

Agenda Item	7.
Report No	CPB 02/19

Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) of Highland Council,
Partnership Self-Assessment
Report on behalf of the Chief Officers Group

The Board is asked to:

- Review the findings and consider if there is a need for any improvement actions as a result of the self-assessment.
- Note that the survey helps prepare Board members and officers for any request by the Highland Council's external auditors to interview partners.
- Note that external scrutiny of the partnership arrangements of all statutory community planning partners is a growing area of interest.

1. Background

- 1.1 A Best Value Assurance Report is a strategic assessment of the Council carried out by external assessors. The focus of the audit covers areas such as leadership, finances, workforce planning, performance and partnership working. It is increasingly likely that all statutory community planning partners can expect a degree of scrutiny around their partnership working within their own external assessments.
- 1.2 Highland Council will undergo a Best Value review starting in late March 2019 and as anticipated this will look at the Council's partnership working. It is also anticipated that there will be a request to interview partners and if possible observation of a Board or COG meeting.
- 1.3 A self –assessment in form of an electronic survey was circulated to the Board, COG and Community Partnership chairs. The assessment was prepared by the Improvement Service and has been used by Councils to assist in preparing for a Best Value review by way of self –assessment with partners. As the Board has not undergone a self-assessment for some time the survey also offers the opportunity to reflect on current partnership arrangements and progress.

2. Analysis of Survey Results

- 2.1 Overall there were 12 responses from COG and Community Partnership Chairs with none from Board members. An overview of results shows that generally there is consensus that the CPP:

- Has a joint vision and integrates joint objectives into planning (HOIP);
- That there is commitment from all to community planning and partnership working along with joint priorities which strengthen the partnership;
- That locality plans are in place which identify priorities, outcomes and timelines;
- That there are clear roles, lines of accountability and communication within the partnership;
- That the partnership understands communities needs and aspirations;
- If there was evidence of a commitment from partners and communities to capacity building and empowerment through initiatives such as transfer of assets and participatory budgeting;

There were mixed views on:

- Whether there were effective governance arrangements in place in relation to scrutiny and accountability;
- That actions are in place to deliver the HOIP;
- That the partnership can evidence achievements gained through community engagement;
- Whether the partnership can demonstrate effectiveness in delivering real outcomes and impact for the people and communities in their area – with several saying they don't know.
- That there is evidence that demonstrates the partnership is doing to improve outcomes and reporting to stakeholders is regular and effective.

There was disagreement that:

- There is evidence of a consistent and coordinated approach to community engagement – especially those that are hard to reach;
- There is a clear understanding on the resources needed to deliver partnership priorities than can demonstrate how well the Partnership aligns funding, assets and staffing in a sustainable framework;
- There is a clear framework for planning and budgeting that includes detailed and realistic plans linked to resources to achieve the aims of the CPP;
- The partnership plans budgets and finances together to ensure a clear picture of the overall resources available and that the Partnerships resources were well aligned with strategy, priorities and the community planning vision.

2.2 Examples of positive results and good practice include:

- Breakthrough achievements
- Development of the HOIP and local planning arrangements
- Good collaborative culture, communications and strong chairing
- Chief Officer Groups (COG) its operation to support and take direction from the Board
- The review and restructure of the CPP to support HOIP delivery
- Strong governance arrangements in place though COG and the Board

2.3 Areas for improvement suggested:

- Dedicated resources at CPP and Community Partnership level
- Build in time to review and share best practice
- CPP remit is currently wider than HOIP - assess if this is sustainable/ manageable?
- Strengthen further links to communities
- Strengthen accountability to wider public/communities
- Continue introduction of peer reviews of Community Partnerships
- Strengthen evidence base for work and performance reporting

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The self-assessment process has offered a timely opportunity for the Board to reflect on the community planning partnership and its arrangements. Many of the issues highlighted around resources, engagement and accountability are already being discussed by the Board. The Board may wish to consider if the assessment has identified areas where further improvement actions are required.

Evelyn Johnston
Corporate Audit & Performance Manager
Highland Council

On behalf of the Chief Officers Group