

Agenda



Listening Learning Leading

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Date: 29 January 2024

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A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee

**WILL BE HELD ON TUESDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2024 AT 6.00 PM
ABBEY HOUSE, ABBEY CLOSE, ABINGDON OX14 3JE.**

To watch this virtual meeting, follow this link to the council's YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTj2pCic8vzucpzlaSWE3UQ>

Members of the Committee:

Ken Arlett (Chair)

Mocky Khan (Vice-Chair)
David Turner
Jo Robb

Tony Worgan
Leigh Rawlins
James Barlow

Kate Gregory

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Vivien Williams
Head of Legal and Democratic (Interim)

1. Apologies for absence

To record apologies for absence and the attendance of substitute members.

2 Urgent business and chair's announcements

To receive notification of any matters which the chair determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the chair.

3 Declaration of interests

To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and non-registrable interests or any conflicts of interest in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

4 Minutes (Pages 4 - 8)

To adopt and sign as a correct record the committee minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2023.

5 Work schedule and dates for all South and Joint scrutiny meetings (Pages 9 - 10)

To review the attached scrutiny work schedule. Please note, although the dates are confirmed, the items under consideration are subject to being withdrawn, added to or rearranged without further notice.

6 Public participation

To receive any questions or statements from members of the public that have registered to speak.

REPORTS AND ISSUES FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 Budget setting 2024/25

For Scrutiny Committee to consider the report of the Head of Finance on Budget Setting 2024/25, and make any recommendations to Cabinet (report to follow).

8 Corporate Plan 2024-2028 - to agree an approach to the new corporate plan (Pages 11 - 29)

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to review the approach outlined to develop the Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 and provide feedback or recommendations to Cabinet.

9 Future direction of Cornerstone Arts Centre, Didcot (Pages 30 - 225)

Scrutiny Committee will be reviewing and providing feedback on the draft Cabinet report considering the Future Direction of Cornerstone Arts Centre, Didcot.

10 Exclusion of the public

To consider whether to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business under Part 1 of Schedule 12A Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 on the grounds that:

- (i) it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1-7 Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and
- (ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

In this agenda item, Scrutiny Committee can consider confidential appendices from the report: Future direction of Cornerstone, Didcot, if they require this.



Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Listening Learning Leading

Scrutiny Committee

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 6 DECEMBER 2023 AT 6.00 PM

THIS MEETING WAS IN PERSON AT ABBEY HOUSE, ABINGDON OX14 3JE.

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Mocky Khan (Chair), David Turner, Tony Worgan, Leigh Rawlins and James Barlow

Officers: Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer)

Remote attendance:

Councillors: Katherine Keats-Rohan

Officers: Simon Hewings (Head of Finance), Mark Hewer (Infrastructure and Development Team Leader) and Richard Spraggett (Strategic Finance Officer)

Guests: Cabinet members Pieter-Paul Barker (Finance) Councillor David Rouane and Anne-Marie Simpson

24 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Kate Gregory, Ken Arlett and Jo Robb.

25 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The chair had no urgent business but paid tribute to the of the Head of Legal and Democratic, who recently passed away. A moment's silence followed.

26 Declaration of interests

None.

27 Minutes

On page three of the minutes, fourth bullet point, a member raised whether a response was had from the Deputy Chief Executive (DCE) for Transformation and Operations – in her absence, a response was given via Simon Hewings, Head of Finance, who was present. The feedback from the DCE was that the cost centre was labelled for the Climate Team, but in reality, it also covered the Insight and Policy team, where they were a number of staff vacancies and secondments. The budgets will be segregated in future for clarity.

Resolved:

The minutes on 7 November were agreed as a correct record by committee, and the chair shall sign them as such.

28 Work schedule and dates for all South and Joint scrutiny meetings

Members did raise the issue of a long agenda for the 6 February meeting. It was confirmed that the items will be interlinked, but that the weight of the agenda would be considered. It was possible to have two February meetings if desired. Scrutiny do need time to consider papers effectively and reasonable time to discuss in a meeting.

Topics were raised for the work programme – including;

1. Inviting Thames Water as a guest. Chair clarified that we would need to explain why we want to speak to external parties and give ample time to invite them in. A member added that we should also speak to the Environment Agency at the same time.

2. CIL monies that were unallocated – was it appropriate to call in those external partners involved in unallocated funds. Chair added that this may be a Joint Audit and Governance Committee. Another member added that it could be a duplication of work for some partners.

3. Can we look at procurement strategy? Officers would need to comment on what committee was planned to be involved.

It was noted that the budget date for Council was moved back one week.

There was discussion about whether there would be separate scrutiny meetings on the Joint Local Plan (JLP) rather than Joint Scrutiny, it was explained that all members can speak to and debate the JLP and that there were many stages and at those stages the appropriate scrutiny committee will be involved.

Resolved:

The committee noted the work programme.

29 Public participation

None.

30 SODC Community Infrastructure Levy Pilot Grant Fund Policy

Cabinet Member for Finance and corporate assets introduced the report.

We had raised significant funds, and now we had the challenge of filling in the infrastructure gap. He explained that infrastructure such as roads, health and schools was dealt with under Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and Integrated Care Board (ICB) CIL funds. The topic of this grant scheme, for SODC and Parishes and Towns, was where community facilities come into play. This scheme aims to help towns and parishes to apply for such funds.

The CIL was portioned as follows:

- 50 percent to Oxfordshire County Council for delivery of the following infrastructure types: education, transport, libraries and household recycling centres

- 20 percent for public health care infrastructure
- 30 percent retained by the district council for infrastructure that it is responsible for, such as leisure and other community facilities

Development and Infrastructure Team Leader was present to answer questions. He added that not for profit organisations, third parties can apply also – such as sports clubs. The report was comprehensive in terms of explaining the scheme, and questions were welcomed.

Committee comments were as follows:

- Members were supportive of this scheme.
- Discussion was had on leisure centre facilities and having a better reach. Section 19 was queried – can we have full income and deductions for planned expenditure added for clearer analysis. Officer responded that the table was projected end of year balance for SODC and factors in spend and income. It was difficult to factor in how much will come in, with the slowing down of planning applications. The further breakdown was available. The income was a conservative prediction as there were variables out of our control. A member considered that the breakdown in the report would be helpful.
- Had consideration been given to 60 percent of SODC residents living in rural areas, and whether these residents get a fair share of CIL funds. Member asked if transport links to more urban leisure centres could be part of this? Cabinet member added that this approach should help with this issue, as CIL from urban areas can be spend widely across the district. The officer replied on the transport suggestion – he explained that the spend must be on physical infrastructure but suggested that Towns and Parishes could look at spending their funds on bus links to centres, for example. This scheme does support Towns and Parishes to apply for more funds for infrastructure projects, but transport would be for Towns and Parishes to arrange from their own funds not SODC, as Town and Parish funding portions had a wider remit.
- A member asked if figures for years three, four and five were complete? Can we purchase equipment with this funding? Officer replied to the first question by saying that there were more gaps as we looked further ahead. More might materialise later, and this was the best position provided for now. In response to the equipment question, the officer responded that this would be possible as part of delivering and kitting out a new facility (table, chairs, IT, sports). Applicants could not use SODC funds for existing centres, but Towns and Parishes could use their wider remit to apply for these under their funding portions.
- What percentage of the CIL income or expenditure does the £750,000 represent? Officer replied that based on the last 12 month's CIL collection, this represented 47 percent of our 30 percent CIL income. We will monitor how sustainable this figure was. Currently, the figure represents 19 percent of the current CIL balance overall.
- Cabinet member explained that this was a pilot scheme, and we were hoping to achieve a wide range of projects with it.
- Point six: five percent for administration – it was explained that the five percent was being fully used and was the maximum. If it could be lowered it would, but currently it was needed.
- The minimum project value of £75,000 was queried, could it be £50,000? Officer replied that exceptions could be considered by the Cabinet Member if the project fell slightly outside of the criteria but was judged to be of community value. £75,000 was the minimum value as the scheme was meant to deliver bigger projects, and

this figure aligned with the maximum threshold for smaller funding schemes available. An expression of interest stage was planned and would help tease out this sort of information.

- This would go to Cabinet on 18th December 2023, and we hoped to launch in early 2024. There was a window for us to fit in with other grant schemes in order not to significantly delay this new scheme.
- Discussed the link to the Leisure Strategy
- Member raised whether the further tranches may be better at a different time of year over January – this would be a test to see how it works and whether there will be further tranches and when.
- Scoring matrix: it was driven by appropriate use of funds as there were CIL criteria attached to the funds obtained. We also looked at Corporate Plan priorities, such as climate. Part of the criteria was that the application for an infrastructure project needed to result in completion of a project.
- Para 21, page 18: four-week deadline clause to claim funds. Member added that we needed to stress this deadline to ensure its met as some councils will not meet regularly enough to push this through.
- Officer explained that we were a member of a forum of councils that operate CIL. One other council had a similar scheme – Cornwall County.
- Member raised communication as it was crucial to the scheme's success. Officer had already got the Comms team onboard, and they had done similar with the Capital Grants Scheme. We also produced some clear guidance to go with the communications.
- The scoring matrix was discussed further to help understand its workings. There were multiple categories where a project could score a nine. Suggestions were made to the criteria wording.

In debate, members were in support of the scheme, and that it complemented other schemes. It had the potential to improve District coverage of infrastructure. Members supported some adjustments to the criteria but felt that it was thoughtfully put together. They discussed gaps in provision, and a member noted that where there was a provision filled, we had to look at it relatively, as due to population increases, another similar facility may be deemed necessary in the same area, to meet population needs. A member was glad to see that the policy stated that planning permission must be obtained in advance. We must ensure that the communications are strong and take learnings from a suggested 12-month pilot.

Committee proposed the below, which was seconded and agreed when put to the vote.

Resolved:

The Scrutiny Committee noted and supported Cabinet recommendations(s) as follows, and confirmed that they approve of the scheme:

- a) That Cabinet considers whether or not to approve the pilot scheme policy to award grants for delivery of infrastructure funded by the council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allocation, attached in appendix one, and:
- b) If Cabinet supports the pilot scheme policy, that it delegates authority to the relevant head of service in consultation with the relevant cabinet member to make minor amendments to the standard terms and conditions of the scheme.

The committee also made other suggestions for consideration of the officers and Cabinet member. The committee asked for the following amends to the report based upon their discussion and proposed amends to wording on the criteria and elaboration on finance:

Recommendations:

1. Clarity wanted on point 19 and its table – showing income and expenditure
2. On the scoring matrix, officer to check with the Climate Action Team on the addition of “climate adaptation” to column G scoring.
3. On the scoring matrix, column B, committee want inclusion of gaps in provision. Committee discussed inclusion of active travel as part of the scoring matrix, to help tackle gaps in provision.
4. Committee asked for consideration of communication of the pilot scheme – how will this be communicated? Committee also suggested a 12-month pilot scheme, to take learnings from and either rerun the scheme or make adaptations.

The meeting closed at 8.21 pm

Chair

Date

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Scrutiny work programme

15 January 2024



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MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
Joint Scrutiny Committee 29 Jan 2024	Garden waste permit approach		Sue Cooper and Andrea Powell	Mark Minion mark.minion@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 6 Feb 2024	Budget setting		Pieter-Paul Barker	Simon Hewings simon.hewings@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 6 Feb 2024	Cornerstone		Pieter-Paul Barker and Maggie Filipova-Rivers	Andrew Busby andrew.busby@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 6 Feb 2024	Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028 approach		Andrea Powell	Tim Oruye tim.oruye@southandvale.gov.uk

MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
Scrutiny Committee 13 May 2024	Corporate plan quarterly performance report	When quarterly performance management reports are reported to Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee members will be asked to review the report and confirm to the Scrutiny Chair if there are any elements of the report they wish to discuss at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting. The relevant Cabinet lead and contact officer will be notified.	Andrea Powell	Tim Oruye tim.oruye@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee 20 May 2024	Didcot Garden Town strategies	Scrutiny will review a report that will update on the DGT Delivery Plan and seek specific approvals from Cabinet for relevant strategies or plans	Robin Bennett	Jayne Bolton jayne.bolton@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee 20 May 2024	Transformation programme update		Andrea Powell	Tim Oruye tim.oruye@southandvale.gov.uk
Items for future meetings (dates to be determined)				
Joint Scrutiny Committee 25 Mar 2024	Future items for Joint Scrutiny to be confirmed			

Cabinet Report



Listening Learning Leading

Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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Wards affected: All

South Cabinet member responsible: Councillor Andrea Powell

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To: Scrutiny

Date: 6 February 2024

To: Cabinet

Date: 15 February 2024

South Oxfordshire District Council Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 Approach

Recommendation for Scrutiny Committee

The committee is asked to review the approach outlined to develop the Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 and provide feedback or recommendations to Cabinet (meeting on 15 February 2024)

Recommendation for Cabinet

For Cabinet to endorse the approach to develop the new Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028

Purpose of report

1. To seek endorsement from Cabinet on the proposed approach to develop the next corporate plan 2024 to 2028

Corporate objectives

2. A new corporate plan for the period 2024-2028 is required to establish a strategic vision, ambitions and priorities for the council.

