



**BEST VALUE - CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN**

Report by Chief Executive

**PURPOSE**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to inform the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of the progress with the Continuous Improvement Action Plan and present the key findings for effective challenge and scrutiny.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Mapping the performance of services in delivering improvement is essential as this provides the context required to effectively plan service change. A performance review of the Continuous Improvement Action Plan (CIAP) was undertaken to highlight the work outstanding and the action being taken by services. As requested by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in September 2022, the key findings are summarised in the Report by department and service rather than the Local Government Benchmarking Framework themes as in previous reports.
- 2.2 The half-year 2023/24 performance review of the CIAP found that the key improvement outcomes from two external audits, nine internal audit follow-up reviews and one self-assessment have still to be completed. These are represented as CIAP actions in Service Business Plans (SBPs) and are included in the departmental business plan progress reports made available to the public on the Comhairle's website quarterly. The CIAP Summary is in the Appendix to the Report with a link to the audit and self-assessment reports, where available, and the name of the officer responsible for taking each action forward to completion.
- 2.3 Elected Members have access to Interplan and can view the progress of SBPs and CIAP actions online throughout the year.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle:
  - (a) note the Continuous Improvement Action Plan performance review; and
  - (b) scrutinise the key findings summarised in the main body of the Report.

Contact Officer:	Fiona Knappe, Team Leader, Organisational Development
Appendix:	Continuous Improvement Action Plan Summary
Background Papers:	Report to Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 15 June 2023

## IMPLICATIONS

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

Resource Implications	Implications/None
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Financial	None
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Legal	As per the Accounts Commission for Scotland's Publication of Information (Standards of Performance) Direction 2021 under section 1(1) (a) of the Local Government Act 1992, Councils have a statutory duty to ensure balance in reporting areas of improvement that have and have not been achieved. SPI 2 includes the requirement for the Comhairle to assess how it is performing against its duty of Best Value through self-assessments, service review activity, audit assessments (including those in the annual audit), assessments from other scrutiny and inspection bodies, and how it has responded to these assessments.
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Staffing	None
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Assets and Property	None
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Strategic Implications	Implications/None
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Risk	None
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Equalities	None
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Corporate Strategy	The Report is aligned to Strategic Outcome 4.1.5 - Effective governance of the Comhairle is in place.
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Environmental Impact	None
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Consultation	None
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## BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Statutory Performance Information (SPI) [Direction](#) published on 21 December 2021 is given by the Accounts Commission for Scotland ("the Commission") and applies to reporting performance for the three years from 1 April 2022. The Direction introduced the Commission's [Strategy 2021-2026](#). The Commission holds councils and other local government bodies in Scotland to account and, through the Direction, sets out the performance information that they require councils to publish, and to ensure a balance in reporting areas of improvement that have and have not been achieved.
- 5.2 The Commission's Local Government in Scotland Overview 2023 [Report](#) (May'23) prepared by Audit Scotland, reported that *"service performance was beginning to stall before the pandemic as a result of long-term reductions in funding and wider pressures. The pandemic has affected performance across all service areas. Some services are showing signs of recovery, but there are also signs of growing backlogs, declining performance in some areas and services at capacity. The extent and impact of needs not being met is not clear"*.
- 5.3 The Commission highlighted in the Comhairle's Best Value Assurance [Report](#) (BVAR) that *"the Comhairle has implemented many successful initiatives but the overall pace of change has been slow. It needs to ensure that it has the leadership capacity to drive strategic and transformational change at the pace needed"*.

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

- 6.1 At its meeting on 11 February 2015, the Comhairle agreed the proposals for the development of its Continuous Improvement Agenda to reflect best practice and audit requirements. To satisfy the requirements of the Commission's SPI Direction in the Achievement of Best Value, the Comhairle at its meeting on 14 December 2016 approved the Audit and Scrutiny Committee's recommendation to

include the outcomes of internal and external audits and inspections in the CIAP for effective challenge and scrutiny. The areas for future development and the priority recommendations identified from corporate self-assessments completed since March 2020 are also in the CIAP.

