From mountain to sea

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

How Good is Our…Governance in Practice?

2019 Report

Policy, Performance and Change

Customer Communication & Improvement,
Business Services

April 2019

Contents

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Self-Assessment and the Scrutiny Process

Developing effective self-assessment is consistent with the Crerar Review (2007) which recommended the degree of future external scrutiny should be dependent upon the range and quality of performance management and associated self-assessment in place within public services with an emphasis on a demonstrable and robust process.

Aberdeenshire Council responded with the introduction of 'How Good is our Council'? (HGIOC) in 2010 and revised in 2016 to form 'HGIOC? 2'. The tool is a performance improvement model using an evidence-based, self-assessment approach encouraging a comprehensive review of activities and results. It promotes a holistic approach to continuous improvement and evaluation, mapped to a number of established performance improvement frameworks including Aberdeenshire Performs; The EFQM Excellence Model, Best Value principles and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF).

HGIOC is aligned to the Best Value audit approach with questions having been matched against the characteristics of a Best Value Council. Completing the **HGIOC** process will contribute to preparation and evidence gathering for the ongoing audit of Best Value by Audit Scotland.

There must be a systematic approach with evidence to back up the self-evaluation judgements. As well as having a validation process built into the **HGIOC** approach there will be an audit of the process by internal audit.

HGIOC provides a framework of key questions under a total of 17 Quality Indicators (QI) of which 6 Core Indicators have been determined (see Appendix 1). These core indicators form a partial self-assessment and the basis of this report.

The core indicators were developed to provide challenge with a critical and honest assessment through a structured, evidenced process which identifies areas of strength, areas for improvement. Subsequently, the areas for improvement are programmed through the development and implementation of a corporate-wide Action Plan.

Effective and confident self-evaluation requires evidence from a variety of sources. Accepted practice across HGIO frameworks is based on the principle of triangulation where at least three lines of enquiry are identified. These are likely to be drawn from the following, although this is not an exhaustive list:

- Performance data – particularly where trends can be identified
- Planning, monitoring and evaluation documentation
- Feedback from stakeholders (most importantly from service users)
- Direct observations of delivery / practice
- Case studies backed up with relevant information
- Information from partner organisations we work with

1.2 Approach and Objectives

Aberdeenshire Council is committed to improving outcomes and performance for the benefit of service users and communities. In order to achieve improvement, the Council must become self-aware and understand where strengths and opportunities for improvements lie. The 'HGIOC' self-evaluation process is an integral part of the Council's continuous improvement agenda and allows focus to be aligned on particular areas of operation, ensuring a reflective, evidence base and uses a six-point scale to assist in self-evaluation.

Quality indicators evaluated achieved averaged ratings of between 2.6 and 4.00 (with an evaluation range between 1.0 and 5.0) on the six point scale outlined at Table 1 below:

Table 1: The six point scale

No.		Ratings defined	Quality Indicators
Level 6	■	**Excellent** – Outstanding, sector leading	
Level 5	■	**Very good** – Major Strengths	
Level 4	■	**Good** – Important strengths with areas for improvement	**1.1; 1.2**
Level 3	■	**Satisfactory** – Strengths just outweigh weaknesses	**4.1; 5.1; 8.2; 10.0**
Level 2	■	**Weak** – Important weaknesses	8.1; 9.1; 9.2
Level 1	■	**Unsatisfactory** – Major weaknesses	

Governance and scrutiny practices and policies exist across the organisation and are enacted strategically and operationally. This 2019 self-assessment report summarises the approach taken, and findings from, 55 (45%) out of a potential total of 121 senior managers, across all services and areas, who took part in cross-service focus groups over nine workshop sessions. Full results from these sessions can be found at Section 5.

A further workshop was undertaken with Elected Members with 10 members attending (57% of substantive members and 17% of substitute members) from the Audit Committee, where 3 quality indicators were evaluated: Impact on the Community, Partnership Working and Vision, Values and Aims with full results from this session found at Section 6. Outputs from this workshop where additional to those also reported by officers, have been included to Appendices 1 and 2 and highlighted in red.

Trained and experienced HGIO Assessors were appointed to support Senior Managers and Elected Members, to complete Self-assessment recording templates for each Quality Indicator.

2 ABERDEENSHIRE CONTEXT

Aberdeenshire Council provides services to more than 260,000 residents across the 4th largest geographical area in Scotland with the 6th largest school roll in Scotland, supporting the 5th largest workforce in Scottish local government and is the largest employer within Aberdeenshire.

During the HGIOC review year in 2016, the Council went through a significant period of change with revised governance under the Future Governance strategy. In January 2017, a new Scheme of Governance was implemented with the appointment of four new Policy Committees: Business Services; Communities; Education and Children's Services; Infrastructure Services, and the new Audit Committee. This marked the biggest change to council committees and decision-making since Aberdeenshire Council was formed in 1996. Under the new approach, policy committees are able to make financial decisions relating to service budgets, which supports the council make decisions more quickly and effectively.

In May 2017, the newly formed Council Administration was introduced following council elections. In November 2017, the council formally agreed 11 Strategic Priorities, following an extensive programme of engagement with staff and the community.

Aberdeenshire Council has adopted a Code of Corporate Governance based on the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) publication Delivering Good Governance in Local Government, first published in 2007 and revised in 2016. This builds on The Good Governance for Public Services issued by the Independent Commission of Good Governance in Public Services. The Council's Code adheres to the core principles of good practice contained in the CIPFA/SOLACE guidance and includes a mechanism for its governance arrangements to be tested through the "How Good is Our Council" framework.

Audit Scotland clearly define governance and scrutiny as:

'Governance and transparency are concerned with the effectiveness of scrutiny and Governance arrangements, leadership and decision making and transparent reporting of financial and performance information'.