Background

3. South Oxfordshire District Council currently has a corporate plan 2020 - 2024 that was adopted at full council on 8 October 2020. This is now within its final year so timely to develop a new plan to set the direction for the next 4 years.
4. There are statutory functions and services that a district council must provide. These therefore must feature in any strategic planning through the lifespan of the new corporate plan.
5. The corporate plan should reflect the financial landscape of a council, that sits alongside the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). For the corporate plan to be a credible strategic framework, it can be aspirational and ambitious but it must be affordable and able to be appropriately budgeted for.
6. It is envisaged that the new corporate plan will:
 - Establish the strategic direction for South Oxfordshire District Council for the period 2024-2028, informed by Councillors, Strategic Management Team (SMT), service areas, stakeholders and residents.
 - Provide a framework to align council work to priorities, with a recognition that not all identified priorities will be equal in scale and scope.
 - Target resources towards the priorities identified in the plan, aligning projects undertaken by the council to directly contribute to the delivery of the plan.
 - Showcase opportunities that could either be delivered directly, delivered in partnership or could be influenced by the council, as appropriate.
 - Lead a hierarchy of plans that highlight how the work of individual officers, teams, service areas and wider partnerships, contribute to overall council performance and progress against its objectives – the golden thread.
 - Increase residents' awareness of services the council provides and its ambitions.
 - Cater to the district's particular needs while maintaining flexibility to respond to new situations as they emerge.
 - Provide a performance monitoring and reporting framework to improve transparency and accountability and report on progress towards our strategic goals and objectives.

Approach and draft themes

7. In July 2023, an all member briefing introducing the current corporate plan, the performance reporting framework and initial plans for the development of a new corporate plan was held.
8. In October 2023, Cabinet members and representatives of the Strategic Management Team (SMT) met to review the current corporate plan, evaluate its strengths, areas for development and ideas to improve and inform a future plan.
9. The discussions also began to outline the approach to progress the next Corporate Plan 2024-28. In summary, key milestones of approach is as follows;

- Develop draft themes and illustrative projects
- Public and stakeholder engagement on the draft themes
- Analyse the feedback received
- Develop the draft corporate plan
- Corporate Plan 2024-2028 adopted by full Council

10. The development of draft themes considered the status of current priorities and projects, contractual commitments, statutory and legal obligations, service delivery and emerging influences and policies.
11. It is proposed that an engagement campaign on the draft themes and illustrative projects is undertaken to receive the views of the public and interested stakeholders. Analysis of the feedback received and further co-productive work would lead to the development of a fully drafted corporate plan. The draft corporate plan would then be subject to usual democratic and scrutiny process before adoption of the final plan by Full Council in October 2024.
12. The proposed draft themes brought forward by Cabinet members to form the basis of new Corporate Plan are set out in the table below.

THEME ONE: Action on climate change and nature recovery
THEME TWO: Inclusion, accessibility and accountability
THEME THREE: Thriving and healthy communities
THEME FOUR: Homes and infrastructure that meet local need
THEME FIVE: Financial stability and innovative transformation

13. Brief descriptions of each of the draft themes above, including some illustrative current and potential projects are appended to this report at appendix 1.
14. The aim for the final plan when adopted, is to make it more accessible, interactive and be provided in a number of different formats. These will be explored further during the development process.

Scope of Engagement

15. It is proposed to undertake a public and stakeholder engagement campaign for a period of up to 6 weeks following endorsement of the approach.
16. Internal and external engagement on the draft themes of the Corporate Plan 2024-28 will help to:
- Convey the priorities and aspirations of the elected administration
 - Test out the themes and illustrative projects.
 - Better understand and respond to the needs of local people, councillors, officers, businesses and partner organisations.
 - Facilitate the district to be better informed about the councils work and encourage participation in local democratic decision making.
 - Enable residents to influence their “place” which could harness the increased sense of community spirit and local resilience.
 - Increase transparency and be more accountable for what we do.

17. Some examples of audiences to be engaged with include;

- External: residents, businesses, town and parish councils, community groups, seldom heard audiences, younger people, other statutory bodies
- Internal: Councillors, Climate Emergency Ecological Action Committee (CEEAC), Council officers.

18. Some examples of proposed engagement activities and channels to be used include;

- An online survey using a new engagement platform
- Community outreach events
- Engaging at venues where groups are likely to meet for example community centres, coffee shops, leisure centres
- Interactive briefing sessions for officers and councillors
- Use of social media to promote the campaign

19. Further details of the audiences, proposed engagement activities and channels to be used are available in the Communications and Engagement Plan - copy to be appended to this report. (Appendix 2)

Timeline

20. An indicative timeline for the development of the plan is setting out key dates and activities are as follows:

- February 2024 – Scrutiny committee review the approach and draft themes
- February 2024 - Cabinet endorse the approach.
- March to April 2024 – Engagement on draft themes.
- May 2024 – Analysis of engagement feedback
- June to August 2024 – Development of the draft corporate plan and accompanying performance measures
- September / October 2024 - Scrutiny Committee meeting to review the full draft corporate plan and performance reporting framework.
- September / October 2024 - Cabinet meeting to approve corporate plan, performance reporting framework and recommend to Council.
- October 2024 – Full Council meeting to formally adopt the new Corporate Plan.
- October 2024 – Corporate plan comes into effect.

21. To note, while the new plan is being developed, the annual performance reports for the existing corporate plan will also be completed.

Options

22. It is not a requirement for a council to have a corporate plan however not having one would severely inhibit the council's ability to achieve its strategic objectives and priorities while undertaking its statutory functions delivering essential services for the district.

23. To endorse the proposed approach with recommendations.

24. To not endorse the proposed approach.

Financial Implications

25. There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report but there needs to be recognition that the new plan will sit alongside the MTFP.
26. As the Corporate Plan 2024-28 progresses and gets adopted it is likely that existing resources and budget will need to be redirected and refocused towards the outcomes within it. All future budget proposals will be subject to the usual democratic and scrutiny process.

Legal Implications

27. There are no legal implications arising from this report. Legal implications may arise in respect of individual projects or delivery of services while implementing the Corporate Plan 2024-28.

Climate and ecological impact implications

28. There are no climate and ecological implications arising from this report. It is envisaged the development of the new corporate plan will set the strategic vision and direction for the future delivery of projects and initiatives to address climate and ecological issues and achieve better outcomes, including through a new Climate and Nature Recovery Action Plan.

Equalities implications

29. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and there are no implications identified. This will be reviewed further with regard to the proposed Engagement and Feedback exercise that will be undertaken.

Risks

30. The Corporate Plan 2024-28 will be a strategic framework that will be underpinned by a series of programmes of work and projects. As the underpinning work progresses, risks will be detailed in individual project risk registers or captured in the corporate risk register and be subject to the usual democratic and scrutiny process.
31. It is speculated that a General Election may be called during 2023/24 quarter 4, which may impact the proposed stakeholder engagement phase of the development of the Corporate Plan 2024-28. The proposed engagement is scheduled to launch ahead of a potential pre-election period but this will be closely monitored by the project team.

Other Implications

32. There are no other implications arising from this report.

Conclusion

33. A new Corporate Plan for the period 2024-2028 is required to establish a strategic vision, ambition and priorities for the council. It is envisaged that the development of this plan will support the alignment of resources to council priorities and increase residents' awareness of the work the council is doing and what the council aims to achieve. An indicative timeline has been set out to illustrate timescales for engagement, development of a draft plan, governance and the adoption of the plan at full Council.
34. A number of draft themes and illustrative projects have been developed by Cabinet Members, informed by SMT, to form the basis of a new Corporate Plan 2024-28.
35. The proposed engagement presents opportunity to be creative and imaginative building on established and emerging techniques that could potentially extend the councils reach and increase participation to co-produce the next corporate plan.

Background Papers

South Corporate Plan 2024-2028 – Themes and Descriptions

THEME ONE: Action on climate change and nature recovery
THEME TWO: Inclusion, accessibility and accountability
THEME THREE: Thriving and healthy communities
THEME FOUR: Homes and infrastructure that meet local need
THEME FIVE: Financial stability and innovative transformation

THEME ONE: Action on Climate Change and Nature Recovery

Preparing and adapting our communities for the impact of climate change, building resilience and restoring our natural environment are effective ways of responding to the climate and ecological crises facing us all. We can show leadership by reducing our own carbon emissions, by providing support for local projects and by setting policies which ensure development makes a positive contribution to our environment. Our priorities will be detailed in the forthcoming new Climate and Nature Recovery Action plan which is being developed in tandem with the Corporate Plan.

Example existing projects to carry forward:

- Review and achieve our own zero carbon target and support others to achieve the district carbon target of net zero using the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire framework.
- Promote the circular economy (reduce, reuse, recycle), including in our waste management contracts.
- Mitigate climate change through planning and land use, enhancing biodiversity on our own land and seek to strengthen the planning system to enforce environmental standards.

Potential new projects:

- In partnership with the Local Nature Partnership, aim to increase the amount of land protected for nature and public access.
- With partners, explore opportunities to support a home retrofit programme to enable residents to improve the energy-efficiency of their homes.
- Work towards producing and enabling the production of more renewable energy in the district

THEME TWO: Inclusion, Accessibility and Accountability

We remain committed to robust governance and complete transparency in our decision-making and focused on ensuring equality of access to all the services provided by the Council. We aim to be a “Council in the Community” by engaging openly with Town & Parish Councils, local voluntary organisations and other groups representing different sectors of society. We will foster a culture of inclusion both within the Council and with external contacts, celebrating diversity and championing lesser-heard voices. Our priorities include extending the reach of our public engagement activities and supporting community-led input into our Garden Community delivery plans for Didcot and Berinsfield.

Example existing projects to carry forward:

- Apply good governance and transparency in all our working and decision making, exploring optimal structures and mechanisms for best practice in local government.

- Engage effectively with residents, parish and town councils and other community organisations, using plain English in our communications and using appropriate methods and technologies to ensure equal and fair access for all.

Potential new projects:

- Increase engagement in all consultation projects, particularly within “lesser heard” communities, younger residents and other under-represented sections of society.

THEME THREE: Thriving and Healthy Communities

Our vision for South Oxfordshire is built on shared wellbeing and prosperity, with thriving, active communities and equality of access to local resources and services. We will continue to offer information, advice and direct intervention on issues such as the cost-of-living crisis, healthy living, community safety and referrals to partner agencies. We will ensure equitable access to leisure facilities, arts & cultural programmes, recognising their contribution to wellbeing and community cohesion. We want to regenerate Didcot and Berinsfield, bringing employment opportunities, spaces for nature, new homes, community facilities and active travel infrastructure. We will continue to work with thousands of local employers to enhance skills, access funding and facilitate peer networking to enhance South Oxfordshire as an exciting place to live, work and prosper.

Example existing projects to carry forward:

- Provide advice on access to grants, training and diversification programmes, helping local businesses to build agility and resilience.
- Use our planning powers to preserve our valuable green spaces, particularly in urban areas.

Potential new projects:

- Launch a new Arts & Culture Strategy, including a sustainable future for Cornerstone.
- Strengthen support and wellbeing programmes for our more vulnerable residents.
- Implement projects as identified within the Didcot Garden Town and Berinsfield Garden Village delivery plans.

THEME FOUR: Homes and Infrastructure that Meet Local Needs

A key role for the Council is to ensure that local housing needs are met with a strategic development plan that takes account of the needs of current and future generations, while minimising the impact on the environment. Our developing Joint Local Plan with Vale of White Horse Council will seek to ensure delivery of appropriate new housing and essential infrastructure until 2041, aiming to protect our precious green spaces and to encourage more sustainable lifestyles. Our Housing Delivery Strategy and Action Plan will enable us to provide more genuinely affordable homes for social rent, complementing those delivered by commercial housing developers as required by our planning policies. We will use infrastructure levy funds received from developers to build much-needed facilities to enhance quality of life and wellbeing, with a particular focus on fair distribution and equality of access.

Example existing projects to carry forward:

- Encouraging sustainable transport solutions that prioritise walking, cycling and public transport to reduce car dependency and air pollution.
- Work with our communities to optimise and allocate infrastructure funds to projects based on local need and growing demands.

