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| Title of Report: | Audit Proposals for Improvement – Quarterly Update |
| Committee Report Submitted To: | Audit Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | 08 June 2022 |
| For Decision or For Information | For Information |

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| Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23) | |
| Strategic Theme | - Improvement and Innovation - Healthy, Active and Engaged Communities |
| Outcome | Citizens and communities will be centrally involved in Council's planning and decision-making processes |
| Lead Officer | Head of Performance |

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| Budgetary Considerations | |
| Cost of Proposal | |
| Included in Current Year Estimates | YES/NO |
| Capital/Revenue | |
| Code | |
| Staffing Costs | |

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| Screening Requirements | Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals. | | |
| Section 75 Screening | Screening Completed: | Yes/No | Date: |
| | EQIA Required and Completed: | Yes/No | Date: |
| Rural Needs Assessment (RNA) | Screening Completed | Yes/No | Date: |
| | RNA Required and Completed: | Yes/No | Date: |
| Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) | Screening Completed: | Yes/No | Date: |
| | DPIA Required and Completed: | Yes/No | Date: |

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the progress against the Proposals for Improvement from Performance Improvement Audits since 2019.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The NI Audit Office, on an annual basis, publishes its Section 95 Audit and Assessment Report on Council's ongoing work to comply with its Performance Duty. A significant area of these reports is the Proposals for Improvement which highlight areas in which Council needs to demonstrate some progress to ensure its ongoing compliance with the Performance Duty. This report acts as a quarterly update against these proposals.

3.0 Quarterly update

- 3.1 Attached at Annex 1, please find an update report on the current progress against Audit report Proposals for Improvement.

4.0 Recommendation

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Audit Committee notes the contents of this report and uses this opportunity to raise any relevant questions or concerns.

Annex 1 – Progress against key proposals for improvement following NIAO Performance Audits

| 2019/1 Issue identified | December 2019 - Proposal for Improvement |
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| <p>Departmental plans are not agreed until several months after the start of the year</p> | <p>Annual Service Business Plans should be signed off at the beginning of each financial year. They should identify improvement arrangements and areas for continuous improvement and be regularly reported to relevant Committees.</p> |
| <p>June 2022 Update</p> | |
| <p>Council’s Business Planning process - Council’s Senior Management Team continues to lead on focused action to ensure that Business Plans are prepared and agreed much earlier in the business year. Services have been instructed to avoid submitting a list of regular outputs, and instead were directed to tie their work much closer to improvements, performance indicators and measurable outcomes. This work is progressing well and remains on track. In 2020. the Directorates did have their Business Plans completed and agreed within a few months of the post lockdown restart, and improvements can be evidenced in terms of the content and “outcomes focus” of Business Plans.</p> <p>This progress has continued into the business planning year of 2021/22, with the submission dates, Council agreement dates, and indeed the quality of the information provided, all demonstrating consistent improvements. Indeed, for the 2021/22 planning year, service and directorate business plans were agreed within the first 2 months of the financial year.</p> <p>This theme has continued, and all Directorates have had their Business Plans submitted and agreed at Committee level by May 2022. To maintain this positive performance, Council intends to continue to monitor and report against this Dec 2019 Proposal for Improvement.</p> | |

| 2019/2 Issue identified | December 2019 - Proposal for Improvement |
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| <p>A robust and flexible Management Information System (MIS) is needed to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inform budget and target setting. 2. Enable Services to manage and report on performance. 3. Enable Services and Committee members to challenge what Council does and how it is done. | <p>The Council should prioritise the development of its performance management system to enable the performance of all its functions and services to be measured, to support the identification of those areas which would benefit most from improvement, and to monitor and report on performance improvement across all services as well as specifically against Improvement objectives and projects</p> <p>The Council should consider if Performance Management software could improve the efficiency and effectiveness of collecting, analysing, monitoring, and reporting on performance indicators and measures across all services and functions</p> |
| June 2022 Update | |
| <p>Council's Performance Team, working closely with Councils' own Digital Services Team, have created, built and developed new Performance Management Software for Council named "Perform". Perform will be used to assist in the monitoring and reporting of progress against Performance Improvement information. The key performance indicators and improvement actions from annual Performance Improvement Plans as well as Service and Directorate Business Plans are used to populate the digital platforms created, and accessibility for staff and elected members can be granted at whatever stage is deemed necessary and appropriate. Furthermore, the APSE led national Performance Network Indicators have also been added to the suite of indicators that will be managed with the new software platform.</p> <p>The hard work carried out during 2020/21 has put the Council in a stronger position to better manage its information with regards to performance data.</p> <p>In 2021/22 a full suite of indicators was tracked through the PERFORM portal, and many technical lessons have been learned in terms of the ongoing development of this platform. The priority area for the development of PERFORM in 2022 is the training and integration of Service staff on to the portal to allow for direct use at the Service level.</p> <p>Out with the cost savings and flexibly bespoke nature of the new software, one of the additional benefits of this has been that the Digital Services team have been able to improve themselves and their skill set, adding further value to the organisation, and increasing the capacity and capability of their team.</p> | |