This HGIO…Governance in Practice? assessment has been aligned to the six key principles of the Code of Corporate Governance as detailed below. Each indicator was fully reviewed and assessed prior to selection, as being appropriate to allow determination of, adherence and support of, each of the principles within the Code:

Principles of Aberdeenshire Councils Code of Corporate Governance	Supported by Quality Indicator	
	Core Applied	Standard Applied
Focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area	4.1: Impact on the Local Community 8.2: Partnership Working	5.1: Delivering Services 9.1: Vision, Values and Aims 9.2: Leadership and Direction
Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles	8.1: Working together across services	9.1: Vision, Values and Aims 9.2: Leadership and Direction
Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour	1.2: Adherence to statutory principles and fulfilment of statutory duties 4.1: Impact on the Local Community 8.1: Working together across services	9.1: Vision, Values and Aims 9.2: Leadership and Direction
Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk	1.1: Improvements in Performance 1.2: Adherence to statutory principles and fulfilment of statutory duties	9.2: Leadership and Direction
Developing the capacity and capabilities of members and officers to be effective	1.1: Improvements in Performance 1.2: Adherence to statutory principles and fulfilment of statutory duties 8.1: Working together across services	9.1: Vision, Values and Aims 9.2: Leadership and Direction
Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability	1.1: Improvements in Performance 1.2: Adherence to statutory principles and fulfilment of statutory duties 4.1: Impact on the Local Community	5.1: Delivering Services 9.2: Leadership and Direction

3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This 2019 self-evaluation project to determine How good is our…Governance in Practice? has identified a number of key strengths and areas for improvement.

A number of these strengths and areas for improvement were repeatedly highlighted throughout the course of focused workshops and can therefore be viewed as significant. Critical evaluation of Aberdeenshire Council's policy, and crucially, its enactment of public engagement and consultation was one of the most discussed topics for all groups.

To summarise, many instances of good engagement and consultation practices were identified and highlighted below including the Local Development Plan and the recent Waste Strategy Consultation. Conversely, the Waste Strategy consultation was also highlighted as an area for improvement when viewed within the context of the 'Ladder of Participation' (to actively seek the redistribution of influence, and recognise the difference between the 'empty ritual' of participation versus having genuine power to affect the outcome of the process during engagement/consultation between local government and communities).

The inclusion of Elected Members within the self-assessment process offered a useful perspective in relation to their insightful position within communities and the strategic leadership of the Council. There was a general view amongst elected members that a key area for improvement was in relation to inefficient communication at all levels across the council, and transparency of purpose.

This evaluation recognises that good governance policies exist within the Council to allow and support public consultation albeit these can be further developed and improved upon by review of the stance undertaken within the Ladder of Participation. Instances where public engagement/consultation is appropriate, and provides adequate clarity of purpose should be identified within the scoping process along with instances where notification of policy intention is either pre-determined or necessary to fulfil statutory obligation or restrictions of resource allocation.

3.1 Overall Judgement

This self-assessment process has been aligned against the Code of Corporate Governance to provide assurance, understanding and to identify:

- Do we have clear strategic direction;
- How are we performing;
- Are we using our resources effectively;
- Do we work well with partners and communities; and
- Can we demonstrate continuous improvement?

We are confident that we have a good understanding of our governance and are able to identify our areas of strengths and weaknesses and recognise our ability for improvement but may lack the resource capacity for improvement. Further improvement relies upon strategically aligning services and improving communication within, and between services and with our communities. There are weaknesses

within the practical application of governance in particular, surrounding the current budget setting process which many felt lacked transparency and alignment with priorities leading to services following budgets rather than needs within the community. It was identified that the organisation would benefit from a stronger, more committed and clearer direction from the strategic leadership team and elected members.

3.2 Key strengths

- Local Development Plan – highly structured and extensive programme of public consultation and engagement;
- Area management structure;
- Health & Social Care Partnership – working inclusively within communities;
- Equality Impact Assessments to consider needs of minority groups with scrutiny from elected members within each policy and area committee;
- Infrastructure Services – Change Programme, reviewing multi-tasking of key officers at all levels, eg within trading standards/environmental health/planning/building standards;
- City Region Deal;
- Council Plan and Priorities;
- Arrangements for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults strongly in place and supported;

3.3 Key Areas for Improvement

- It has been recognised that Elected Members require information that is meaningful, recognises outcomes, and allows for service delivery to be reviewed effectively;
- Scottish Public Service Ombudsman case reports are currently not reported to Audit Committee;
- Ladder of Participation;
- Improve linkages of delivery activity across services to avoid duplication of effort (silo working, even within services);
- Current lack of performance management information to Policy and Area Committees;
- Lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities when operating cross-service;
- 2018 refresh of Partnership Policy but limited awareness by officers;
- Weak areas in following things up later, benefits realisation, reporting on outcomes – what difference has it made?
- Current budget setting process is not linked to vision or culture we are trying to achieve through One Aberdeenshire and supports working in silos;

3.4 Action Plan

A potential action plan will be separately prepared and reviewed by Directorate Management Teams to assess feasibility and resource capacity prior to inclusion as Appendix 2 within this Report.

3.5 Limitations of Approach

This report expresses the views of a broad range of senior offices across all services within Aberdeenshire Council. Senior officers were selected to participate because of their decision-making role within the organisation and therefore their reliance upon governance structures to support that role. A majority of Elected Members from the Audit Committee also expressed their views against a smaller range of quality indicators which encapsulate key elements of council activity.

This report only summarises Areas for Improvement which have wide-ranging impacts on governance in practice. Where officers identified anecdotal strengths, this has not been included within this report.

It is important that organisationally self-evaluation is viewed and used, as a rolling process rather than a static, one-off annual event and this model of evaluation supports this.

4 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE SELF-ASSESSMENT (DESKTOP ANALYSIS)

Quality Indicator 1.1: Improvements in Performance

Evaluation level: **Overall Score from desktop analysis: 4.0** **Good**	This indicator relates to the achievements of the Council and its Services. It captures the organisation's overall performance based on available data and analysis. It allows a focus on continuous and sustainable improvements against local and national objectives. It takes account of how well the organisation performs against aims, objectives and targets.

