

The report concludes that the Council has delivered a number of ambitious projects since the Council's last Best Value report, in particular in relation to schools, community campuses, housing and transport.

Other key points in the report include:

- The council still needs to focus on some key requirements for Best Value, including financial sustainability, financial management and transformation.
- There are risks around the council's successful delivery of change due to its past track record and the scale of the challenge in both the medium and longer term.
- Elected members need to work together to urgently agree the medium-term financial strategy and transformation programme.
- Performance across services is mixed and the council is among middle performing councils using benchmarking indicators.
- The council makes good use of data to understand and improve its performance.
- Partnership working continues to be a strength at the council.

The report includes Accounts Commission Findings and a set of recommendations for the Council. The recommendations are detailed below and have informed an improvement action plan which is monitored regularly.

- As a matter of urgency, officers and elected members need to work together to develop and agree the medium-term financial strategy and progress the council's transformation plans.
- The council needs to develop and sustain more constructive relationships between members and between members and officers. It needs to implement effective cross-party governance arrangements to ensure that it delivers the medium-term financial strategy and transformation plans.
- The council needs to ensure that workforce planning reflects the medium-term financial strategy.
- The council should undertake a review of its capital programme, to ensure that the timeframes for delivery are achieved going forward and that monitoring and reporting mechanisms are enhanced to drive more accurate analysis and planning around capital work.
- The council need to continue to implement financial planning arrangements to address budget gaps, underpinned by robust financial budgeting and monitoring arrangements.
- The council should refine its vision in light of the outcome of consultation work through the Services with Communities transformation work stream and to ensure that it focuses its activity most effectively.
- Elected members need to exercise appropriate scrutiny at all times, take ownership for personal development plans and take up relevant training opportunities.
- The council should continue to build on positive elements of community empowerment. It should look to increase community ownership of local neighbourhood plans and work with communities to improve how they monitor progress.