

Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Corporate Services

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AGENDA ITEM

Development of the South Oxfordshire District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024

Recommendation

Scrutiny Committee is asked to review the progress of and provide any recommendations on the development of the new South Oxfordshire District Council Corporate Plan 2020-24.

Purpose of Report

1. To brief Scrutiny Committee on the development of the new Corporate Plan 2020-24 and provide an opportunity for the Committee to make any recommendations on the proposed priority themes, illustrative projects, timescales for delivery, governance and engagement approach.

Strategic Objectives

2. A new Corporate Plan for the period 2020-2024 is required to establish a vision and priorities for the council.

Background

3. As a large organisation working in partnership with a variety of stakeholders, public, private and the community and voluntary sector, the vision and priorities are important in setting the strategic context for the execution and delivery of council business in accordance with Councillor intentions.
4. It is envisaged that the Corporate Plan will:
 - Establish the strategic direction for South Oxfordshire District Council for the period 2020-2024, informed by Councillors, Strategic Management Team (SMT), service areas, stakeholders and residents.
 - Provide a framework to align council work to priorities.
 - Target resources towards the priorities identified in the plan, aligning projects undertaken by the council to directly contribute to the delivery of the plan.
 - Enable plans, projects, policies, strategies and delivery to be tied into a 'golden thread' linking service and team performance to overall council performance.
 - Align staff objectives setting and appraisal system with the objectives of the Corporate Plan allowing all staff to understand how they as individual contributors help the whole organisation achieve its objectives.
 - Increase residents' awareness of the work the council is doing and what the council hopes to achieve.
5. During January and February 2020 Heads of Service and Cabinet Members met to discuss illustrative projects and actions that could contribute to the themes that had been identified as part of the Corporate Plan 2020-24. These were collated by the Insight and Policy Manager and an away day session planned for 18 March 2020. During the session it was planned that SMT and Cabinet Members were to prioritise which illustrative projects and actions to include and make plans for engagement. This session was subsequently cancelled as the council invoked business continuity measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19.
6. Cabinet Members continued to work on their themes and illustrative projects for inclusion into the Corporate Plan 2020-24 remotely to ensure they were ready to work at pace with officers on the development of the plan as work on the Councils Covid-19 Community Support Programme became more stable.
7. In June 2020 Cabinet Members and SMT came back together to review the themes and illustrative projects with any amendments to reflect the change in landscape. This resulted in an emerging consensus on themes and illustrative projects.
8. On 22 June 2020 the draft online survey to be used during engagement was shared with wider members by Councillor Andrea Powell to provide an early opportunity for them to feedback on the format, process and content. Feedback has been incorporated into the documents appended to this report.
9. The proposed Corporate Plan 2020-24 themes and illustrative projects were considered by the South Oxfordshire Climate Emergency Advisory Committee on 29 June to provide an opportunity for the Committee to make any recommendations to Cabinet on the contents with particular regard to Climate Change, a number of minor changes were requested and are reflected in the document appended to this report.

Themes

10. The proposed themes which have been identified by Cabinet members and informed by SMT which will form the basis of the Corporate Plan are:

- Theme 1: Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs.
- Theme 2: Improved economic and community wellbeing
- Theme 3: Action on the Climate Emergency
- Theme 4: Protection and restoration of our natural world
- Theme 5: Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability
- Theme 6: Openness and accountability

11. Details of the illustrative projects which underpin each theme can be found in the appendix.

12. During the development of themes and illustrative projects for the Corporate Plan 2020-24, South Oxfordshire District Councillors have held discussions and exchanged thinking with Cabinet members from the Vale of White Horse District Council. It is recognised that as well as a shared workforce, there are some shared interests, although each Council will develop its own Plan based on its specific priorities and situations.

Scope of Engagement

13. Internal and external engagement on the Corporate Plan 2020-24 will help us to:

- Test out themes and illustrative projects.
- Convey the priorities and aspirations of the recently elected administration
- Better understand and respond to the needs of local people, staff, Councillors and businesses.
- 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 we have experienced since Covid-19.
- Increase transparency and be more accountable for what we do.