What did we find?

The Council Plan 2017-2022 contains eleven council priorities. Each Directorate takes the lead role for one or more priorities whilst supporting delivery of other priorities through specific actions. Each Priority is supported by a Delivery Plan which confirms the outcomes to be achieved and a range of specific actions to enable delivery of the outcomes. Actions incorporate measure of success to assure elected members of progress.

Policy Committees have now all agreed outcome indicators that will support the Members understand the impact of the priorities across communities over the life of the Council Plan and enables officers to begin the performance management reporting cycle. It is expected indicators will be finalised by 31 May 2019.

Each area has Local Community Plans 2016-2019 which were developed through partnership and community engagement and seeks to deliver on the overarching Community Planning Partnership vision. These plans are regularly reviewed by the Local Community Planning Groups and by Area Committees.

Performance is recorded on the performance management system (Pentana). Services are able to monitor and report on the delivery plan and actions. This system is accessible to all officers and partners and Members. It is updated regularly and administered by the corporate Performance Team.

Services use a range of means to discuss performance information, including management teams, team meetings and 121s. Actions are agreed where necessary.

Each year in September, a full annual performance review is put forward to Full Council and considers a range of performance information (annual performance report, annual audit report, etc) to assist and assure members that the Council is meeting its objectives in relation to the delivery of the Council Plan.

The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) compares the performance of all councils in Scotland and is annually published and disseminated across Directorate Management Teams for their consideration/action.

Areas for Improvement

- It has been recognised that elected Members require information that is meaningful, recognises outcomes, and allows for service delivery to be reviewed effectively;
- Opportunity for regular reporting to area committees regarding the performance in relation to the council's eleven priorities;

Action Plan

1.1.1 Six-monthly progress report to Area Committees evidencing delivery of the priority projects supporting the Council Plan within the Area was agreed;
1.1.2 DMTs commit to an informal annual performance session with each area committee to discuss the performance of their service and the impact locally;

Quality indicator 1.2:
Adherence to Statutory principles and fulfilment of statutory duties

Evaluation level: **Overall Score from desktop analysis: 4.0** **Good**	This indicator relates to how well the Council, individually or in partnership, complies with legislation and is responsive to related guidance and codes of practice. This includes awareness, knowledge and understanding of the legislation, guidance and codes of practice which apply in given situations; the quality of systems for ensuring that staff comply with relevant legislation and act in accordance with relevant guidance and codes of practice and evidence from audit, inspection, evaluation, feedback and complaints processes. It also looks at the financial performance of the Council.

What did we find?

The Council's Scheme of Governance provides the framework to support and implement appropriate governance arrangements to maintain transparency, lawfulness, fairness, accessibility and accountability.

The corporate report template specifically includes a statement identifying the power within the Scheme of Governance permitting delegation of decision making. There is also further assurance from the Monitoring Officers that the report is compliant with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation. Professional advice and support is available to both officers and Members through monitoring officers.

ALDO Training on the Scheme of Governance is available for all officers so that they are clear on what decisions are within their powers.

We regularly share briefings and advice notes from the Standards Commission with members and prepare internal guidance on standards of conduct.

The Council Publishes an Annual Governance Statement which is revised annually upon the completion of the audit of the Council's accounts.

The Scheme of Governance provides a framework for officers to seek Best Value when procuring goods/services and spending money through the financial regulations (Part 3) and procurement guidance.

All minutes and public committee reports are published online and available for inspection, including declaration of interests. An increasing number of Policy Committee are available to view online in real time via the Council website where they are also archived.

There is a clear complaint handling procedure, in line with Scottish Public Service Ombudsman requirements. The Annual Complaints Performance Report is published on the Council's website and highlighted with the annual Public Performance Report. Complaints Handling Training is currently being designed as part of the new Customer Service Framework to ensure staff compliance with the customer service charter and the SPSO guidelines. In addition, the council will now be presenting the annual complaints report to the audit committee for consideration.

Areas for Improvement:
- SPSO case reports are currently not reported to Audit Committee;

Action Plan:
1.2.1   Continued Scheme of Governance training for Members via training sessions and ALDO;
1.2.2   Annual complaint report to be provided to Audit Committee

5 SERVICE BASED SELF-ASSESSMENT

Quality Indicator 4.1: Impact on the local community

	This indicator relates to the direct impact that governance within the Council is having on communities whether geographic or of interest. It focuses on measuring the extent to which communities are stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive as a result of the support, resources and input from the organisation. It seeks to capture how well we know what is needed in our communities and how successful we are at responding. It takes a close look at what difference the services provided are making to improving and sustaining local communities and communities of interest
Evaluation level: **Average Score: 3.8** **Between satisfactory and good** Lowest Score: 2.5 Between Weak and satisfactory Highest Score: 4.0 Good	

What did we find?

Aberdeenshire Council is community driven as reflected through increasingly extensive and regular community engagement undertaken to help shape service delivery across communities. However, a number of concerns were raised which questioned the clarity of purpose when engaging with communities. Is it clear whether the purpose is engagement, consultation or simply broadcasting? Governance structures are designed to promote accountability and transparency of decision making therefore bolder communication and an adaptable model for engagement should be introduced to support and enhance the 'ladder of participation' particularly in instances where decision making has already taken place due to budgetary or service efficiencies about to take effect. In general, workshop responses were positive as highlighted by the ongoing Local Development Plan consultation and engagement process and support for the Area management structure and locality focus.

