

Cabinet Report



Listening Learning Leading

Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

Author: Alice Penfold

E-mail: alice.penfold@southandvale.gov.uk

Wards affected: all

South Cabinet member responsible: Councillor. Sam Casey-Rerhaye

E-mail: Sam.Casey-Rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk

To: SCRUTINY

Dates: 4 February 2025

To: CABINET

Dates: 30 January 2025

To: COUNCIL

Dates: 13 February 2025

The Way Ahead - Council Plan 2025-2029

Recommendation to Cabinet

To approve the Council Plan 2025-2029 (Appendix 1) and recommend its adoption to Full Council.

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	No	No	No	Yes
Signing off officer	Hannah Makins	Vivien Williams	Chloe Bunting	Ruth Lewin- Leigh

Purpose of report

1. To seek Cabinet approval for the proposed Council Plan 2025-2029 and recommendation to Full Council for adoption.

Corporate objectives

2. A Council Plan for the period 2025-2029 is seeking to establish a vision and strategic priorities for the council. The Council Plan forms part of the council's policy framework.

Background

3. The existing Corporate Plan 2020-2024 has now reached the end of its defined timeframe. The council is now seeking to adopt a Council Plan for the period 2025-2029 to establish its vision and strategic priorities.
4. As an organisation working in partnership with a variety of stakeholders across the public, private, and community and voluntary sectors, the council's vision and priorities are important in setting the strategic context for the delivery and monitoring of council services in accordance with councillor intentions.
5. 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 Council Plan.
6. The Council Plan should reflect the financial landscape of the council, and it sits alongside the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). For it to be a credible strategic framework, the Council Plan can be aspirational and ambitious, but it must be affordable and be appropriately budgeted for.
7. The Council Plan sets the overall strategic direction of the council for the period 2025-2029. It is informed by councillors, Strategic Management Team (SMT), council service areas, stakeholders and residents. Alongside setting the overall strategic direction of the council, the Council Plan 2025-2029 will:
 - 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 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 the council's strategic goals and objectives.
8. The Council Plan does not supersede national policy or legislation, and it does not allow the council to override existing policies or statutory frameworks that the council is required to adhere to. Once the Council Plan is adopted, further formal decisions by the bodies involved may be required in order to implement it. Where this is the case, these decisions will be subject to the usual democratic and scrutiny processes.

Development of the Council Plan

9. The process began with a review of the Corporate Plan 2020-2024, which included workshops with Cabinet Members and the Strategic Management Team (SMT) in Autumn 2023. Outcomes arising from these sessions led to the development of draft priorities and illustrative programmes of existing or aspirational activities ahead of public engagement.
10. At its meeting on [15 February 2024](#), Cabinet endorsed the approach to develop the Council Plan. The approach was considered by Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on [6 February 2024](#) and feedback was submitted to Cabinet for consideration alongside the proposed approach.
11. The [public engagement exercise](#) on the draft themes for the Council Plan ran over a four-week period between 16 April 2024 and 14 May 2024. Activities included an online survey using a new engagement platform, a community drop-in event, a virtual exhibition, and interactive briefing sessions for officers. All councillors were also provided with consultation packs which they could use to engage with their networks and the communities they represent.
12. In total, 130 responses were received from a variety of residents, businesses, organisations and community groups, made up of 127 online submissions and 3 postal responses. The engagement summary report is included at Appendix 2. Key findings include:
 - 80% of respondents expressed agreement with the priority related to climate change and nature recovery being included in the Council Plan (56% strongly agreed, 24% agreed).
 - 76% of respondents expressed agreement with the priority related to inclusion, accessibility and accountability being included in the Council Plan (43% strongly agreed, 33% agreed).
 - 87% of respondents expressed agreement with the priority related to thriving and healthy communities being included in the Council Plan (47% strongly agreed, 40% agreed).
 - 82% of respondents expressed agreement with the priority related to homes and infrastructure being included in the Council Plan (47% strongly agreed, 40% agreed).
 - 73% of respondents expressed agreement with the priority related to financial stability being included in the Council Plan (39% strongly agreed, 34% agreed).
13. Further engagement has been undertaken with councillors through an all member roundtable to seek views on the draft vision, strategic priorities, objectives and initiatives to further inform the Plan's development.
14. Further engagement has also been undertaken with council officers from all service areas, to help develop indicators to measure progress against the proposed strategic priorities and objectives.
15. Internal and external engagement on the Council Plan 2025-2029 has helped to:
 - Convey the priorities and aspirations of the elected administration.
 - Test the priorities, objectives with illustrative projects in parallel with the delivery of statutory functions.