Potential new projects:

- Develop a new Local Plan with Vale of White Horse Council with progressive and evidence-based policies to secure an appropriate housing mix, affordable homes and sustainable construction methods.
- Deliver new council owned homes with a focus on quality of design, affordability and local requirements.

THEME FIVE: Financial Stability and Innovative Transformation

Residents in South Oxfordshire will continue to receive excellent value for money from a high-performing Council which is continually innovating to deliver high quality, user-friendly services. Our “invest to save” policy will be followed, particularly to ensure long-term financial stability, cost savings and reduced carbon emissions. Our Transformation programme will deliver efficiencies and improvements across all service areas, improving accessibility for residents and modernising our ways of working. We will achieve this by exploring options to bring more services in-house and refreshing our technology platforms to make them fit-for-purpose and adaptable as our services evolve. Our recent success in securing external funding for new programmes will continue to protect our financial viability, and we will continue to exercise strong and responsible stewardship over all public funds held by the Council.

Example existing projects to carry forward:

- Develop and implement an innovative Transformation Strategy to diversify our revenue streams, improve our effectiveness and secure our ongoing viability.
- Invest responsibly and ethically with the Climate Emergency at the heart of what we do.
- Maximise external funding opportunities to support our services and to enrich our leisure, sporting and community activities.

Potential new projects:

- Successfully transition from current contractual obligations to a new combination of internal and external arrangements that deliver best value for money and quality of service to our residents.
- Resolve medium to long-term office accommodation solution for the Council, recognising post-Covid working practices, financial viability and customer service requirements.
- Manage and utilise council assets and funds responsibly to achieve financial and community benefits.

Corporate Plan 2024-28 Communications and Engagement Plan

Project name	Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028 Approach
Objectives of project	Stage 1: To launch a six-week public engagement on the key themes for the new corporate plan 2024-28 Stage 2: To report back on next steps Stage 3: To promote the final corporate plan 2024-28
Link to other projects/Strategies	Joint Local Plan Climate Action Plan
Current corporate plan strategic themes	<p>South</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness and accountability <p>Vale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in an open and inclusive way
Date created	November 2023
Last updated	January 2024

Background information/scene setting

Both councils have existing corporate plans that set out six strategic themes. These both run until October 2024:

- <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/about-the-council/corporate-plan>
- <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/about-the-council/corporate-plan>

The councils now need to refresh these plans and look ahead to 2024 – 2028. The aim is to have new plans in place for October 2024. The plans remain as separate documents for South and Vale.

The existing themes are:

South	Vale
Protect and restore our natural world	Providing the homes people need
Openness and accountability	Tackling the Climate Emergency
Action on the Climate Emergency	Building healthy communities
Improved economic and community well-being	Building stable finances
Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs	Working in partnership
Investment that rebuilds our financial viability	Working in an open and inclusive way

The new Corporate Plans will form an overarching, high level vision which informs the work we do and underpins all other council strategies and action plans

The proposed new themes are:

South Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028:
Action on climate change and nature recovery
Inclusion, accessibility and accountability
Thriving and healthy communities
Homes and infrastructure that meet local need
Financial stability and innovative transformation

Vale: Corporate plan 2024-28 - At the Heart of the Vale	
3 core themes	Providing the homes people need
	Supporting climate and nature recovery
	Creating healthy, sustainable and inclusive communities
Approaches to achieve the themes	Working responsibly and in partnership
	Supporting thriving local businesses
	Building a council for the future

Communications strategy

Conversation/feedback vs Consultation

We will avoid the use of 'consultation' – keeping in mind this is a non-statutory process, in the narrative used around the development of the new corporate plan we will refer to engagement, feedback and conversation. We will provide some examples and suggestions around this option.

What will this project be called?

We will explore options for alternatives to 'Corporate Plan' – e.g. A vision for our future etc. with 'corporate plan' used as a strapline. This will help make the subject more engaging for audiences when 'Corporate Plan' could come across as dry.

Seldom heard audiences

One of our priorities will be to engage with seldom heard audiences – those groups representing protected characteristics e.g. age (younger people), ethnicity, disability, rural communities, socio economic groups.

Community outreach events

Part of our plan to reach target audiences will be to get out into the community with drop-in sessions at accessible, public places, such as local cafes, community centres and local facilities such as Cornerstone and Beacon. There are several sessions like this taking place as part of the Joint Local Plan consultation running in January and February – so we can gauge how successful these have been to inform and shape the Corporate Plan sessions.

We will also utilise the extensive databases held by other teams within the council, such as the economic development team for reaching our rural communities and local businesses. This may also include exploring local groups and social housing providers.

Younger audience focus

To reach younger people, we will contact a broad range of youth groups from our equalities database and use the knowledge of colleagues in our community safety who regularly engage with younger people on best practise methods. We will ensure a range of online options are available to reach younger people (online survey, quick polls, social media feeds etc.) and ensure the key messages are tailored to the appeal to this audience.

Internal audiences

We also need to ensure staff are engaged and help shape the plan, since ultimately the corporate plan forms the golden thread through the work we do. We will factor in interactive briefing sessions and potentially service level focus groups.

Plan development post engagement

The aim for the final plan is to provide a number of ways to access it. Alongside a full PDF document (designed and made as accessible as possible), we will provide a HTML version and an interactive version (storymap/flipbook or equivalent). We will also provide an Easy Read version.

Flipbooks examples: [Kildare Council](#) and [Cheltenham Council](#)

Communications and engagement objectives

- To engage a wide range of people with the high-level themes of the new corporate plan and to encourage their feedback
- To reach and engage with seldom heard audiences
- To engage staff and councillors in the feedback

Key messages

Internal messages

- We are developing a new corporate plan for 2024-28
- The new plan will present a high-level vision for the council
- These themes will lead the golden thread that runs through everything we do at the councils
- The plan sets the direction for all the work we do and underpins all other council strategies and action plans
- We need your feedback to help shape the themes we prioritise.

External messages

- Join our big conversation - help shape our priorities for the next four years
- Help shape the future of your area
- We think our priorities should be xxxxxxxxxx – do you agree?
- What matters to you?

Known timescales

August – December 2023	Research and preparation period
Tuesday 10 October 23 South (am session) Vale (pm session)	Cabinet member and SMT workshops to discuss approach to new corporate plan In person sessions. Result of these workshops will inform the corporate plan approach.
December 2023 to February 2024	Draft themes prepared <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement survey prepared • Databases for engagement agreed and signed off • In person events organised including resourcing • Engagement material for in person events prepared and printed • Hard copies of all engagement materials printed and distributed to deposit locations • Comms material drafted and prepared • Content for social media prepared • Videos produced • Animations produced • Social media graphics • Posters produced
January – February 2024	Endorsement of engagement approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 February – Scrutiny – Vale • 6 February – Scrutiny – South • 9 February – Cabinet – Vale • 15 February – Cabinet – South

<p>Stage 1 March - April 2024</p>	<p>Stage 1 Six-week public and stakeholder engagement launched and promoted to audiences At this stage the engagement focuses on the broader themes identified (rather than a draft document). See audience list, channels and outputs below</p>
<p>Stage 2 May-August 2024</p>	<p>Stage 2 Feedback and report on engagement results Next steps promoted – Corporate Plans drafted (May-September 2024) During this period agree and prepare the range of ways to present the new plans (see details below).</p>
<p>Stage 3 September - October 2024</p>	<p>Stage 3 Review of draft corporate plans Scrutiny (South and Vale) Cabinet (South and Vale)</p> <p>Adoption of new plans at both Full Councils in October 2024 Full launch of finalised Corporate Plan Promotion of new plan</p>

Audiences

Internal	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior management team (SMT) • Council leaders and cabinet members • Council Staff • South and Vale councillors • Corporate plan project board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town council and parish councils • Residents • Businesses

Internal	External
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups representing protected characteristics / seldom heard audiences e.g. age (younger people), ethnicity, disability, rural communities, socio economic groups • Youth groups/ Schools, colleges • Oxfordshire County Council • Other Oxfordshire councils • Other partner agencies • Local media / influencers (particularly those with an interest in local planning)

Channels

Internal	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emails • eNewsletters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staff news (Weekly) ○ In Focus - Cllr news (monthly) • Staff intranet news (Internal) • All staff briefing sessions (In person or virtual) • Jarvis news articles and pop ups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eNewsletters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ South & Vale news (monthly) ○ Town & Parish newsletters (as needed) • Social media: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Facebook (including paid adverts) ○ X/Twitter ○ Instagram ○ LinkedIn ○ WhatsApp Communities ○ YouTube ○ Nextdoor • Council website (External) • Online news and newsletter articles • Social media posts, animations and video • Leaflets/ flyers • Pop-up banners • Posters • Press releases • 'Join the Conversation' platform for online survey

Databases we can use to reach audiences:

- Consultation and Engagement database (mainly residents)
- Town and Parish Council database
- Equalities database (groups representing protected characteristics)
- Economic Development database (businesses)
- Planning database (organisations)
- Staff establishment lists

Engagement format

- Online survey in Citizen Space with paper option/alternative formats available upon request
- Public meetings with display boards / presentation of options (locations tbc: community centres, coffee shops, Beacon, Cornerstone, leisure centres)
- Shorter quick polls
- Interactive consultation formats. Explore options for gamification to work alongside more traditional methods of consultation – for example Menti, priority setting exercises, budget simulator, online polls? (Nextdoor/Facebook)

Outputs: Media/social media/engagement events

- We will develop video – vox pops with residents (contacts via consultation mailing lists) also featuring leaders/cabinet members. Videos can be embedded in consultation pages - (produced in house)
- Animation / explainer style videos
- Designed graphic posts – ensure consistent design (In house – Canva or professional designer)
- Pop up banners for public drop-in sessions
- Specific material for younger people? For example, Tik Toks
- Printed postcards / posters (In house – Canva or professional designer)
- Easy read consultation material
- Sign language video?
- Printed material (posters? postcards) in community centres, libraries and arts centres.
- Drop-in sessions / outreach events in the community – cafés?

Launch video

Our aim is to involve a range of residents / business contacts / councillors. The concept is for a short one-minute video featuring a montage of different voices expressing what matters most to them for example, family – affordable housing matters to us, young person – the environment matters to me etc – with summary at the end from council leader for example, we want to hear from you. We are currently recruiting for volunteers to take part in the video.

Indicative communications action plan (Stage 1)

When	What	Audience	Key messages
October	Focus Groups	Cabinet Members / SMT	What do we want our priorities to be for the next four years?
March week commencing 11 March 2024	Survey launch – Citizen Space	General audience	Join our big conversation – help shape our priorities What matters to you?
11 March	Press release	Local media and influencers	We've launched our big conversation – we want residents to help shape our priorities for the next four years
11 March ongoing (see separate social media plan for six weeks)	Social media - Video launch	Social media followers	Video tailored to each channel Explore Tik Tok / Insta for reaching younger audience
11 March – 15 March	Targeted distribution list	Rural audience	We've launched our big conversation – we want our rural communities to help shape our priorities for the next four years. We want to know what matters to you.
11 March – 15 March	Targeted distribution list: Economic Development database	Business audience	We've launched our big conversation – we want our business community to help shape our priorities for the next four years. We want to know what matters to you.
11 March – 15 March	Equalities database	Seldom heard targeted audiences	We've launched our big conversation – we want you to help shape our priorities for the next four years. We want to know what matters to you.
13 March	Staff newsletter Jarvis news article	Staff	We've launched our big conversation – we want staff to help shape our priorities for the next four years
March TBC	Email In Focus	Members	We've launched our big conversation – we want members to help shape our priorities for the next four years. We want to know what matters to you.
March/April TBC	Staff briefings/ Service level focus groups	Staff	We will need your feedback to help shape the themes we prioritise.

When	What	Audience	Key messages
March TBC	South and Vale news	Residents	We've launched our big conversation – we want residents to help shape our priorities for the next four years. We want to know what matters to you.
March TBC	T&P newsletter	Town & Parish Councils	We've launched our big conversation – we want residents to help shape our priorities for the next four years
March TBC	Email	OCC/Oxfordshire councils	South / Vale Councils have launched our big conversation – we want residents to help shape our priorities for the next four years
March TBC	Targeted distribution lists Option for focus groups?	Younger people	We've launched our big conversation – we want you to help shape our priorities for the next four years We want to know what matters to you. Complete our short survey for a chance to win a £30 Nando's Voucher
March/April TBC	Drop-in events – see separate plan	Residents – potential those we are less likely to hear from	Conversations with people about what matters to them.
March/April TBC	Posters/leaflets	Visitors to libraries/arts centres	Community centres, libraries and arts centres.

Evaluation – how will we measure success?