Strengths Identified:
- Area management structure;
- Waste management strategy consultation;
- Local development plan consultation;

- Health & Social Care Partnership – working inclusively within communities;
- Local housing strategy – tenant participation;
- Self-evaluation within Education and Children's Service – annual school, parent/council level and out of area placements;
- Capital Plan/Learning Estate Working Group – prioritisation of capital works;
- Community Learning and Development;
- Mental Health Strategy;
- Building Standards Focus Group;
- Citizens Panel;
- Community Empowerment – Asset transfer;
- Delivering licensing;
- Rural Partnerships

Areas for improvement
- Complexity surrounding governance within Community Councils;
- Requirement for place based scrutiny/assessment;
- Inconsistent approach/clarity surrounding engagement, consultation and broadcasting of information;
- Duplication of community engagement – community planning perspective - versus- direct service perspective;
- Clarity around the role of the Council;
- Differing approaches to legislation – e.g. community asset transfer/Community Empowerment Act;
- Which areas have Community Councils;
- Ladder of Participation;
- Consistent approach across all areas and services activities – manage expectations

Action Plan
4.1.1 Review/revise and provide greater support and training to governance arrangement within Community Councils;
4.1.2 Create a log of areas that have Community Councils;
4.1.3 Develop methodology to identify smaller/rural communities in need of support;
4.1.4 Provide place based statistical assessments;
4.1.5 Improve linkages and communication between community engagement to prevent duplication;
4.1.6 Ensure a consistent approach across all services when interpreting community based legislation;
4.1.7 Ladder of Participation – create a robust model to identify what is meant by engagement, consultation and broadcasting of information and provide training to officers on appropriate and consistent usage of each;
4.1.8 Provide clarity on the role of the Council within communities

Quality Indicator 5.1: Delivering services

Evaluation level: **Average Score: 3.8** **Between satisfactory and good** Lowest Score: 3.0 Satisfactory Highest Score: 4.0 Good	This indicator relates to the effectiveness of governance practices to support delivery of a comprehensive range of well-integrated services for users. The expectation is that services should be delivered in line with the policies and plans of the Council. It takes a closer look at how well we tailor services to meet the needs of others whilst in doing so, ensuring a degree of flexibility to accommodate unplanned changes. It looks at how clearly agreements relating to service delivery are set out and what arrangements are in place for quality improvement. It also examines what systems are in place to encourage and respond to continual stakeholder feedback.

What did we find?

Overall many areas of strength and best practice were identified within the focus group workshops. In particular, working practices within the frontline delivery activities of Infrastructure Services were highlighted for forward planning, responsiveness to change and a high level of communication cross service within Roads, Waste, Fleet services, Transportation, Building Control and Planning albeit with caveats due to somewhat restrictive governance policies. Approach to crisis management identified more fluid and positive strategies to react and provide positive outcomes. Evaluation levels across all workshops indicated that governance practices enable and support planned service delivery activities across the organisation with some areas of weakness.

Strengths Identified:
- Local Development Plan – aligned to council priorities and delivery plans;

- Roads Asset Management Plan;
- Road Condition Index;
- Local Government Benchmarking Framework;
- Health & Social Care Partnership – needs based assessments;
- Transportation – evidence led delivery;
- Equality Impact Assessments;
- School Inspections reported to Area Committees;
- Strength of processes in place for Adult and Child Protection;
  file:///C:/Users/dknight/Downloads/(19)%20CSWO%20Annual%20Report%202017-2018.pdf
- Delivery of internal audit plan as part of the continuous improvement cycle;
- Review of expenditure approval process;
- Procurement – improved process although requires further amendment;
- Locality structure of Health & Social Care Partnership;
- Roads Asset Management Plan;
- Crisis management

Areas for improvement

- Allow greater lead time and improve support for new legislation e.g. revised procurement processes;
- Lack of flexibility within expenditure setting process;
- Governance of loans and grants is not included within the Scheme of Governance;
- Current lack of performance management information to Policy and Area Committees;
- Need a greater focus on outcomes within communities particularly over the long term;
- Improve dissemination of stakeholder feedback across services;
- Improve linkages of delivery activity across services to avoid duplication of effort (silo working, even within services);
- No fast track of service delivery or a consistent ability for rapid response to unplanned change;
- High level of risk aversity particularly relating to reputational risk – can lead to reduced strength of decision making;

Action Plan
5.1.1 Introduce service help desk for Procurement in line with ICT's Ask Fred service;
5.1.2 Review of expenditure setting process underway;
5.1.3 Revise and review appropriate inclusion of Loans and Grants within Scheme of Governance;
5.1.4 Delivery plan performance measurement to be reported from quarter one performance;
5.1.5 Forum or hub to be introduced for services to share information on planned delivery activity;

Quality Indicator 8.1: Working together across services

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Evaluation level:

Average Score: 2.8
Between weak and satisfactory

Lowest Score: 2.0
Weak

Highest Score: 3.5
Between Satisfactory and Good

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This indicator refers to the practice and organisational arrangements for effective collaboration between and across services of the council. It looks at how we improve impacts by working well together. It also explores efficient and equitable working across services and ensures we recognise and use the learning and experiences gained.

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What did we find?

Some very strong examples of governance structure supporting joint working as demonstrated by Health & Social Care Partnership, fractions within Infrastructure Services and Business Services. Overall however, many areas of improvement were duplicated across all workshops, identifying a lack of governance to support joint working across or even within services in relation to sharing best practice, sharing outputs/lessons learned, roles and responsibilities, resource allocation and overall accountability**.**

Strengths Identified:

- SharePoint and Office365 – promoting inclusive working;
- One Aberdeenshire – aspirational;
- GIRFEC thematic groups;
- Complaint handling process – monthly reporting to services;
- Monthly budget monitoring and quarterly reporting to Committee;
- Strategic Leadership Team and Directorate Management Teams;
- Area management structure collaboration with services;
- Infrastructure Services Change Programme – review of potential for officers to multi-task within existing roles;
- Regeneration teams within Economic Development to deliver regeneration plans;
- Introduction of community campus structure for multi-service working;
- Community Planning;