| 2022/1 Issue identified | February 2022 Proposal for improvement |
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| <p>Council needs to be able to clearly demonstrate that robust and transparent arrangements and processes are in place through which functions and services which would benefit most from improvement are identified, prioritised and selected. Whilst the process of development and shaping of improvement objectives has improved within Council, it is still primarily based on a top-down approach.</p> | <p>Council needs to further develop and refine arrangements and processes around the identification, prioritisation and selection of functions or services for improvement, with discussions and decisions made documented fully.</p> |
| <p>June 2022 Update</p> | |
| <p>Council's Performance Team has been engaging widely across Council and assisting the identification and formulation of Improvement Objectives. The focus of this process has been at the Head of Service level. This work has been conducted in the context of good work by Council to grow its Service level data with improved Business Plan reporting, the new utilisation of national APSE led benchmarking data and indeed the completion of a borough wide Citizens survey. These elements have ensured that Council has had more sources of reliable data on which to help identify areas for improvement.</p> <p>In June 2022 Council will agree and publish its annual Performance Improvement Plan on its website, along with its associated Consultation Report. Council will expand its Consultation report by adding in a section in relation to the identification of Improvement Objectives.</p> | |

| 2022/2 Issue Identified | February 2022 Proposal for Improvement |
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| <p>A number of Proposals for Improvement identified in previous years have yet to be fully implemented by Council. Whilst Council currently tracks recommendations arising from the NIAO's Financial Audit, implementation of Proposals for Improvement arising from the review of the Local Government Auditor's Performance Improvement annual audit and assessment work do not appear to be tracked.</p> | <p>Council should ensure that a suitable mechanism is developed to track the implementation of Proposals for Improvement.</p> <p>A progress report on implementation of all Proposals for Improvement should be provided to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee and the Audit Committee on a regular basis. Where a Proposal for Improvement is no longer relevant, it would be helpful for the reason to be provided in the progress report.</p> |
| <p>June 2022 Update</p> | |
| <p>Performance Team will bring an update report to Audit Committee and Corporate Policy and Resources Committee on a quarterly basis, beginning in June 2022.</p> <p>Performance Team will also explore the development of a new module on the PERFORM platform to assist in the tracking of these Proposals for Improvement</p> | |

| 2022/3 Issue identified | February 2022 Proposal for improvement |
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| <p>Establishing clear baseline data to identify areas of improvement, set targets and to measure performance improvement against is vital. Without these it will be difficult to clearly demonstrate improvement. Some of the Council's current improvement objectives are broad, may take several years to be delivered, and are focussed on outputs rather than outcomes. For example, agreeing funding and governance arrangements is an output, not an outcome i.e. a measurable difference made.</p> | <p>Where possible and relevant, clear baselines, targets and KPIs should be in place for all Improvement Objectives, projects, and self-imposed indicators. Council should avoid improvement objectives that are excessively broad or that may take several years to demonstrate an improvement for citizens. Focus should be on outcomes rather than outputs.</p> |
| <p>June 2022 Update</p> | |
| <p>This area remains a focus for Council. Progress in this area can be evidenced in the development of Service Level Business Plans over the past few years.</p> <p>Furthermore, this approach is being applied to the ongoing development of the Council's 2022/23 Performance Improvement Plan and will be evident in the final report, due to be published by 30 June 2022.</p> | |