- Number of people taking part (to include analysis of different audiences)
- Number of survey responses received.
- Have we successfully engaged with our seldom heard audiences?
- Have we received meaningful feedback? Is the feedback integrated with the new plan in a meaningful way?
- Social media engagement (especially click throughs) and sentiment
- Video watch rates / drop off-rates
- Media coverage

We have engagement participant numbers from the previous development of the corporate plans – we need to be mindful that the numbers may have been particularly high due to the pandemic situation.

Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Development and Corporate Landlord

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To: Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 6 February 2024

Future Direction of Cornerstone Arts Centre

Recommendation(s)

(a) That Scrutiny Committee review and provide feedback on the Draft Future Direction of Cornerstone Arts Centre cabinet report attached

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	Yes	Yes - indirectly	Yes-indirectly	Yes - indirectly
Signing off officer	As shown within the report	As shown within the report	As shown within the report	As shown within the report

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Scrutiny the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the draft cabinet report attached, before it is considered by Cabinet on 6 February 2024.

Strategic Objectives

2. See attached draft cabinet report

Background

3. See the attached draft cabinet report for background

Financial Implications

4. See the attached draft cabinet report for background

Legal Implications

5. See the attached draft cabinet report for background

Climate and ecological impact implications

6. See the attached draft cabinet report for background

Equalities implications

- See the attached draft cabinet report for background

Risks

7. See the attached draft cabinet report for background

Other Implications

8. See the attached draft cabinet report for background

Conclusion

9. See the attached draft cabinet report for background

Background Papers

- Draft Cabinet report and associated appendices, some of which are confidential.

Cabinet Report



Listening Learning Leading

Report of Head of Development and Corporate Landlord

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Wards affected: Didcot, in particular, but potential district-wide impact.

Cabinet member responsible: Cllr Pieter-Paul Barker, Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers

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To: CABINET

Dates: 15 February 2024

Future Direction of Cornerstone Arts Centre

Recommendation(s)

- a) That Cabinet endorses the Cornerstone Development Action Plan (Appendix 6) to optimise operation of the in-house delivery model before any consideration is given to alternative operating models.
- b) That Cabinet acknowledge that the current implementation costs outlined within the action plan, expected to be incurred over the lifetime of the action plan, are subject to agreement of full Council at its meeting in February 2024.

Purpose of report

1. To propose a future direction for the discretionary service known as, Cornerstone Arts Centre to enable ongoing development of the service to offer the most effective and efficient operation. This is to maximise community benefit and financial efficiency, and to establish the long-term sustainability of the centre.
2. To outline the proposed Arts Centre Development Action Plan, including the reasons why a plan has been developed, how the actions within the plan were identified and

what the desired outcomes are. This report also outlines the impact of the actions that are proposed to be measured during the initial implementation period and in the future.

3. Longer term actions can only be indicative at this stage, as the plan will need to be kept under review and the impact of earlier changes considered.
4. Any council decision that has financial implications must be made with the knowledge of the council's overarching financial position, as reported to full Council in February 2023 when the budget for 2023/24 was agreed. For South, the position reflected in the council's medium-term financial plan (MTFP) as reported in February 2023 showed that it is due to receive £644,000 less in revenue funding than it plans to spend in 2023/24 (with the balance coming from reserves), with this budget gap expected to continue in future years. However, there is great uncertainty over this due to a lack of clarity from government.
5. The future funding gap is predicted to increase to over £8.5 million by 2027/28, based on current cautious officer estimates of future funding levels. Whilst it is anticipated that overall funding for the council will remain relatively unchanged in 2024/25, the lack of certainty on future local government funding from 2025/26 onwards means the level of funding, and the resulting estimated funding gap, could be significantly different from current officer estimates, in either a positive or negative way. Every financial decision, particularly those involving long-term funding commitments (i.e., those beyond 2024/25), needs to be cognisant of the potential for significant funding gaps in future years. The budget report for 2024/25 will provide an update on the council's financial position.

The provision of Cornerstone Arts Centre provides links to our Corporate Plan Objectives

6. Improved economic and community well-being

- Cornerstone Arts Centre contributes to the wellbeing and health of our community through delivery of a variety of programmed arts activities and as a venue for community activities.
- Implementing the proposed action plan (Appendix 6) will allow Cornerstone to improve the services provided for the community, further increasing the positive impact the centre has on the wellbeing of the community.
- Cornerstone Arts Centre contributes to the economic wellbeing of Didcot and the surrounding area, as well as the potential economic benefit to the council. It is a key entertainment venue in the district, attracting people to the town centre. The centre also offers an affordable venue for community groups, businesses, and residents to use to deliver their own income-generating activities.

7. Investment that rebuilds our financial viability

- The action plan includes looking at ways to improve the financial viability of Cornerstone, including accessing potential grants and external funding, reviewing pricing and marketing strategies to maximise income. It would continue to develop the financial management processes to identify innovative ways to further boost income generation and minimise costs.

- There is a significant decarbonisation project planned for Cornerstone over the coming 12-15 months, which will see some major upgrades to the centre to help reduce its carbon footprint and energy costs. This will reduce the building's operating costs.
- The proposed action plan also includes several capital projects and improvements for the centre, from additional external branding (see appendix 1) to undertaking pre-emptive building improvements. This will ensure the longevity of the building and its activities for the future. By investing in pre-emptive building improvements and maintenance will minimise the need for costly substantial, avoidable or urgent works in the future.

8. Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs

- As one of the key providers of entertainment/Arts infrastructure for Didcot, the surrounding area, Cornerstone holds an important role for the community. It is the only dedicated performance and arts venue in the town, offering affordable and accessible artistic programming for all.
- Its town centre location offers a focal point for the community, providing an entertainment venue and key meeting place for the community. Currently several local groups use the venue as an informal meeting space to hold activities for a range of people, including vulnerable groups. While some sections of the community are aware of this, the action plan will look to promote this more widely in the community. The venue is a designated 'Safe Space' for the community, offering refuge for anyone, in particular as a safe haven for vulnerable individuals where they can come for assistance.

Background

9. The council is the freehold owner of the land upon which Cornerstone Arts Centre is built. It forms part of a lease known as Orchard Centre Phase 1, to Corona Vulcan (Didcot) Ltd, the superior leaseholder, and is for a term of 150 years from March 2005. There is a lease back to the council, of the same date and term, for a number of properties on Station Road, which include Cornerstone and the adjoining cinema. Whilst this lease has a peppercorn rent, the council is responsible for services charges and for 23/24 this amounted to circa £40,000 for Cornerstone. The lease is silent on matters of use, alteration, assignment and subletting.
10. Cornerstone Arts Centre was built by the council in 2007 and opened in August 2008, offering an in-house artistic programme of shows, classes, workshops and exhibitions, a café, an auditorium, and several multi-purpose rooms/studios for hire. The Café was run by an external operator until 2016, when the café function was brought in-house. The Centre, including the café, currently employs 14 FTE staff and 15 casual staff. Currently four FTE posts are shared with Vale of White Horse District Council for their arts venue in Wantage, one split 50/50 and three split 70/30, with Cornerstone receiving the higher portion of time.
11. Between March 2020 and August 2021, Cornerstone closed to the public due to the Covid pandemic. During this period the venue was repurposed as a community food hub, preparing food parcels for vulnerable residents and supporting the Community Hub team. The arts centre staff were redeployed where possible. Cornerstone staff also provided a modest online programme during this period for the wellbeing benefit of the community.

12. In August 2021, the venue reopened to the public and began re-introducing and rebuilding programmed arts activities. The level of programmed activity is returning to pre-pandemic levels, despite a significant reduction in the programming expenditure budget since 2020. For example, in 2019/20 cornerstone booked 97 shows, while in the last 12 months 75 different shows were programmed. The cost of performers in the same periods has reduced from £275,000 to around £115,000. This significant cost saving resulted in efficiency was achieved through amendments to the programming selection and negotiation process on performance fees followed by the Arts Centre team.
13. As with the whole arts industry, it has taken some time to see public uptake of arts services return to 'normal' levels following the Covid pandemic and the subsequent cost of living crisis, but ticket sale figures at Cornerstone are steadily increasing. For example, current ticket and class sales for 2023/24 already exceed total sales for 2022/23.
14. Through 2022/23 officers commissioned a range of advisory reviews of Cornerstone by Artisan Estates Management Limited, LGA/Arts Council peer review and Bryn Jones Associates Ltd, to inform officers' work to review a range of options for cabinet members to consider in relation to future operation of Cornerstone. Consultancy support from consultants working in the Oxfordshire arts sector was also obtained to support this work. Additional work has included a review of programming costs, capacity assumptions, catering options, stock condition review of the building and external areas.
15. The reviews and further investigations have provided a range of guidance for immediate and ongoing operational actions as well as options for future management of Cornerstone. It should be noted that these reports are each a point-in-time review, recognising that there are some inaccuracies/assumptions within them and that by their nature as, the situation described in them may no longer be accurate.
16. The Artisan report focused on the building viability and uses, the peer review focused on the cultural aspects of the service and the BJA review focused on the business operations, with some consideration towards the cultural aspects. All three reports included several recommended operational and strategic improvements in their areas of focus, with frequent overlapping areas, such as customer engagement, and maintaining a well-presented venue. See below the outline scope of these reviews.

Artisan Property Options Appraisal (Appendix 3)

17. Artisan was commissioned by the Strategic Property team to undertake an options appraisal to explore avenues open to the council from a real estate asset management perspective. The approach of the Artisan property options appraisal undertaken in May 2022 for Cornerstone was to explore:
 - the constraints that apply to the asset, to determine what is possible
 - demand and supply for what is possible in the asset's location
 - strategies to optimise the asset's potential in response to the findings.

The Local Government Association (LGA) and Arts Council England Peer Review (Appendix 4)

18. In November 2022 the council underwent an LGA and Arts Council England Peer review of Cornerstone. The purpose of the review was to give an external perspective on the cultural, community and other potential value of Cornerstone and the potential for future development and sustainability of a council-owned resource. In particular, officers asked the peer team to focus on the following issues:

- How can Cornerstone best balance artistic, cultural and community aspirations with the need to deliver revenue to reduce the net cost to the council?
- How can Cornerstone define and measure cultural and community aspirations?
- is a curated programme of courses and workshops still the right approach?
- What scope is there to use Cornerstone as a resource for community development, social regeneration, training and education, health and wellbeing, and other council priorities within its role as an arts centre?
- How can Cornerstone become more inclusive and accessible for the evolving demographic of Didcot and surrounding areas?

19. The peer review report set out several operational recommendations, many of which are already in the process of implementing and are also captured in the action plan.

The Bryn Jones Associates (BJA) Business Options Appraisal (Appendix 5)

20. BJA was commissioned in 2022 to review the business options available to both Cornerstone and the Beacon (as this was a joint report commissioned with Vale of White Horse District Council). The report concluded in early 2023. The scope of the BJA business options appraisal was to:

- establish the best cultural and community models for Cornerstone (and the Beacon as this was a joint report commissioned with Vale of White Horse District Council)
- recommend a preferred option that will establish Cornerstone as an artistic and cultural hub for South Oxfordshire, maximise its income generating opportunities and keep the cost to the council to a minimum to support the council's long term financial position
- identify opportunities to benefit from external funding sources and partnerships.

21. BJA conducted an information review including finance, programming, hires, ticketing, catering and marketing; one-to-one meetings and consultations with relevant groups including members, officers and venue staff; mystery visits and area familiarisation; visits to other venues in the area; and secondary research including area demographics, arts and local business sector reports.