- 6.2 It is important to include all inspection and audit reports in the CIAP report to inform the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of reasons why services may not be able to take forward some of the recommendations. It is also important for services to challenge the completion dates set by auditors and agree realistic timelines for when the recommendations can be fulfilled, with consideration to current service requirements and resources available.
- 6.3 Services use the Comhairle's online performance management system Interplan to record and monitor SBP Actions, which are periodically evaluated and updated to ensure they are still fit for purpose. As guided by the Comhairle, the key improvement outcomes from external audits and internal audit follow-up reviews, and the areas for future development and the priority recommendations identified from corporate self-assessments completed since March 2020 have been input to Interplan and more will be added as they become known.
- 6.4 Elected Members have access to Interplan and can view the progress of SBP and CIAP actions online as required.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

- 7.1 The review of the key improvement outcomes from external audits, internal audit follow-up reviews and self-assessments found that 58% of the implementation dates set by Auditors and confirmed with management have been extended, some more than once. The dates of when the original report was issued, when the recommendations were to be implemented by and, where relevant, the revised completion dates are included in the Appendix to the Report.
- 7.2 There are two CIAP actions reporting red, one within the Chief Executive's Office and one within Assets and Infrastructure.
- 7.3 As requested by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in September 2022, the key findings of the CIAP actions are summarised in the Report by department and service rather than the Local Government Benchmarking Framework themes as in previous reports.
- 7.4 Updates have been provided in Interplan for all CIAP actions. The Comhairle has undergone a period of organisational restructuring and, therefore, the alignment of some services to departments may be different to that stated in the original audit or self-assessment report.

## **CHIEF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT: Chief Executive**

### **Chief Executive's Office**

- 8.1 The Participatory Budgeting (PB) internal audit (Sep'19) made one recommendation for a structured plan to be implemented in order to demonstrate how the Scottish Government target of 1% of budgets allocated to PB would be achieved. The Comhairle's Transformation Strategy focuses on Community Empowerment as a key strand of increasing PB. However, work was delayed due to the impact of COVID on the service and progress was to be reported through the Budget Reports from June 2020 onwards. Progress was delayed further pending appointment to the Director's post as there was no capacity within the Finance team to take this forward.
- 8.2 The Corporate Management Team (CMT) will plan how PB can be progressed within the Comhairle. A meeting with COSLA PB lead officer took place 28 February 2022 for an initial discussion on how to improve the Comhairle's approach and this was followed up in greater detail with COSLA officers in April 2023. The discussion highlighted that the Comhairle has used PB from the inception of the

Comhairle deciding that a major proportion of Crown Estate funding be allocated for community benefits and projects, and that the Comhairle's commitment to PB therefore remains strong. Whether the method of distribution of Crown Estate community funding fully meets the PB criteria will be further explored and clarified within this financial year. There are a number of service areas for which a PB approach would be beneficial and it is likely that the Budget and Strategy Board will be asked to consider recommendations to that effect, subject to there being capacity within the Services concerned and the Finance team. The Outer Hebrides Community Led Local Development Local Action Group (OH CLLD LAG) has £40k available for community projects. PB is being used to award funding.

- 8.3 The Best Value external audit undertaken by Audit Scotland (Sep'22) made nine recommendations. An action plan was approved by the Comhairle in December 2022 to take these forward and work is now underway by services and the CMT to deliver the actions set out. The BVAR Action Plan Progress Report will be presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in due course. While the actions are not yet complete, there has been good progress to date in 2023.
- 8.4 The Capital Contract, Project Management and Service Provision – Goathill Care Development Internal Audit (Nov'21) made 17 recommendations. One recommendation is partly outstanding and requires continued close monitoring of progress of remedial works and of workmanship in general throughout the remainder of the project and post completion. The project is now three months into the 12-month Defects period. There remains Supervisor and Assistant Supervisor resource in place with the latter having a permanent site presence during the early stages of occupation. The Contractor has also been generally proactive in terms of responding notified Defects and has maintained a local presence

#### **Human Resources and Performance**

- 8.5 The Emergency Planning Internal Audit (Oct'22) made seven recommendations and the follow up review (May'23) found four recommendations to be outstanding. The half-year CIAP review found three recommendations still outstanding. A documented training schedule (2.3a) is to be set up specifically for staff engaged in emergency planning to ensure that all required training is covered and continually updated. Scottish Resilience Development Service (ScoRDS) training was undertaken in 2023 by identified employees involved in Emergency Planning and a Training Schedule for 2024 is currently being developed. Heads of Service were required to prioritise Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) (2.4a) and work is almost complete on the final one, and these will be reviewed annually. A cyber exercise (2.4b) is scheduled for March 2024 involving key partners to confirm that we have confidence that the most critical BCPs are realistic.

#### **Internal Audit**

- 8.6 The Comhairle's Annual Audit Report 2021/22 published by the Commission on 1 December 2022 brought forward seven recommendations from previous audits and five are now complete. The IT Service is working with the Incident Management Team and the Resilience Team to ensure lessons learned from the cyber incident are built into their Business Continuity, Cyber Resilience, and Disaster Recovery Plans. The Procurement Guide and Tender Evaluation Guide have been reviewed, updated and finalised, and as agreed with Internal Audit, procurement training will be carried out by the end of the financial year 2023/24.