- Role of corporate communications team;
- Health & Social Care Partnership – cross-agency working;

Areas for improvement

- Continue to work within silos
- Lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities when operating cross-service;
- Resource implications and responsibility for these, unclear at start of joint working;
- Budget setting process supports services working in silos;
- Lack of understanding of common organisational purpose and lack of accountability;

Action Plan

8.1.1 Review and revise service level agreements and provide clarity on when these should be used – include roles and responsibilities, resource allocation, accountability and expectations;

8.1.2 Align budget setting process to support outcomes;

Quality Indicator 8.2: Partnership Working

Evaluation level: **Average Score: 3.6** **Between satisfactory and good** Lowest Score: 2.0 Weak Highest Score: 5.0 Very Good	This indicator refers to the role of the Council in promoting, encouraging and undertaking effective partnership working with service users, staff, other stakeholders and partner agencies. A central goal of the Council is to secure and sustain cohesive and meaningful partnerships which will take forward its' strategic vision, values and aims. The indicator looks at how working in partnership improves impacts. It also explores efficient and equitable working within partnerships where each partner knows what to expect of the others.

What did we find?

Despite some dissatisfaction identified within the role of partnership, the majority of workshop attendees felt governance arrangements supporting positive partnership working was a major strength for Aberdeenshire Council as a successful and meaningful partner.

Strengths identified:

- City Region Deal;
- Northern Alliance;
- Health & Social Care Partnership – Alcohol and Drug Partnership;
- Community Planning Partnership;
- Waste Partnership with Moray and Aberdeen City Council;
- Road Casualty Reduction;
- Opportunity North East;
- NESTRANS;
- Participatory budgets;
- Self-directed support within social work;
- North of Scotland Trading Standards Partnership,
- GIRFEC;
- Procurement;

- Early Learning and Childcare Academy;
- Local Resilience Partnership;

Areas for Improvement:

- 2018 refresh of Partnership Policy but limited awareness by officers;
- Disjointed governance structure in community planning (between Executive, community planning group, LOIPs etc.);
- Need to improve processes to evaluation the effectiveness of partnership, e.g. GIRFEC;
- Provide stronger governance in smaller partnerships such as volunteering;
- Sharing and accessing information within partnerships;
- Unintended consequences through lack of linkages across services, partnerships and activities;
- How do we measure that our partnerships are providing positive net benefits;
- National legislation does not always support local structure for example, four definitions of what constitutes a locality creating difficulties for locality planning;
- When does joint working become a partnership;

Action Plan:
8.2.1 Promote Partnership Policy/Framework across the organisation;
8.2.2 Hub/forum to share information on activities and outputs within partnerships;
8.2.3 Clarity of interpretation of national legislation and impact locally;
8.2.4 Develop a model to evaluate and assess the effectiveness and net positive benefit of partnership working;
8.2.5 Review governance arrangements around smaller partnerships including volunteering;

Quality Indicator 9.1: Vision, values and aims

Evaluation level: **Average Score: 2.6** **Between weak and satisfactory** Lowest Score: 1.0 Unsatisfactory Highest Score: 4.5 Between Good and very good	This indicator relates to the governance of the corporate leadership within the Council and the way in which it exercises its functions through unity of purpose. It looks at how well we work internally and with partners to create a shared vision, sense of purpose and direction which are ambitious and challenging. It promotes positive attitudes to economic, social and cultural diversity and focuses on the extent to which vision, values and aims guide planning for improvement. It also ensures that the Council vision actively influences practice at the point of delivery.

What did we find?

It was recognised that the Council has an abundance of positive governance practices in place with the development of principles, vision, aims and priorities. A majority felt a disconnect and general dissatisfaction between having such documentation, and the actual enactment and support of those principles and aims from the strategic leadership team. This is evidenced by the lowest evaluation scores across all indicators.

Strengths identified:
- One Aberdeenshire Principles;
- PPP process;
- Council Plan;
- Council Priorities;
- Council Vision;
- Service/Team Vision;

Areas for improvement
- Can empowerment be achieved within the current hierarchical structure;
- Current budget setting process is not linked to vision or culture we are trying to achieve through One Aberdeenshire and supports working in silos;
- Lack of strategic vision supports silo working – teams/services try to fill the void;
- Look at PPP and align with priorities and improve governance of the process to ensure a level playing field for staff;
- Transition from command and control culture to more of an evolution/developmental approach;

- Uncertainty around whether or not 'being the best in Scotland…from mountain to sea' is still the Council vision;
- Increase visibility of strategic leadership in relation to supporting/embedding vision, values, aims;
- Disconnect between 'corporate' and more remote frontline services – creation of team/service specific visions/aims;

Action Plan

9.1.1   Outline what governance practices surround the implementation/embedding of One Aberdeenshire Principles;
9.1.2   Provide a governance structure around the PPP process;
9.1.3   Support teams to create a cascaded vision to link and align with Council vision and priorities;
9.1.4   Increase visibility of our leadership in relation to supporting/embedding vision, values, aims;

Quality Indicator 9.2: Leadership and direction

Evaluation level: **Average Score: 2.7** **Between weak and satisfactory** Lowest Score: 1.0 Unsatisfactory Highest Score: 4.5 Good to Very Good	This indicator considers the role of leaders. It relates to the corporate leadership and the way it functions to ensure effective visions, values and aims. It relates to the success of senior managers in linking the Council vision to strategic deployment of resources in order to deliver services. It considers the role of leaders in fulfilling their statutory duties and will include clarity of roles for senior elected leaders and officers. It also explores how well leaders plan for changes to legislation, regulation, policies and codes of practice. It focuses on the mapping out of future developments which are challenging, can be realised and are sustainable. It seeks to identify a culture which supports and enables risk management.

What did we find?