22. The BJA report included general recommendations for operational improvements, as well as management models. Officers are investigating and implementing the operational recommendations where appropriate and are reviewing the models in more detail. They recognise that some of the details, such as the financial assessments, are

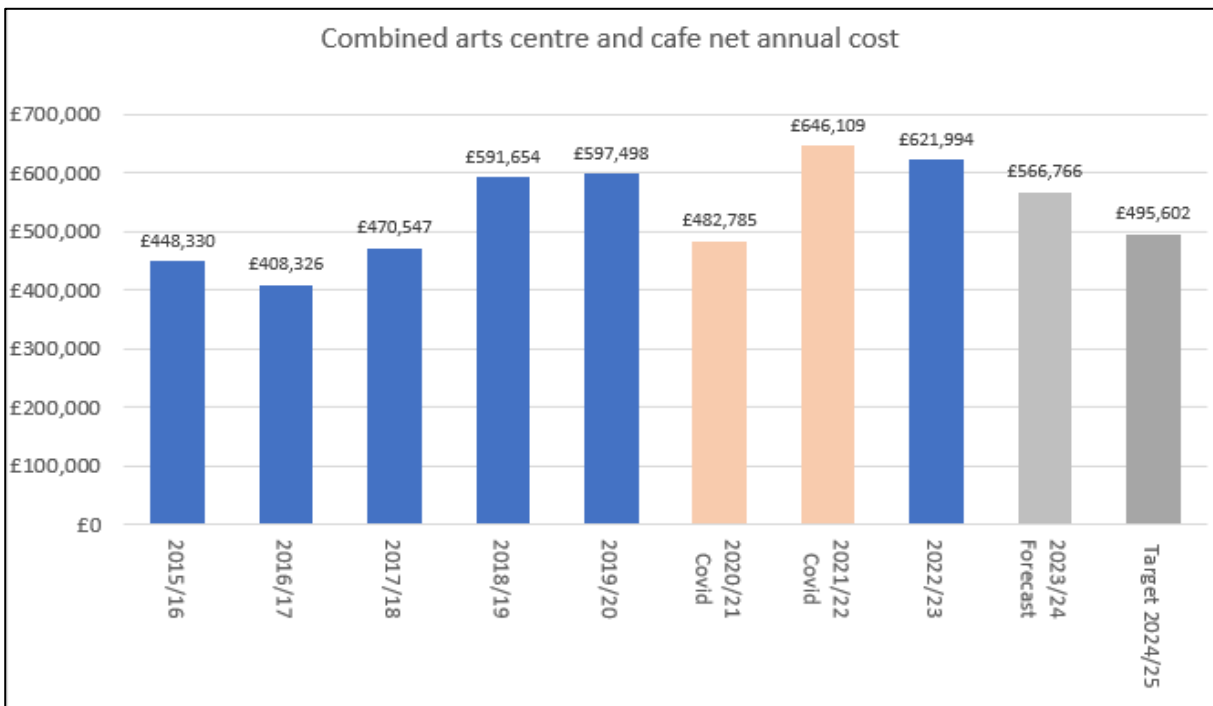
not in line with council officers’ figures and that the timing of this review required significant assumptions as the most recent data available was heavily impacted by the pandemic.

23. Also, in 2022 the council commissioned a decarbonisation survey of the site, which led to a significant decarbonisation project for Cornerstone that the Property Assets Project Team are managing. This decarbonisation work has secured a significant Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Grant, which must be spent by 31 March 2025 and requires the council to operate the building for a minimum of three years after practical completion. The council has committed £1.585 million Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) spending towards this project and is expected to be delivered during 2024/25. It includes replacing the existing heating system with an air source heat pump system and installing solar panels.

24. At the end of 2022, an officer working group was set up to review the various consultant reviews, undertake additional investigations, and prepare an Arts Centre Development Action Plan for Cabinet to consider. This group includes representation from the Arts Centre Team, Finance, HR, Legal and Strategic Management Team with support from an external arts consultant from Oxford Arts Community Interest Company (CIC). The action plan incorporates the recommendations that were identified by multiple parties and/or that are expected to improve the centre’s financial or community benefit performance.

25. Shown below in Chart 1 is the annual net cost of Cornerstone to the council for recent years. It also shows the current forecast outturn for this year 2023/24 and the current forecast net costs in 2024/25. We have included the years affected by the pandemic in 2020/21 and 2021/22. During this period the centre was predominantly closed and repurposed. The figures in chart 1 also includes the very recently confirmed £24,000 rental income from a high street bank for sole use of one of the meeting rooms for an initial period of 12-months.

26. Chart 1 – Combined annual financial performance of the arts centre and cafe



27. Chart 1 shows the combined 2024/25 net cost forecast for Cornerstone Arts Centre and the cafe, inclusive of additional spending on marketing and delivery of the action plan. It also includes income growth/saving projections as a result of the investment. The income growth suggested (see Appendix 2) shows a cost saving target, were all actions and additional activity being delivered from the 1 April 2024. The actual savings will be tracked through the financial year as actions are delivered.
28. In addition to identifying various operational improvements the centre could implement, the BJA business review also investigated some potential alternative long-term operating/governance models for the centre. The review noted that the financial viability modelling for the operating options was based on information relevant to a specific point-in-time when the centre was still in the early stages of recovering from the Covid pandemic and reflected previous approaches to alternative funding sources, which may have subsequently changed as the sector has evolved post pandemic.
29. Officers recommend implementing the Cornerstone Development Action Plan before Cabinet consider any alternative operating models for Cornerstone. To provide current, post-pandemic market data to assist in comparing operation options.

Options and Action Plan

30. The commissioning of the BJA consultant report has been a valuable exercise in understanding the range of options other than direct delivery, which may be available to the council, including:
- the running of the centre by an external organisation, for example a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
 - an outsourced operator model.
31. It is important that the council review the implications of each of these options in full and set out clearly to Members the associated implications of each option, including any risks and future governance arrangements.
32. The proposed Arts Centre Development Action Plan incorporates actions suggested in the Artisan, LGA/Arts Council England Peer Challenge, and Bryn Jones Associates reviews, and by the officer working group. See Table 1 for a list of the objectives, reason for inclusion and desired outcomes and Appendix 6 for the objectives, actions, measures, desired outcomes, responsible teams and target dates.
33. Using the high-level objectives and actions in the Arts Centre Development Action Plan, officers will create an in-depth operational work plan detailing all tasks required to achieve the action plan objectives. Officers initial estimate of delivering the action plan is £28,500, which has been included in the proposed 2024/25 budget. Delivering any space reconfiguration works could cost a further £50,000 - £250,000. This would be subject to an agreed business case and may require future approval at Council. The action plan costs have been broken down in more detail in Appendix 6.
34. Officers will provide relevant stakeholders (as identified in the action plan) with regular progress updates and performance monitoring reports.
35. After the 18-month implementation period, officers will bring forward a report to Cabinet to provide an update on the implementation and impact of the action plan. They will

also provide an updated medium/long-term financial forecast outlining the level of financial commitment required from the council to retain the centre as an in-house service following the implementation of the action plan.

Table 1 – summary of action plan objectives

Action Plan Objective	Reasons for inclusion	Intended outcomes	Due by	Started?
Short Term (up to 9-12 months)				
Launch an Arts and Culture Strategy	Place-shaping, communities and Partnerships, access for all.	A clear vision, purpose and strategic direction and objectives for the council's broader Arts and Culture provision, including Cornerstone	2024/25 Q2	Yes
Increase the leadership capacity to provide direction and development of a new vision	To ensure the action plan and intended outcomes are met	Provide direction and the development of a new vision	2024/25 Q1	Yes
Produce a stakeholder map and extend the working group to become a strategic cross-council group, which allows all parts of the council to understand the wider benefits of the Arts	To enable services to feed into the action plan	Create buy-in from across the council to deliver the vision	2024/25 Q1	Yet to start
Integrate Cornerstone into Didcot Garden Town work	Better community engagement and oversight	Improved delivery	2024/25 Q2	Yet to start
Build relationships with local groupings including town centre partnerships, business networks and education providers	Better understand community, business and education needs, maximise opportunities to work together collaboratively	Collaborative projects developed including wider funding opportunities; strong relationships with groups, schools and local organisations in place	2024/25 Q3	Yes
Establish a Community Board that is fully representative of the emerging communities in Didcot and the wider district	To help define and measure cultural and community aspirations	To identify potential barriers to access for all communities	2024/25 Q2	Yet to start
Ensure the staff and volunteer team understand the equality, diversity and needs of the local community	To ensure that the centre operates and the programme that is inclusive and appropriate	To provide a suitably inclusive and accessible service for the community	2024/25 Q2	
Obtain specialist arts and culture resources where appropriate	Develop skillsets within the team	Implementation of the action plan	2024/25 Q1	Yes
Deliver an updated artistic and cultural offer	Improve community benefit and audience engagement	Improved programming built on the needs and desires of the community; improved relationship with artists and other art/culture providers; Improved positioning within the market and sales	2024/25 Q4	Yes

Action Plan Objective	Reasons for inclusion	Intended outcomes		Status
Improve/increase community engagement to inform review of the artistic and cultural offer	Improved programming to meet the needs and desires of the community; improved relationship with arts and culture providers	Improved positioning within the market; improved sales	2024/25 Q3	Yes
Obtain specialist marketing resources as required	Develop team skills and capacity to develop the arts marketing strategy	Marketing activities are showing positive impact on sales and income, marketing plans and activities are developed	2024/25 Q1	Yes
Implement a Marketing Strategy/plans	Improved branding and marketing; improved signage	Improved branding and marketing; improved signage; increase in ticket sales and memberships	2024/25 Q2	Yes
Implement pricing changes following a full review	Improve commercial viability	Improved market positioning, improved income generation, improved social value, continuing a range of pricing options that are affordable for different elements of the community	2024/25 Q1	Yes
Implement a Fundraising Strategy and secure fundraising resources for Cornerstone	Diversification of income streams	Reduction in net cost to the council	2024/25 Q1	Yet to start
Maximise room/space utilisation and set occupancy targets	Improved utilisation of services/spaces	Improved income; improved social value	2024/25 Q2	Yes
Improve the Café's financial viability and levels of community benefit	Improved Social Value, improve financial viability	Increased cost savings and income generation, maintain or improve customer satisfaction levels	2024/25 Q4	Yes
Implement updated operational procedures	To improved centre operations	Improved efficiency	2024/25 Q3	Yes
Establish more partnership working within the council and with external partners	Increased reach	Potential opportunities to access funding that may not be available to the council directly.	2024/25 Q4	Yes
Medium Term (12-18 months)				
Improve the volunteers, friends and ambassadors' initiatives	Community integration and engagement	Improved social value, community links, value for money.	2025/26 Q1	Yes
Establish more robust performance monitoring and evaluation	Management information on which to base decision making	Ongoing service improvement; foundation for future options appraisal and funding applications	2024/25 Q3	Yes
Deliver the approved decarbonisation project	Alignment with the Corporate Plan objectives	Carbon savings, establish new baseline	2025/26 Q1	Yes

Action Plan Objective	Reasons for inclusion	Outcomes		
Implement pricing changes following a full review	Improve commercial viability	Improved market positioning, improved income generation, improved social value, continuing a range of pricing options that are affordable for different elements of the community	2024/25 Q1	Yes
Subject to future funding, undertake works to allow separation of the Cafe area	Improve flexibility and efficiency	Works undertaken to allow the café to open separately to the rest of the building	2025/26 Q1	Yet to start
Work with Economic Development to establish a Social Value Calculator and targets for Cornerstone	Quantify social benefit of investment	Improved measurement of impact	2025/26 Q1	Yet to start
Long-Term (over 18 months and ongoing)				
Assess the impact of changes made and long-term service models for Cornerstone, including the continuation of an inhouse service.	What is the most sustainable solution to deliver the arts centre service at Cornerstone	Greater focus and cohesion	2025/26 Q4	Yes
Consider the councils ongoing financial commitment to Cornerstone	Maximise opportunities to reduce the cost to the council of the community benefit the arts centre provides.	Improved financial forecasting	2025/26 Q4	Yet to start

Other options

36. Considering alternative operating models before implementing the improvement actions identified is not considered appropriate at this point in time. However, as the improvement actions are expected to make a significant impact on the net cost of the current service, fair consideration to those options can only be undertaken once the initial period of the action plan has been implemented. Therefore, this option has not been explored further at this time, but rather the action plan highlights that it will be a consideration in 18 months, when a further report will be brought before cabinet.
37. Continuing with the service as it currently is, with no significant improvements is not considered a viable option given that all the reports commissioned identified improvements in the way the centre can be operated. There is a requirement within the Best Value legislation for officers to continually seek to improve outcomes and efficiency. Not implementing improvement actions identified would mean opportunities for better service and financial outcomes are not realised.
38. Cease delivering the arts centre function and look to repurpose the building is not considered a viable option. This would result in the loss of a key facility for the area that offers high levels of community and economic benefit and links with the council's corporate priorities. Indications from the consultants' reports are that the centre could be more financially sustainable in the medium to long term.
39. As a purpose-build arts venue, the building may require significant alterations to appeal on the open property market, affecting the council's ability to achieve best value from the disposal or alternative use of the site. The estimated building costs of moth-balling the site would be a minimum of circa £130,000 per annum. In addition, there may be staff cost implications for the Arts Centre team and potentially the requirement to repay some of the PSDS decarbonisation grant if the council stopped operating the building within the three-year post completion period after works are carried out.