### **CHIEF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT: Depute Chief Executive**

#### **Assets and Infrastructure**

- 9.1 The Information management self-assessment included two priority recommendations: a refresh of the IT Strategy; and a review of IT security, with consideration to be given to the continued change from office to home working environments and the effects this may have on information security moving forward to ensure the integrity of corporate information in a home working environment. Work on both priorities is underway. The area for future development requires the continuation of employee training to raise awareness of the importance of, and legal requirements relating to, information security. The Chief Officer, Property and Infrastructure, advised that the IT Strategy is

required to reflect service and operational requirements of the Comhairle, which to date have not been clarified as services have been adapting to COVID restrictions and return to office working. Various actions have been undertaken to improve information management and security over the period, such as implementing two-factor (2FA) authentication. Work continues on modes of working and targets have been changed to account for further development in these areas.

- 9.2 The Property Maintenance Delivery (PMD) internal audit (Jul'21) made seven recommendations and the follow-up review (Jul'22) found three partly implemented with further work required to meet the objective of the recommendation. Management confirmed to internal audit that they would be implemented by October 2022. Two of the three are now complete and ongoing monitoring of fuel consumption is taking place. The Property Maintenance section is currently reviewing with the Transportation team the process for the section to routinely receive copies of fuel invoices in order for appropriate checks to be undertaken, with potential issues dealt with accordingly.

### **Economic Development and Planning**

- 9.3 Two of the five recommendations made in the Planning Applications internal audit (Aug'20) are still outstanding. The rescheduling of the Scottish Government (SG) work programme impacted on the completion of these. As such, recommendation 2.1b is deferred as National Guidance is still awaited from Scottish Government on the role and responsibilities of a Chief Planner. This was expected towards the end of 2022 but was not issued and is now expected to be published in Autumn 2023. The Comhairle Organisational Review has acknowledged the requirements to make provision for the role within the structure and the Depute Chief Executive will take forward the action once the National Guidance is available. The Comhairle responded to the SG consultation on Mandatory Training for elected Members ahead of the consultation closing on the 26 October 2023.
- 9.4 Recommendation 2.1a required the Planning Manager to develop a structured plan as to how required changes introduced through the Planning Scotland Act 2019 will be implemented. The Scottish Government [Transforming Planning in Practice: updated planning reform implementation programme](#) was refreshed on 29 October 2021. The timetable is high level and has been adopted by the Service as the best guide as to the timescale for implementation of the changes introduced through the Planning Scotland Act 2019. The Comhairle relies upon further detail on each work package being made available timeously. It is challenging for the Planning Managers to develop a structured Plan for implementation of the Act in the absence of a clear plan from Government on its plan and timetable. However, the planning managers attend Heads of Planning quarterly meetings, maintain a close eye on Chief Planner Letters, and the Transforming Planning website and social media for updates. As at October 2023 there has been no further update or refinement of the Transforming Planning in Practice: updated (Oct 2021) planning reform implementation programme. Officers maintain a close eye on any updates issued by Government for specific actions.

## **EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

### **Education, Skills, and Children's Services Directorate**

- 10.1 The Catering Trading Organisation Audit (May'21) made 12 recommendations and five were found to be complete during the follow-up review (Nov'21). Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the service, the completion date was put back. Nine recommendations are now complete and the remaining three are underway. The required work includes spot checks during site visits and signed off on the quality control daily and weekly sheets; undertaking physical stock reconciliations of catering supplies to confirm that the stock used is accurate and any issues identified are addressed; and implementing the changes required to bring the secondary school canteen standards up to the requirements of [The Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools \(Scotland\) Regulations 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#).
- 10.2 One of the four recommendations made in the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) internal audit (May'22) is still outstanding and requires the service to update and refresh the EMA policy that is

published on the Comhairle's website annually. The old policy has been removed from the website. The Scottish Government EMA Guidance and Process document has just been finalised for local authorities and, therefore, does not give enough time for the policy development and report to be presented to the November series of meetings. Proposals are now for the updated policy and report to be presented to the first series of meetings in 2024.