Some key strengths have been identified within the governance processes from the leadership team. Overall, despite governance in place to promote openness, transparency, accountability and fairness, these were the areas in which many felt were lacking, certainly their visibility. The two dominant topics considered were the decision making processes of elected members and whether or not, these decisions aligned to support strategic priorities and, the budget setting process itself. Interpretations suggested that this process was conducted without full account of strategic priorities and in itself, perpetuated services working in silos.

Strengths Identified:
- Directorate Management Teams – regular meetings to drive forward/discuss key projects;
- Arrangements for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults strongly in place and supported;
- Cohesive leadership despite political differences to provide the best for Aberdeenshire;
- Extended leadership forums;
- Effective committees enabling effective decision making at a strategic level – limited referrals to Full Council;
- Very good at external visibility, presence: social media, events, etc.

- Induction and Training programme for newly elected members;

Areas for improvement

- Are officers providing adequate strength and professional advice to elected members? Particularly around the budget setting process;
- Budget setting process – transparency, accountability, link to strategic priorities
- Budget setting process – work planned around budget rather than strategically or for areas of need;
- Lack of openness, transparency and accountability in decision making particularly around allocation of budgetary resources;
- Long-term financial planning/budget setting process;
- Leadership in silos;
- Weak areas in following things up later, benefits realisation, reporting on outcomes – what difference has it made?
- Disconnection between role/responsibility for elected members in taking strategic decisions – can be too myopic;
- Are priorities considered when decisions are made by elected members?
- Responsive to changes in legislation, less effective with internal changes;

Action Plan
9.2.1 Review and revise if required, guidance and training for officers to support elected members;
9.2.2 Budget setting process – review with the aim to provide greater levels of transparency and accountability;
9.2.3 Budget setting process – review potential to align budgets against council priorities;
9.2.4 Budget setting process – review implementation of long-term financial planning where possible;

Quality Indicator 10.0: Capacity for Improvement

Evaluation level:	
Average Score: 3.3 **Between satisfactory and good** Lowest Score: 2.0 Weak Highest Score: 4.0 Good	This indicator requires a global judgement based on evidence and self-evaluation of all key areas. The council should consider contextual issues and consider strengths identified around ability to respond quickly to change, to be creative and innovative in pursuit of excellence.

What did we find?

Ample opportunities to improve – do we, can we have the capacity to improve, or is this limited by other factors such as procurement, flexibility, hierarchy, R&D opportunities.

There are clear strengths in the 'nuts and bolts' of governance and recognition of areas for improvement, but weaknesses within the practical application and leadership of governance.

Definite strengths and areas of improvements with areas of important weaknesses. Would prefer leadership team to offer a stronger direction.

Inability to embed change/transformation due to lack of corporate direction/commitment. Organisationally strong but strategically not directional. Difficult for decisions to be made due to high level of risk aversity.

Ability to improve but could also lack capacity to do so; clarity lacks in role of governance in supporting outcomes/service delivery/key activities; (area for improvement – procurement processes in review)

We are confident that we have a good understanding of our governance and are able to identify our areas of strengths and weaknesses and recognise our ability for improvement but may lack the capacity for improvement. Areas where improvements have been identified and the model is capable of supporting improvement in other areas. Further improvement relies upon strategically aligning services.

We have identified areas of strengths and some areas of improvement which can quite readily be improved with some areas of improvement with complexity such as on a national platform.

6   ELECTED MEMBER BASED SELF-ASSESSMENT

Quality Indicator 4.1: Impact on the local community

Evaluation level: **Average Score: 3.3** **Between Satisfactory and Good** Lowest Score: 2.5 Between Weak and satisfactory Highest Score: 4.0 Good	This indicator relates to the direct impact that governance within the Council is having on communities whether geographic or of interest. It focuses on measuring the extent to which communities are stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive as a result of the support, resources and input from the organisation. It seeks to capture how well we know what is needed in our communities and how successful we are at responding. It takes a close look at what difference the services provided are making to improving and sustaining local communities and communities of interest

What did we find?

Working directly with communities, elected members have a unique insight of concerns, issue and needs of our communities. Improvements in communication was highlighted as being necessary between Services, Areas, Councillors and Strategic Leadership of the Council to enable more effective working, addressing and assessing needs and to identify and support linkages between community groups and service delivery. In particular, it was identified that many communities are confused on the role of the council, who to contact within their council area and this suggests a lack of transparency within the Council facing both internally and externally.   Both the Area Committee and Area Management structures were viewed as being highly positive and effective together with the Community Planning Partnership, albeit with concerns surrounding the current review of Area management structure. These structures provide a strong and important link between council policy, service delivery and public consultation and decision making. It is clear that governance structures exist but are not viewed as robust enough when considering communications within stakeholder groups both internal and external.

Strengths Identified:
- Area Committee Structure;
- Area Management structure;
- Parent/council meetings – can influence;
- Community Planning Partnership;
- Carbon budget;
- Community Learning and Development;
- Community Councils;
- Local Development Plan;

Areas for improvement
- One Aberdeenshire principles – embed 'right person, right place, right time';
- Creating linkage between groups and council activities (ladder of participation);
- Address expectation gap with greater transparency on role of the council;
- Actions from the Area Improvement Working Group;
- Actions Community Council Review;
- Engagement and Consultation;
- Budget setting process - help communities to understand processes;
- Participatory budgeting – support communities to understand processes;
- Improve clarity of non-political role of elected members within multi-member wards;

Action Plan
4.1.1 Review/revise and provide greater support and training to governance arrangement within Community Councils;
4.1.2 Create a log of areas that have Community Councils;
4.1.3 Develop methodology to identify smaller/rural communities in need of support;
4.1.4 Provide place based statistical assessments;
4.1.5 Improve linkages and communication between community engagement to prevent duplication;
4.1.6 Ensure a consistent approach across all services when interpreting community based legislation;
4.1.7 Ladder of Participation – create a robust model to identify what is meant by engagement, consultation and broadcasting of information and provide training to officers on appropriate and consistent usage of each;
4.1.8 Provide clarity on the role of the Council within communities;

Quality Indicator 8.2: Partnership Working

Evaluation level:	This indicator refers to the role of the Council in promoting, encouraging and undertaking effective partnership

Average Score: 3.5 **Between Satisfactory and Good** Lowest Score: 3.0 Satisfactory Highest Score: 4.0 Good	working with service users, staff, other stakeholders and partner agencies. A central goal of the Council is to secure and sustain cohesive and meaningful partnerships which will take forward its' strategic vision, values and aims. The indicator looks at how working in partnership improves impacts. It also explores efficient and equitable working within partnerships where each partner knows what to expect of the others.