Financial implications

40. The net cost of running the arts centre including the café and marketing functions reached £0.6 million in both 2018/19 and 2019/20. Since then, significant operational changes have been made to achieve a stronger focus on gross profitability of shows and workshops, and overheads are carefully monitored.
41. The benefits of the efficiencies achieved have been offset by inflationary increases in utilities and other financial pressures linked to the cost of living crisis. Consequently net costs for the Arts Centre function (excluding the café) have not significantly reduced, however, they have stabilised at £0.5 million per annum (see Appendix 2). Officers are confident that the investment required to deliver the proposed action plan will reduce the annual net cost to the council, predominantly through a greater focus on income generation and external funding bids that reflect the current national funding regimes that have stabilised over the past two years.
42. As shown in chart 1 above, the net combined cost of Cornerstone (arts centre and café) predicted in 2023/24 is already less than the service cost in 2018/19 and 2019/20 (i.e., excluding the pandemic years). There are further savings forecast following increased marketing investment and delivery of the action plan, bringing the 2024/25 combined forecast net cost for the arts centre and café to £495,602. Target growth achieved from the increased marketing investment is 15 per cent more than the original income target

for 2024/25, and approximately 38 per cent more than the combined income forecast for 2023/24. By implementing the other improvements in the proposed action plan Cabinet would position the centre on a trajectory that could see its net cost continue to reduce in future years.

43. The 2024/25 net cost forecast is inclusive of additional spending on marketing and delivery of the action plan. It also includes income growth/saving projections as a result of the investment. The income growth suggested (see Appendix 2) shows a cost saving target were all actions and additional activity being delivered from the 1 April 2024. The actual savings will be tracked through the financial year as actions are delivered.
44. Officers will work closely with Finance colleagues to calculate the cost benefits of each action and dynamically adjust the MTFP for Cornerstone to provide ongoing financial targets for improvement.
45. Officers modelled the current medium-term financial forecast for the centre (Appendix 2) using the current proposed budget for 2024/25, with inflationary growth applied. Officers note that resources across many service areas are in high demand and availability may impact delivery of the actions within target timescales. This will regularly be reviewed and updated with finance colleagues as officers work through the action plan. The objective is to reduce the net cost to the council to a sustainable level within the current financial environment, as per action point 24 in Appendix 6.
46. While some of the staffing resources required to implement the plan can be provided using the existing team, this may result in capacity deficits elsewhere in the centre's delivery. The council will likely need to buy-in expert knowledge to achieve the best outcomes, and the existing team may require additional training and development to maximise their potential on a long-term basis.
47. At members request, officers have already included several capital/CIL proposals within in the 2024/25 budget setting process (listed below) which will contribute towards some of the actions identified, but further internal funding requests may be necessary for specific actions and will be submitted following due process in line with the council's constitution. Current proposals total £405,000 to fund various improvements to the building, which has not seen major investment since opening in 2008. Many of these improvements were identified in the Artisan, Peer Review and Bryn Jones Associates reports, and/or in a building stock condition survey carried out by the property team in 2021/22. These works would be in addition to the decarbonisation project referred to earlier. Planned works include external branding, general renovations and refurbishment of public areas and auditorium equipment replacement.
48. By investing additional resources to implement the actions identified in the action plan, the council will ensure the in-house operating model is working at optimal efficiency in the long-term, maximising income opportunities, using existing resources to the best of their potential, increasing the community benefit delivered, and minimising the net cost to the council. It will also provide the best possible comparison data for any alternative operating models Cabinet may wish to consider for the centre. Current estimated cost to deliver the full action plan (appendix 6) is £28,500. If space optimisation works are progressed this would cost an additional £50,000 and £250,000 capital funds, subject to an agreed business case to allocate CIL funding.
49. Key actions in the plan include securing external funding for the centre, which cannot be guaranteed in advance, and should not be included in future budgets until it is secured.

If funding is secured, it is likely to be for specific projects that will require some level of matched funding. In these instances, officers would include the full cost to deliver in the expenditure budget proposal until funding is secured, when the funding income would be off set against the expenditure budget, reducing the cost to the council of that activity.

Legal Implications

50. Legal implications of deciding to implement an action plan are minimal at present, but individual actions may have their own implications, which will be assessed and mitigated as they are implemented. Officers will work with colleagues in Legal to identify and resolve any legal implications for individual actions identified.

Climate and ecological impact implications

51. The property assets project team are working with the arts centre staff to progress the £1.961 million decarbonisation scheme for Cornerstone. The project will deliver recommendations from the recent decarbonisation survey, including replacing the existing gas heating system with an air source heat pump system and install solar panels on the roof areas.
52. The council has secured a £376,000 Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) Grant towards the costs, with the council committing the remaining £1.585 million from Community Infrastructure Levy funds. The PSDS grant must be spent by 31 March 2025. The council must also continue to operate the building for a minimum of three years after practical completion of works, otherwise repayment terms would apply, this may impact possible alternative operating models considered in the future. There are no similar time restrictions on the CIL funds the council has committed to the works.
53. While the decarbonisation works are still in the design phase, it is likely that they will have some impact on service delivery within the centre. The centre's officers are working closely with the decarbonisation project team to minimise any disruption, plan works for the quietest periods for the centre and minimise any potential loss of income when the works are carried out.
54. Officers will work together to forecast the positive impact on Cornerstone's energy costs within the dynamic MTFP for the centre. The Decarbonisation survey indicates that the council could see up to £22,000 in energy savings each year.
55. Officers will consider the ecological and climate impact using the Climate Impact Assessment Tool of each action on the plan when it is being developed and implemented.

Equalities implications

56. Officers have completed an Equality Impact Assessment that did not identify any negative equality implications in the report.
57. As each action is developed officers will consider the equality implications and put mitigations in place if appropriate.

Risks and mitigations

58. That the action plan is not delivered within the proposed timescale. Regular progress and performance reviews with the relevant Head of Service, officer working group and corporate programmes team to ensure timelines are monitored.
59. That there are insufficient resources to complete all actions identified in the action plan, reducing the overall impact achieved. If there are insufficient resources (financial or time) to carry out all actions within the timeline, the officers working group will prioritise the actions that provide the best value.
60. That the action plan does not have the expected impact on the performance of the centre, either in terms of improved benefit to the community or financial viability. The planned regular review of actions being implemented will allow officers to forecast the impact they will have, as will research officers will undertake before implementation starts.
61. That the decarbonisation project planned for Cornerstone impacts the centre's service delivery while works are carried out, potentially leading to a reduction in income and community benefit while works are undertaken. The arts centre team will work closely with the decarbonisation team and contractors to minimise disruption and forecast any potential challenges. The successful contractor will be required to provide regular progress updates to help with forecasting any conflicts.

Other Implications

62. There may be some HR implications connected to specific actions, especially around developing skills and knowledge in the team and potentially bringing in additional resources. Officers will work with HR colleagues to assess any HR implications for each relevant action as they are implemented.
63. The Head of Development and Corporate Landlord has met with the arts centre team to make them aware there is a proposed action plan that will be considered by Cabinet, and in due course will be shared with the staff who will be able to contribute to the further development and implementation of the action plan.

Conclusions

64. After reviewing all of the consultant reports, consultation feedback gathered during the reviews, and views of the officers' working group it is clear there are improvements the council can implement to improve Cornerstone's service delivery. This should have positive impact on the financial viability and community benefit the centre offers. Many of these are already being implemented.
65. While the council should consider if continued in-house operation is the best possible solution for the centre, they should first do all they can to ensure it is operating to its best potential under an in-house model. This should then ensure that the most informed decision is taken, based on the most up to date financial information, as is required in order to assess best value. It would therefore be prudent to undertake the actions identified in the proposed Arts Centre Development Action Plan.
66. Officers will work with the corporate programmes team to monitor progress of the Development Action Plan using the corporate plan reporting process. Officers will

provide regular updates to the officer working group, cabinet members and other key stakeholder groups outlining progress of the implementation and measures of the impact for each action.

Background Papers

67. None.

Appendix 1 – external branding initial options

Current External Branding



External Branding suggestions



Appendix 2 – financial information

The tables and charts below reflect direct running costs and income only from 2015/16 to 2022/23 and forecast figures for 2023/24 and 2024/25. There are charts for the combined cost of the Arts Centre and café, as well the separate costs for each. They do not include support service recharges, or year-end accounting adjustments for, for example, depreciation. The direct costs have been separated into the following categories:

- staffing costs
- other direct costs, such as building operation costs, cost to deliver the arts activities, cost of delivering the action plan etc
- marketing costs (marketing costs were separated from Cornerstone’s main budget then the team were realigned to the Communications service in 2021)
- income generated (including the recently agreed £24,000 income from a high street bank leasing a room for an initial 12-month period starting on 8 January 2024)
- total net cost to the council.

The 2024/25 forecast budgets are inclusive of additional spending on marketing and delivery of the action plan. It also includes income growth/saving projections as a result of the investment in the action plan. The income growth suggested (see Appendix 5) is representative of the impact on the budget were all actions and additional activity being delivered from the 1 April 2024. The actual savings will be tracked through the financial year as actions are delivered.

The costs for all Cornerstone utilities are currently included in the arts centre budget. Officers estimate that the utility apportionment for the café is estimated to be 15 per cent of the overall building costs. In 2022/23 this was equivalent to £11,000.