- 10.3 Of the 14 recommendations made in the Libraries internal audit (Aug'21) one (2.5b) is still outstanding and requires the Property Management Section to prioritise the most significant issues that have been identified as outstanding in the Stornoway Library building. Request for building works have been submitted and raised at Health & Safety meetings. A quote for the list works has been completed and is with the Property Management Section. The work requests have been approved but are awaiting supply and availability of fitters and, therefore, this CIAP action will be transferred from the Library and Information Services to the Property Management section within the Assets and Infrastructure Service for completion. The completion date has been updated to 31/03/2024.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

### **Health and Social Care Services**

- 11.1 The Financial Assessments internal audit (Aug'22) made five recommendations, and one is partly outstanding. It is recommended (2.3) that a protocol be put in place with the Care Homes and Social Work that requires the Financial Assessment team to be notified immediately when a death occurs to allow officers to prepare the final paperwork. A new software system is now in place and discussions with all care homes have taken place to ensure relevant officers are notified as soon as possible after a death occurs. Formal process will be implemented in the near future to ensure consistency across services.

## **CONCLUSION**

- 12.1 The half-year 2023/24 performance review of the CIAP recorded in Interplan was undertaken to highlight the work outstanding, the action being taken by services and the areas of work outwith the control of services. The CIAP review found that all SBPs in Interplan have been updated to advise how the recommendations are progressing and that key improvement outcomes from two external audits, nine internal audit follow-up reviews and one self-assessment have still to be completed.
- 12.2 Recommendations from seven (58%) of the audits/self-assessments have not met their original implementation date. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted on services completing CIAP Actions, which resulted in some completion dates being extended and the actions being carried forward to the 2023/24 business planning period for completion.
- 12.3 In the wider context of the current public sector financial environment, and the significant decrease in real terms funding experienced by the Comhairle and highlighted in its [BVAR](#) by the Commission, it is essential to ensure that services are as efficient and effective as possible through continuous improvement and show ongoing viability in delivering the Comhairle's strategic priorities and statutory obligations.
- 12.4 Although a year-end 2023/24 performance review of the CIAP will be undertaken and presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in due course, Elected Members have access to Interplan and can monitor the progress of SBPs and CIAP actions online throughout the year.

## APPENDIX

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN SUMMARY

NB: The table below displays External Audits shaded blue, Internal Audit Follow-up Reviews shaded yellow and Self-assessments shaded orange.

CIAP Summary	Interplan Reference	Responsible Person	Status	Original Report Issued	Implement by	Revised Completion Date	% Complete	Target	On Target
<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENT:</b> Chief Executive									
<b>Chief Executive's Office</b>									
Participatory Budgeting	4.1.5.17	Malcolm Burr	In Progress	27/09/2019	Jun 2020	Mar 2024	55%	100%	Red
<u>Best Value Assurance Report: Comhairle nan Eilean Siar</u>	4.1.5.49	Malcolm Burr	In Progress	29/09/2022	Dec 2023		75%	75%	Green
Capital Contract, Project Management and Service Provision – Goathill Care Development	4.1.5.54	Dan MacPhail	In Progress	23/11/2021	Mar 2024		75%	90%	Amber
<b>Human Resources and Performance</b>									
Emergency Planning	4.1.5.57	Norma Skinner	In Progress	06/10/2022	Oct 2023		75%	75%	Green
<b>Internal Audit</b>									
<u>Comhairle nan Eilean Siar annual audit report 2021/22</u>	4.1.5.55	Sandy Gomez	In Progress	01/12/2021	Mar 2024		80%	100%	Amber
<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENT:</b> Deputy Chief Executive									
<b>Assets and Infrastructure</b>									

CIAP Summary	Interplan Reference	Responsible Person	Status	Original Report Issued	Implement by	Revised Completion Date	% Complete	Target	On Target
<u>Information Management</u>	4.1.5.25	Calum Mackenzie	In Progress	22/06/2021	Mar 2022	Dec 2023	70%	90%	Red
Property Maintenance Delivery	4.1.5.43	Calum Mackenzie	In Progress	01/07/2021	Oct 2022	Mar 2024	95%	100%	Amber
<b>Economic Development and Planning</b>									
Planning Applications	4.1.5.36	Morag Ferguson	In Progress	17/08/2020	Mar 2023	Mar 2024	80%	100%	Amber
<b>EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES DEPARTMENT</b>									
<b>Education, Skills, and Children's Services Directorate</b>									
Catering – Trading Organisation	4.1.5.37	Diane Campbell	In Progress	31/05/2021	Apr 2022	Mar 2024	95%	100%	Amber
Education Maintenance Allowance	4.1.5.56	Iain G Smith	In Progress	16/05/2022	Sept 2023	Feb 2024	80%	80%	Green
Libraries	4.1.5.46	Neil Macleod	In Progress	13/08/2021	Mar 2023	Mar 2024	95%	100%	Amber
<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE</b>									
<b>Health and Social Care Services</b>									
Financial Assessments	4.1.5.58	Emma MacSween	In Progress	31/08/2022	Jun 2023		80%	100%	Amber