What did we find?

Overall satisfaction with partnership working and a large number of strengths identified supporting robust governance practices being in place. Improved communications and transparency largely dominate the areas for improvement to encourage, enhance and support greater, more active, robust and effective partnership participation within community projects.

Strengths identified:

- Integrated Joint Board;
- Communities Committee – reporting by Police Scotland, Fire Service;
- Buchan Partnership;
- Community Planning Partnership;
- Energy for Waste plan;
- City Region Deal,
- Northern Alliance;
- Partners can take an active role in self-funding and resources with support from Council;
- Homestart;
- Northern Alliance;
- Town Centre First;
- Procurement process;
- Men's shed enabling

Areas for Improvement:

- Communication for partnership scope, role and aims;
- Website – providing information on and for partners/partnerships;
- Review budgetary expectations and/or resources potentially available to local/small partnership or volunteer groups;
- Participatory Budgeting - more involvement and support to achieve targets;

- Participation requests;

Action Plan:

8.2.1   Promote Partnership Policy/Framework across the organisation;
8.2.2   Hub/forum to share information on activities and outputs within partnerships;
8.2.3   Clarity of interpretation of national legislation and impact locally;
8.2.4   Develop a model to evaluate and assess the effectiveness and net positive benefit of partnership working;
8.2.5   Review governance arrangements around smaller partnerships including volunteering;
8.2.6   Improve framework governing participatory budgeting to provide greater support to achieve targets and improve participation requests;

Quality Indicator 9.1: Vision, values and aims

	This indicator relates to the governance of the corporate leadership within the Council and the way in which it exercises its functions through unity of purpose. It looks at how well we work internally and with partners to create a shared vision, sense of purpose and direction which are ambitious and challenging. It promotes positive attitudes to economic, social and cultural diversity and focuses on the extent to which vision, values and aims guide planning for improvement. It also ensures that the Council vision actively influences practice at the point of delivery.
Evaluation level: **Average Score: 3.3** **Between Satisfactory and Good** Lowest Score: 2.0 Weak Highest Score: 4.5 Between Good and very good	

What did we find?

In line with officer interpretation, it was recognised that the Council has positive governance practices in place with the development of principles, vision, aims and priorities. A number of elected members felt strongly that there is a disconnect and general dissatisfaction between having such documentation, and the actual enactment and support of those principles and aims. Timing of the scrutiny and decision making process was highlighted for improvement.

Strengths identified:
- Eleven council priorities;
- Promotion of Council Vision, values and aims;
- Community Councils – strong role in promoting, vision, values and aims;
- Principles - we know where we are going;
- Priority setting process;

Areas for improvement
- Residents can be unaware of who to contact within multi-member wards;
- Communication (silo working) including Councillors – e.g. multi-member ward can have a small minority of Councillors working for political aims rather than for the benefit of Aberdeenshire;
- Scrutiny cycles but can be improved;
- Timeliness of reports to committees - agenda setting;
- Linking priorities to report outputs;
- Time given for preparation for meetings;

Action Plan

9.1.1   Outline what governance practices surround the implementation/embedding of One Aberdeenshire Principles;

9.1.2   Provide a governance structure around the PPP process;

9.1.3   Support teams to create a cascaded vision to link and align with Council vision and priorities;

9.1.4   Increase visibility of our leadership in relation to supporting/embedding vision, values, aims;

9.1.5   Review timings of scrutiny and reporting cycle;

APPENDIX 1 – Supporting Evidence for Quality Indicators

Q.I. Ref	Document/Report	Link to Evidence	Validated as evidence
1.1	Council Plan	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-plan/	
1.1	Delivery Plans	Communities Priority Delivery Plan Education & Children's Services Priority Delivery Plan Infrastructure Services Priority Delivery Plan	
1.1	Community Plans	http://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk/your-area/	
1.1	Annual Performance Report	Annual Performance Report 2017/18	
1.1	Local Government Benchmarking Framework	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/strategy-and-performance/benchmarking/	
1.2	Scheme of Governance	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/scheme-of-governance/	
1.2	Committee Reports	http://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/Committees.aspx	
1.2	Standards Commission	https://www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk/codes-of-conduct	
1.2	Annual Audit Report	Aberdeenshire Council 2017/18 Annual Audit Report	
1.2	Complaints Handling Procedure	Complaints Process	
4.1.	Area management structure	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-us/service-structure/area-managers/	
4.1	Waste management strategy consultation	Waste Strategy 2019-2023 - post consultation approval	
4.1	Local development plan consultation	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/ldp-2021/main-issues-report/	
4.1	Health & Social Care Partnership – working inclusively within communities	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/ahscp/locality-plans-profiles/	
4.1.	Local housing strategy – tenant participation	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/housing/tenant-information/tenant-participation/ New approach to Tenant Participation https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/housing/tenant-information/tenant-participation/focus-groups/	
4.1	Self evaluation within Education and Children's Service – annual school,	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/parents-carers/involvement/parent-forums-and-councils/	