Chart 1 – Combined arts and café financial performance

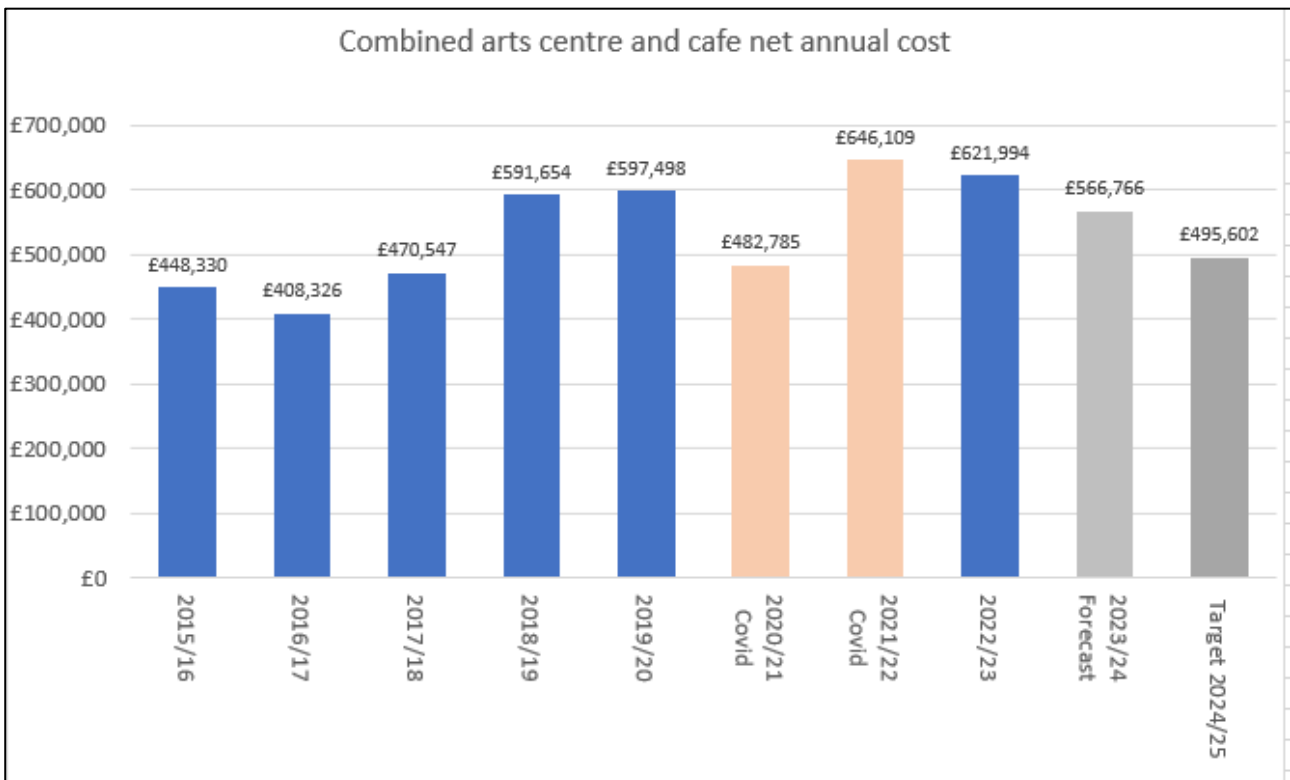


Chart 2 – Combined cost breakdown * Café was inhouse from 2016/17

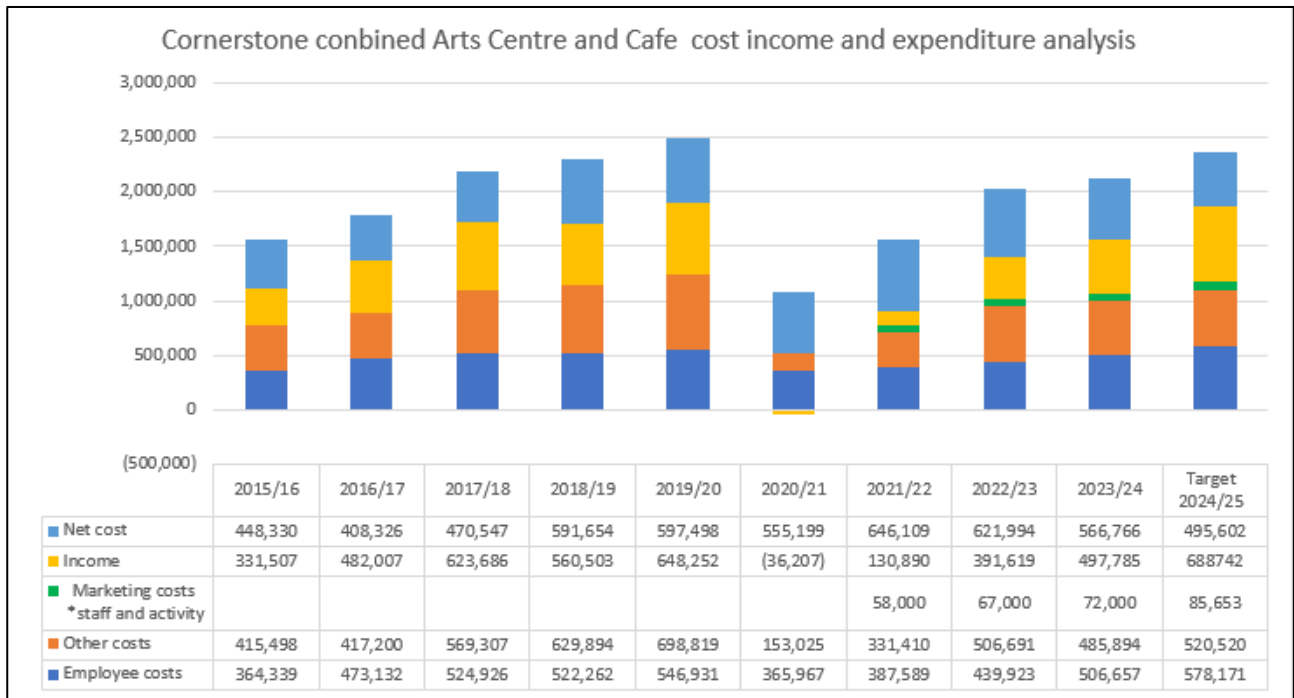


Chart 3 – Cornerstone Arts Centre-only financial performance

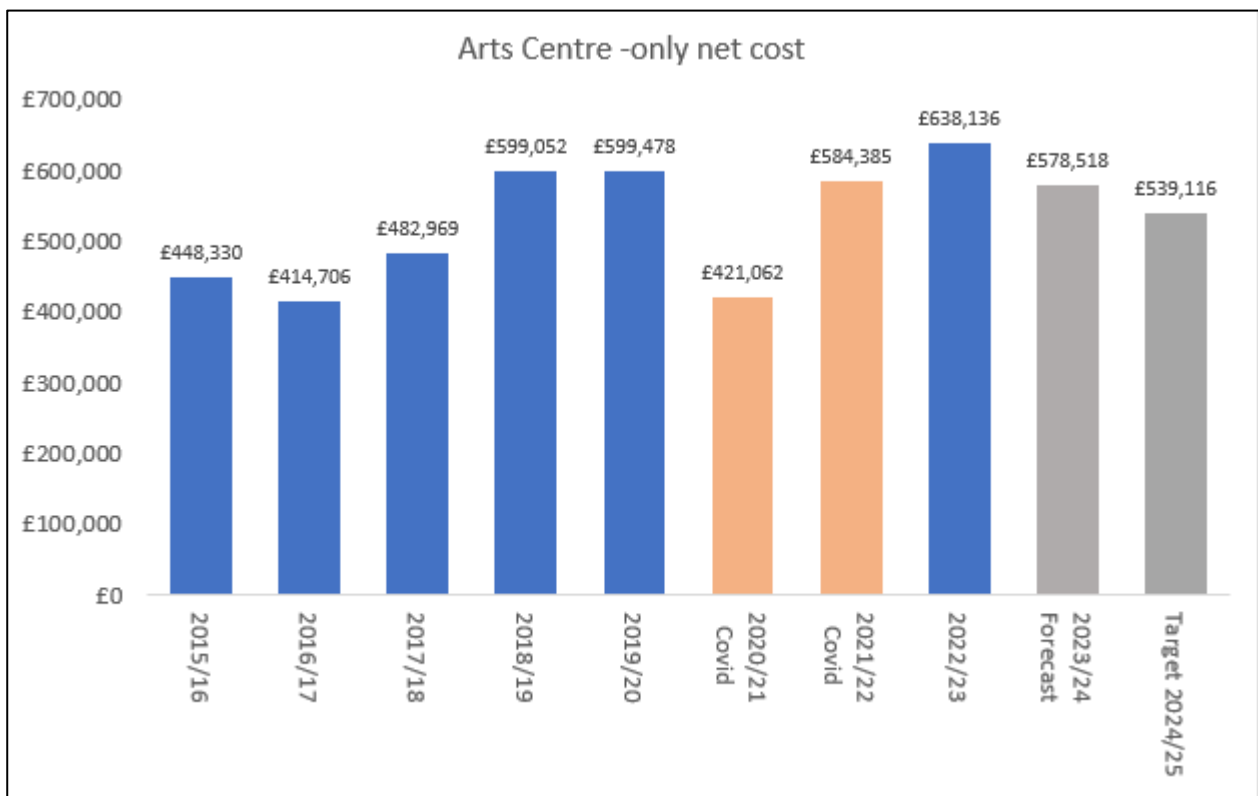


Chart 4 – Cornerstone Arts centre-only cost breakdown

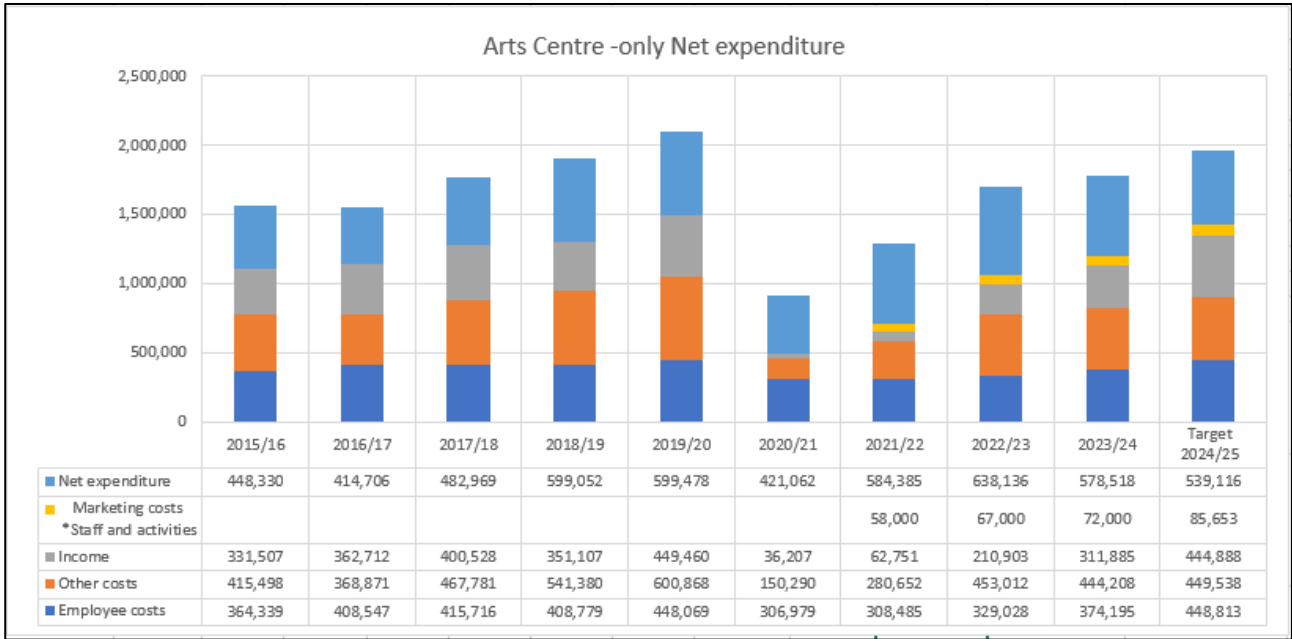


Chart 5 – Cornerstone café-only financial performance

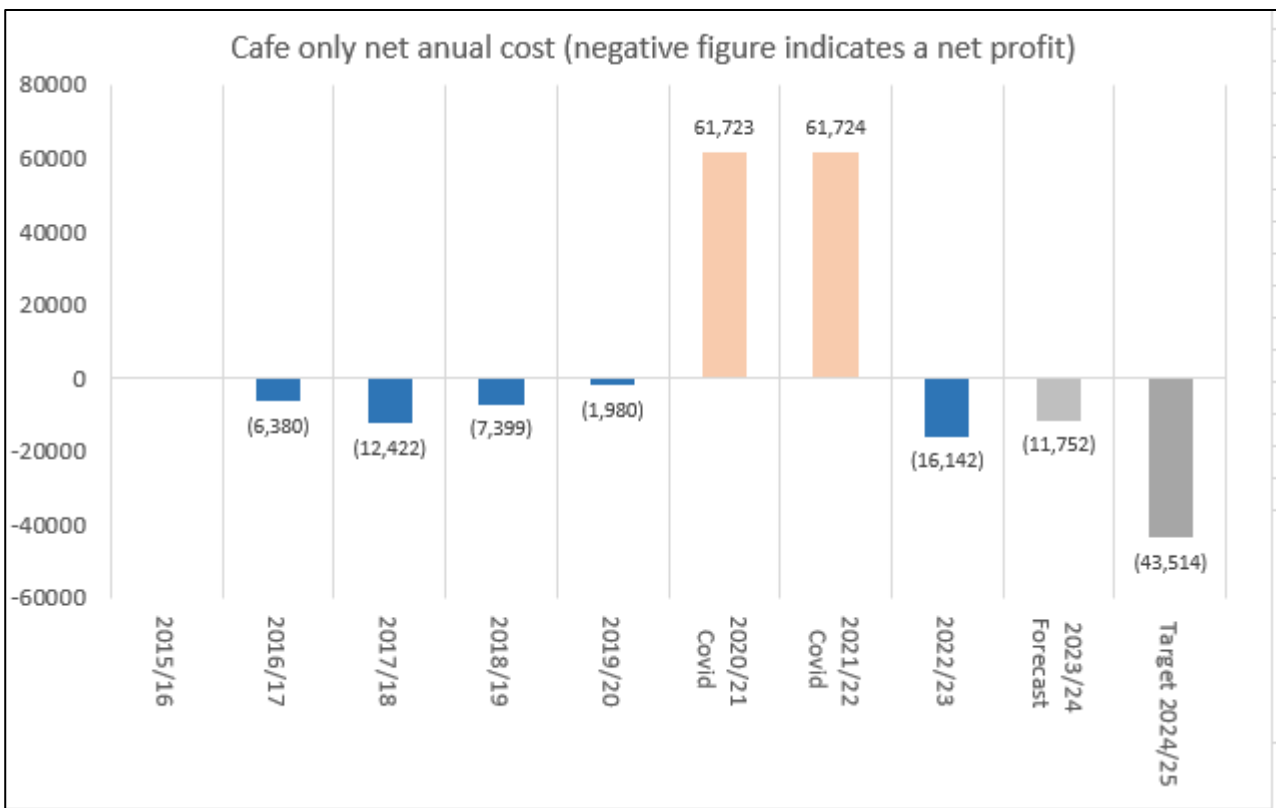
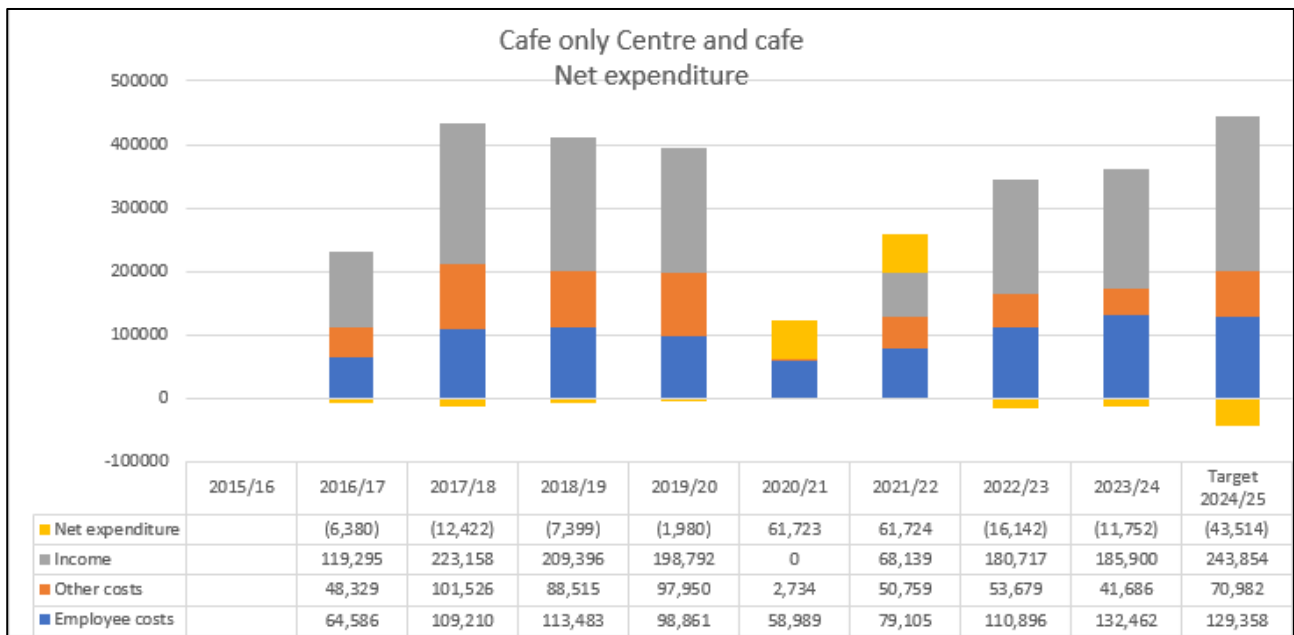