14. It is proposed that the framing of the Corporate Plan 2020-24 engagement is strong on the Covid-19 context and recovery, how the local government landscape is changing and addresses the financial challenges we face. It is also proposed we include that the development of the Corporate Plan 2020-24 is an incremental journey showcasing Councillor intentions and demonstrating progress so far with more detail on specific actions, projects and measures to follow.

15. It is recognised that engagement in this area previously has been low and we need to be balanced and proportionate in the approach. However, the Corporate Plan 2020-24 engagement presents a good opportunity to be creative and imaginative and respond to the Covid-19 landscape by using some different techniques that could potentially extend the councils reach and increase participation.

16. The Communications and Engagement Team scoped virtual options for engagement on the Corporate Plan 2020-24 and propose a campaign that comprises of an on-line survey and a series of short self-shot video clips from Cabinet Members talking to a theme. This virtual campaign will be used on our websites and could be shared on our social media pages for onward use.
17. The online survey shows the themes and illustrative projects and asks stakeholders to rank the importance of them. This will give Councillors a view on the priority of illustrative projects and could be important in the construction of programmes of work to deliver projects that are favoured in the public mind.
18. The survey will capture if responders believe anything to be missing from the Corporate Plan 2020-24 and confirm which words particularly resonate or if any were confusing to them. It will also differentiate between responders, so it is clear if the response is from a resident, Councillor or staff member.
19. Staff engagement will run in parallel to this and we will use all internal communication channels to promote the virtual campaign and encourage participation in the online survey. As the Corporate Plan 2020-24 will be the roadmap for staff in the delivery of their work we also plan to give consideration to a Q and A session which would provide an opportunity for staff to ask more detailed questions or provide feedback on the delivery of illustrative projects to inform Councillors thinking.
20. The primary audience for the engagement will be residents, staff and councillors. Particular focus will be given to using existing and new networks to push the engagement out further to businesses within the district, town and parish councils and community groups (including those involved in the Covid-19 Community Support Programme).
21. Consideration has been given to other engagements and events expected to be taking place in July such as for the Homes England Didcot Gateway site, South Oxfordshire Local Plan Examination and the further easing of Covid-19 restrictions for residents and businesses, which may impact the level of engagement. However, in order to maintain momentum, it is proposed that the engagement start on 16 July 2020 for a period of 4 weeks.

Timeline

22. A copy of the timeline for the development of the plan is attached. Key dates are as follows:
 - 9 July 2020 - Cabinet approve content for engagement.
 - 16 July to 13 August 2020 - Engagement to take place.
 - 16 September 2020 - Scrutiny Committee meeting to examine full draft plan.
 - 1 October 2020 - Cabinet meeting to approve plan.
 - 8 October 2020 – Full Council meeting to formally adopt plan.
 - 30 October 2020 – Plan comes into effect.

Financial Implications

23. There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report. As the Corporate Plan 2020-24 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

24. There are no legal implications arising from this report. Legal implications may arise in respect of individual projects as part of the future delivery of the Corporate Plan 2020-24.

Risks

25. The Corporate Plan 2020-24 will be a strategic document 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.

26. It is anticipated that there will be a HM Government White Paper released in late summer detailing a new push for devolution and raised potential for further local government reorganisation which may impact the development of the Corporate Plan 2020-24.

Other Implications

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

Conclusion

28. A new Corporate Plan for the period 2020-2024 is required to establish a vision 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 hopes to achieve. A timeline has been developed to illustrate timescales for delivery, governance and the adoption.

29. A number of priority themes and illustrative projects have been developed by Cabinet Members informed by SMT, which will form the basis of a new Corporate Plan 2020-24. These have been refreshed and revised in light of the recent outbreak of Covid-19 and discussed with the Council's Climate Emergency Advisory Committee.

30. The proposed engagement presents a unique opportunity to be creative and imaginative and respond to the Covid-19 landscape by using some different techniques that could potentially extend the councils reach and increase participation.

Background Papers

- A copy of the on-line public consultation survey
<https://survey.southandvale.gov.uk/s/preview/XENM4O/ABA704AAE4B1AE1B50CB77E9CB3EA0>
- A copy of the timeline for the development of the plan.
- A copy of proposed Corporate Plan 2020-24 themes and illustrative projects.