	parent/council level and out of area placements		
4.1	Capital Plan/Learning Estate Working Group – prioritisation of capital works	Internal process	
4.1	Community Learning and Development	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/communities-and-events/cld/	
4.1.	Mental Health Strategy	AHSCP Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019 -2024	
4.1	Building Standards Focus Group	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/23531/service-improvement-log-2018.pdf https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/building-standards/customer-charter/	
4.1	**Area Committee Structure;**	**http://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/**	
4.1	**Carbon budget;**	**https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environment/environmental-policy/**	
5.1	Local Development Plan – aligned to council priorities and delivery plans;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/aberdeenshire-local-development-plan-2017/	
5.1	Road Condition Index;	RCI will form part of RAMP, need reference to Committee paper same as example loaded further down page	
5.1	Health & Social Care Partnership – needs based assessments;	Integrated Aberdeenshire Annual Report	
5.1	Transportation – evidence led delivery;	THInC Local Transport Strategy Strategic Transport Appraisal	
5.1	Equality Impact Assessments;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equalities/equality-impact-assessments/	
5.1	Strength of processes in place for Adult and Child Protection;	Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2017/2018	
5.1	Delivery of internal audit plan as part of the	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-us/service-structure/finance	

	continuous improvement cycle;		
5.1	School Inspections reported to Area Committees;	https://education.gov.scot/what-we-do/inspection-and-review/reports	
5.1	Review of expenditure approval process;	Internal process	
5.1	Procurement – improved process although requires further amendment;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/business/procurement/	
5.1	Locality structure of Health & Social Care Partnership;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/ahscp/locality-plans-profiles/	
5.1	Roads Asset Management Plan;	Roads Asset Management Update	
5.1	Crisis management	Business Conitnuity Policy & Procedures	
8.1	Sharepoint and Office365 – promoting inclusive working;	Internal systems	
8.1	One Aberdeenshire – aspirational;	Internal process	
8.1	GIRFEC thematic groups;	GIRFEC Multi-Agency Governance and Groups	
8.1	Complaint handling process – monthly reporting to services;	Annual Complaints Report Internal process (SLT monthly report available on request)	
8.1	Monthly budget monitoring and quarterly reporting to Committee;	Budget Monitoring Procedures 17/18 Budget Monitoring Timetable 2018/19 http://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/committees.aspx?commid=499	
8.1	Strategic Leadership Team and Directorate Management Teams;	Internal structure	

8.1	Area management structure collaboration with services;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-us/service-structure/area-managers/	
8.1	Infrastructure Services Change Programme – review of potential for officers to multi-task within existing roles;	Infrastructure Services Change Programme	
8.1	Regeneration teams within Economic Development to deliver regeneration plans;	Regeneration in Aberdeenshire	
8.1	Introduction of community campus structure for multi-service working;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/communities-and-events/community-centres/	
8.1	Community Planning;	Community Planning Board	
8.1	Role of corporate communications team;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/news/	
8.1	Health & Social Care Partnership – cross-agency working	IJB Duties https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/21932/gdt24706-hscp-commissioning-plan-2017-2019.pdf	
8.2	**Communities Committee – reporting by Police Scotland, Fire Service;**	**http://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/**	
8.2	**Buchan Partnership;**	**https://www.bdp.scot/**	
8.2	**Partners can take an active role in self-funding and resources with support from Council;**	**http://www.bennachievisitorcentre.org.uk/trust.html**	
8.2	**Homestart;**	**https://www.home-start.org.uk/home-start-north-east-aberdeenshire**	

8.2	**Men's Shed**	**https://scottishmsa.org.uk/find-a-shed/**	
8.2	City Region Deal;	Aberdeen City Regional Deal http://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/committees.aspx?commid=499	
8.2	Northern Alliance;	https://northernalliance.scot/	
8.2	Health & Social Care Partnership – Alcohol and Drug Partnership;	https://aberdeenshireadp.org.uk/	
8.2	Community Planning Partnership;	http://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk/	
8.2	Waste Partnership with Moray and Aberdeen City Council;	https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/apps/news/release.aspx?newsid=4550	
8.2	Road Casualty Reduction;	https://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s75677/CHI.17.239%20Appendix%204%20-%20Road%20Casualty%20Reduction%20Strategy%20-%20Final.pdf	
8.2	Opportunity North East;	http://www.opportunitynortheast.com/	
8.2	NESTRANS;	https://www.nestrans.org.uk/	
8.2	Participatory budgets;	Participatory Budgeting - Delivering Better Outcomes	
8.2	Self directed support within social work;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/community-care/financial-support/self-directed-support/	
8.2	North of Scotland Trading Standards Partnership,	Trading Standards Team Plan (still in discussion re NSTSP)	
8.2	GIRFEC;	http://www.girfec-aberdeenshire.org/what-is-girfec/ http://www.girfec-aberdeenshire.org/who-we-are/multi-agency-governance-girfec-groups/	
8.2	Procurement;	Procurement Manual Internal Process	
8.2	Early Learning and Childcare Academy;	https://elcacademy.scot/	
8.2	Local Resilience Partnership;	https://www.readyscotland.org/my-community/ready-in-your-area/north-rrp/	
9.1	One Aberdeenshire Principles;	Internal process	
9.1	PPP process;	Internal process	
9.1	Council Plan;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-plan/	

9.1	Council Priorities;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-plan/council-priorities/	
9.1	Council Vision;	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-us/about-the-council/	
9.1	Service/Team Vision;	Internal process	
9.2	Directorate Management Teams – regular meetings to drive forward/discuss key projects;	Internal process	
9.2	Arrangements for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults strongly in place and supported;	Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2017/2018	
9.2	Cohesive leadership despite political differences to provide the best for Aberdeenshire;	http://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/	
9.2	Extended leadership forums;	Internal process	
9.2	Effective committees enabling effective decision making at a strategic level – limited referrals to Full Council;	http://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/	
9.2	Very good at external visibility, presence : social media, events, etc.	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/news/	
9.2	Induction and Training programme for newly elected members	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors/councillor-training/	