Chart 6 – Cornerstone Café-Only cost breakdown



Appendix 3 – Artisan property options appraisal

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing this information.

Due to the confidential nature of this report, it will not be published publicly, but will be circulated as a separate attachment to appropriate members and officers.

Appendix 4 – LGA/Arts Council England peer review

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing this information.

Due to the confidential nature of this report, it will not be published publicly, but will be circulated as a separate attachment to appropriate members and officers.

Appendix 5 – Bryn Jones Associates business options appraisal

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing this information.

Due to the confidential nature of this report, it will not be published publicly, but will be circulated as a separate attachment to appropriate members and officers.

Appendix 6 – Arts Centre Development Action Plan

Ref	Objective	Activities	Outcomes	Responsibility	Measures	Estimated additional cost to implement	Complete by date
1	Launch an Arts and Culture Strategy	1. Develop a stakeholder map and explore barriers to access 2. Draft Arts and Culture Strategy to be aligned with other council policies; 3. Engagement with stakeholders including cabinet, council, DGT boards and the wider community	A clear vision, purpose and strategic direction and objectives for the council's broader Arts and Culture provision, including Cornerstone	Community Wellbeing including DGT team, Comms for engagement	Strategy agreed by cabinet	Current budget proposals include £5,000 of consultancy in existing growth bids	Within 12 months
2	Increase the leadership capacity to provide direction and development of a new vision	1. Identify resources needed, 2. recruitment/procurement of any external resources 3. development of direction/vision for Arts Centre, 4. Launch new vision.	Provide direction and the development of a new vision	Head of Communities	Resources secured and direction provided	Met by current budget proposals	Within 12 months
3	Produce a stakeholder map and extend the working group to become a strategic cross-council group, which allows all parts of the council to understand the wider benefits of the Arts	Workshop with working group to identify additional internal stakeholder, invite additional stakeholders to join the working group, work with all stakeholders to improve cohesion across services	Create buy-in from across the council to deliver the vision	Arts Centres team (and officer working group)	Working group extended, stakeholder map prepared, improved understanding of Cornerstone's benefit across the council.	Met through existing in-house resources	Within 12 months
4	Integrate Cornerstone into Didcot Garden Town Work	Establish cross council working group to deliver the action plan and feed into DGT board(s)	Improved delivery	Cross-council working group incl. DGT, Communities, Corporate Landlord	Quarterly updates to DGT public meetings	Met through existing in-house resources	Within 12 months
5	Build relationships with local groupings including town centre partnerships, business networks and education providers	Identify groups and organisations to engage with, workshops to establish links and opportunities, establish baseline performance levels to measure improvement against, identify organisations to partner with to delivery projects, including when this could open the joint project up to more external funding opportunities	Collaborative projects developed including wider funding opportunities; strong relationships with groups, schools and local organisations in place	Communities team	Improved engagement with external groups, Collaborative activities undertaken	Met through existing in-house resources	Within 12 months
6	Establish a Community Board that is fully representative of the emerging communities in Didcot and the wider district	*Linked to wider stakeholder mapping action Develop a community engagement strategy, implement community engagement strategy, establish baseline programming range to allow improvements to be measured.	To identify potential barriers to access for all communities	Arts Centres team	Links with a high proportion of communities in and around Didcot are established, improved programming to best suit their needs.	Met through existing in-house resources	Within 12 months

Ref	Objective	Activities	Outcomes	Responsibility	Measures	Estimated cost to implement	Complete by date
7	Ensure the staff and volunteer team understand the equality, diversity and needs of the local community	Identify the knowledge levels required for the team, draw up and implement a training and development plan to fill any knowledge gaps	To provide a suitably inclusive and accessible service for the community	Arts Centre Team	All staff and volunteers have completed any necessary training	Met through existing in-house resources	Within 12 months
8	Obtain specialist arts and culture resources where appropriate	1.Resource 2. Set realistic targets in terms of delivering the action plan 3. Ensure Cornerstone staffing structure is focused on income generation	Implementation of the action plan	HR, relevant HoS	Specialist resources in place and skills gap filled.	Met through existing in-house resources, potentially with up to £2,000 consultancy	Within 12 months
9	Deliver an updated artistic and cultural offer	1. Review the possibility of a curated programme using in part project funding 2. Engagement with other Arts/Culture Venues and organisations 3. Engagement with Artists to explore a hub for creative businesses 4. Develop partnerships 5. Could the cafe area deliver art/culture activities 6. Consider pivoting to meet wider health, wellbeing, educational needs and also daytime offer to family activities 7. Review the customer journey 8. establish baseline performance levels to measure improvement against	Improved programming built on the needs and desires of the community; improved relationship with artists and other art/culture providers; Improved positioning within the market and sales	Arts Centre Team	All actions implemented and positive improvement on community benefit, income generation and customer feedback	Met through existing in-house resources and/or through external funding if secured	Within 12 months
10	Improve/increase community engagement to inform review of the artistic and cultural offer	Achieved via stakeholder mapping and community board actions above, establish baseline performance levels to measure improvement against	Improved positioning within the market; improved sales	Communities with Consultation team support	Improved customer feedback and uptake of activities	Met through existing resources	Within 12 months
11	Obtain specialist marketing resources as required	Identify areas where additional knowledge or staff resources are needed, recruit/procure the resources identified, establish baselines to measure improvements following skills/time increases.	Marketing activities are showing positive impact on sales and income, marketing plans and activities are developed	HR/relevant HoS	Link between marketing and bookings/ ticket sales improved	Recruitment started	2024/25 Q1
12	Implement a Marketing Strategy/plans	1. Develop an arts marketing strategy including mapping of potential users 2. Determine a realistic budget 3. Review Website and branding 4. Address disconnects between marketing and ticketing 5. Cross promotion and upselling	Improved branding and marketing; improved signage; increase in ticket sales and memberships	Arts Centre Team, Comms	Marketing strategy adopted,	Some cost met from in-house team	Within 12 months

Ref	Objective	Activities	Outcomes	Responsibility	Measures	Estimated cost to implement	Complete by date
13	Implement a Fundraising Strategy and secure fundraising resources for Cornerstone	1. Mapping potential sources of external funding including, trusts and foundations, corporate sponsorships, memberships; council pots;2. Explore partnership bids 3. Link with marketing strategy 4. Explore friends/fundraising board	Reduction in net cost to the council	Arts Centre Staff, external bid writer,	External funding bids submitted	Strategy delivered by in house team. £21,500 to fund, 0.5FTE fundraising post.	Within 12 months
14	Maximise room/space utilisation and set occupancy targets	1. Explore co-working hub 2. Engage with co-working hub operator 3. Engage with current and prospective room hires including businesses via econ dev 4. review opening hours 5. Consider room separation for temporary or permanent occupation 6. Set Targets for utilisation	Improved income; improved social value	Arts centre team and Development and Corporate Landlord	Targets identified and being met, Positive impact on finances, appropriate works to improve useable space undertaken.	£6,000 design costs spend within 23/24 and £50,000-250,000 to implement if progressed	Within 12 months
15	Improve the Café's financial viability and levels of community benefit	1. Explore operation as a social enterprise; 2. Engage with potential independent/ 3 rd sector operators 3. Review hours of operation if cafe 4. Review Catering offer	Increased cost savings and income generation, maintain or improve customer satisfaction levels	Arts centre team and Development and Corporate Landlord	Review complete and findings reported on and actioned appropriately	Met through existing in-house resources,	Within 12 months
16	Implement updated operational procedures	1, Identify services/areas where there are operational challenges using existing corporate processes to deliver arts centre operations 2. establish review process with key officers in other teams to identify ways to improve both corporate and the centres own processes and policies to improve efficiency 3. implement new processes and monitor their impact 4 establish baseline performance levels to measure improvement against.	Improved efficiency	Arts Centre Staff	Improved working efficiency Corporate and centre policies/ processes align better	Met through existing in-house resources,	Within 12 months
17	Improve the volunteers, friends and ambassadors' initiatives	1. Develop/review volunteering and ambassador scheme and establish baseline stats to measure improvement against 2. Consider Friends of Committee	Improved social value, community links, value for money.	Arts Centre Staff (with communities' team)	Recruitment/retention of volunteers improves, analysis of a Friends committee complete.	Met through existing in-house resources,	Within 18 months
18	Establish more robust performance monitoring and evaluation	1. Monitor performance against the strategic objectives 2. Monitor delivery of the action plan 3. Develop a daily online/in person Customer feedback system 4. Run annual survey 5. introduce KPI's for service delivery and regularly report on performance	Ongoing service improvement; foundation for future options appraisal and funding applications	Arts Centre Staff (with Corporate Plan Reporting team)	reporting to interim board	Met through existing in-house resources.	Within 18 months

Ref	Objective	Activities	Outcomes	Responsibility	Measures	Estimated cost to implement	Complete by date
19	Deliver the approved decarbonisation project	1.Procure relevant contractors Delivery of works Establish baseline performance levels to measure impact of works	Carbon savings, establish new baseline	Corporate Landlord	Project completed, improved energy efficiency	Met by existing project budget allocated for works	Within 18 months
20	Subject to future funding, undertake works to allow separation of the Cafe area	1. Develop project scope 2. allocate capital budget 3. procure relevant contractors	Works undertaken to allow the café to open separately to the rest of the building	Arts Centre Team with Development and Corporate Landlord	Options identified and where appropriate actioned.	Incorporated within the cost of action 14	Within 18 months
21	Implement pricing changes following a full review	1. Review ticket pricing, memberships, and room hire pricing 2. consider competitors and other SODC facilities 3. discount approach and donating spare tickets to VCOSOs to generate social value	Improved market positioning, improved income generation, improved social value, continuing a range of pricing options that are affordable for different elements of the community	Finance and Arts centre team	Revised pricing rolled out. New pricing policy in place.	Met through existing in-house resources,	Within 18 months
22	Work with Economic Development to establish a Social Value Calculator and targets for Cornerstone	Explore The use of social value calculator	Improved measurement of impact	Communities Team	separate service value from operational costs	Met through existing in-house resources,	Within 18 months
23	Assess the impact of changes made and long-term service models for Cornerstone, including the continuation of an inhouse service	1. produce an options report considering transitioning Cornerstone into a trust, external operator or retaining in house management 2. Cabinet and council to make a decision on options	Greater focus and cohesion	Cabinet and Council	Full council decision in place	Met through existing in-house resources subject to capacity.	April 2026 (latest)
24	Consider the councils ongoing financial commitment to Cornerstone	1. Review financial impact of actions completed 2. Work with Finance to develop detailed and updated financial forecasts 3. Update and expand financial models for alternative operating models for comparison	Improved financial forecasting	Finance	MFTP reflects agreed financial commitment	Met through existing in-house resources subject to capacity.	TBC pending outcome of action 24

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Agenda Item 9

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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