- 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 council's 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.

Strategic Priorities

16. The proposed strategic priorities to form the basis of the Council Plan 2025-2029 are:

- Action on climate change and nature recovery
- Participation, accessibility, and accountability
- Thriving, healthy, and inclusive communities
- Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs
- Financial stability and innovative transformation

17. Each priority is accompanied by a number of strategic objectives, which outline what success will look like within each priority area.

Performance Management Framework

18. It is intended that, each year, the council will develop an Annual Delivery Plan which will set out a range of initiatives to support delivery of the strategic priorities and objectives outlined in the Council Plan.

19. Extensive engagement has been undertaken with council service areas to understand the data they hold and how it could be used to show effectively progress against the Council Plan. A range of possible initiatives and indicators to support the strategic priorities and objectives have been collated and will be finalised pending discussions on the Government's devolution timeframes.

20. Taking into account feedback in relation to the reporting framework for the Corporate Plan 2020-2024, every effort has been made to utilise existing data to demonstrate progress against the new Council Plan. A new reporting dashboard will be developed, and the intention is for this to be as automated as possible, decreasing the amount of data that needs to be entered manually. In addition, the new dashboard will make reporting more accessible and timelier to councillors, members of the public and other interested stakeholders.

21. It is anticipated that the new reporting dashboard will be implemented following the launch of the new Council Plan and the development of the Year 1 delivery plan (expected from March 2025), with incremental improvements made to the reports when relevant data sources are identified and available. The formal performance reporting arrangements will include an annual performance report.

22. As with all council policies, hard copy prints and other formats can be available on request.

Financial Implications

23. There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report, but the Council Plan 2025-2029 will sit alongside the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
24. From the point at which the Council Plan 2025-2029 is 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 financial, democratic and scrutiny processes.

Legal Implications

25. There are no anticipated legal implications arising from this report. Legal implications may arise in respect of individual projects or delivery of services while implementing the Council Plan 2025-2029.

Climate and ecological impact implications

26. There are no anticipated climate and ecological implications arising from this report. The Council Plan 2025-2029 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 Nature and Climate Action Plan.
27. As agreed with the climate team, the use of the Climate Impact Assessment Tool is not appropriate for the high-level strategy set out in this report. The climate and ecological impacts of each project within the programme will be assessed using the Climate Impact Assessment Tool as they come forward.

Equalities implications

28. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed which concludes the Council Plan will have a positive impact upon groups in the district with protected characteristics.

Risks

29. The Council Plan 2025-2029 is a strategic framework 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 processes.
30. The recently published HM Government English Devolution White Paper outlines plans for further devolution and local government reorganisation. In addition, HM Government has committed to local government funding reform from 2025-26, with more radical changes intended to simplify the funding landscape expected from 2026-27. These are examples of emerging national policy and direction that may directly impact the implementation of the Council Plan 2025-2029. They, along with other emerging factors will be monitored and reviewed annually in line with the performance management framework and corporate risk framework, when identified.

Other Implications

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

Conclusion

32. A new Council Plan for the period 2025-2029 is seeking to establish a vision and strategic priorities for the council. It is envisaged that 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 is aiming to achieve.
33. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Council Plan 2025-2029 and makes a recommendation to Full Council for its adoption.

Background Papers

- Appendix 1 – Council Plan 2025-2029 draft
- Appendix 2 – Council Plan Consultation Summary Report