, responsibilities, and timelines therein. This included further endorsement of their annual evaluation role in terms of the Corporate Management Team identifying improvement actions and/or future planned developments in relation to key governance arrangements and continuous improvement.
- Carry out a review of all of the elements and mechanisms that make up the council's local code of governance to ensure each was on a review programme and up to date. Where this was not the case, engagement was undertaken with the relevant *element or mechanism* owner to establish a review timeline. This included assigning the Heads of Service responsible for reviewing each item and keeping it up to date. Hyperlinks for all *elements and mechanisms* were reviewed and updated to ensure these reflected the most up to date document and position.
- Assess the current position of all *elements and mechanisms* on the review programme through development of a RAG status. This aims to ensure all *elements and mechanisms* are as up to date as they require to be while providing a method by which to identify and prioritise items requiring to be reviewed and updated further.
- Introduce a checklist for Heads of Service to use when reviewing and updating each of the *elements and mechanisms* on the Strategic Governance Framework review programme. As such, all reports to committee which provide an update on work to review and refresh an *element or mechanism* require to contain (a) an assessment of the effectiveness of the particular *element or mechanism*, (b) a summary outlining the changes / improvements made to the *element or mechanism* since the last update, and (c) the role of the *element or mechanism* in supporting the successful delivery of The Plan for North Lanarkshire.
- Redesign the Framework document itself so that all five frameworks (once all are reviewed and refreshed) are designed and structured in a similar format and therefore seen to be part of the same suite of related documents.

2.33 Following the range of activity identified in paragraph 2.32, the refreshed Strategic Governance Framework and updated review programme was approved at the Audit and Scrutiny Panel meeting on 2nd September 2021.

Next steps

- 2.34 Moving forward, the Strategic Governance Framework and its accompanying review programme will remain on a formal annual review process that will take place in Spring each year in order to inform production of the council's Annual Governance Statement.
- 2.35 In the meantime, the list of *elements and mechanisms* will be kept under review to ensure updates are submitted to the relevant committee (as appropriate and in line with the review programme), and any other policy developments or legislative changes reported to committee are considered for inclusion in the council's local code of governance, as appropriate. The inclusion of relevant performance measures will also be considered within the Strategic Governance Framework in order to further support the assessment of the effectiveness of specific *elements and mechanisms*.
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3. Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty

- 3.1 There is no requirement to carry out a Fairer Scotland Duty or 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.

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 to help guide their work and ensure they fulfil their responsibilities during the pandemic:

- The Commission recognises the significant pressures under which local government finds itself as a result of the pandemic.
- 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.

4.3 Technology / Digital impact

None identified.

4.4 Environmental impact

None identified

4.5 Communications impact

None identified.

4.6 Risk impact

Work to ensure an annual review and refresh programme for the set of five inter-connected corporate frameworks ensures the council continues to support the Best Value duty and comply with the principles set out within the *Delivering Good*

Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016). This contributes towards the mitigation of two cross cutting risks on the Corporate Risk Register, i.e. *Governance, Leadership, and Decision Making* and *Managing Strategic Change*.

5. Measures of success

- 5.1 In the short to medium-term, assessing the impact of the pandemic 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 None



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