

TITLE	Council Plan Extension 2024-25
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 30 November 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing - Stephen Conway

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to give the rationale for extending the current council plan for one year and for making amendments to the plan. It explains the changes made and the anticipated next steps.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) Agree to extend the current Council Plan for one year (2024-25)
- 2) Accept the amendments to the plan as set out in this report
- 3) Recommend that this goes to full council for approval

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Council needs a Council Plan to set priorities and direction for its work. As the Council Plan needs to be aligned to the new Community Vision (due in June 2024) there will be a gap between the current plan ending and a new one starting for the reasons explained in the report, therefore an interim council plan is needed to bridge this gap.
- The report provides the rationale for extending the council plan for a further year and the reasons for the amendments made to the plan. It also explains what changes have been made, and the next steps following the decision.
- The extended (interim) Council Plan will take effect from 1st April 2024. It will be published alongside a SMART delivery plan for the year.

BACKGROUND

Reason for extending the current plan

The Council Plan forms part of the council's strategic framework and sets out the priorities that the council has set in order to achieve the community vision. It forms part of the golden thread that enables service planning and strategy development, and ultimately leads to team and individual work plans.

The current Council Plan was published in 2020 and was refreshed in February 2022. It is aligned to the 2020 vision, and it is due to end in March 2024. Normally, a new Council Plan would be developed to start in April 2024.

However, significant work is underway with partners and communities to co-produce a new Community Vision for the Borough that will set the direction of travel for many years to come. The new community vision is expected to be launched in 2024.

The new council plan must be developed after this, so that it can be aligned to the outcomes in the vision.

Therefore, an extension to the current plan for 2024-25 is needed to provide direction and continuity for staff, members and residents.

Reason for amendments to the current plan

Since the most recent refresh of the plan in 2022, a number of factors have changed the way in which we operate:

- Change in political administration, with different priorities and a new approach
- High inflation causing real cost increases to the council of about £10.8million this year.
- Cost-of-living crisis impacting residents and staff, with demand for service increasing
- Global events seeing an increase in inward migration to Wokingham Borough

With this context, and the need to reflect additional work planned for the extension period, some amendments have been made to ensure the plan is fit for purpose.

What has not changed:

The strategic themes have not changed. These were agreed following extensive consultation, and a second consultation would be required if these were to be altered. Keeping the current themes also provides continuity for staff and residents.

The Council Values haven't changed. These will be revisited as we develop the new council plan.

Our commitment to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion hasn't changed. This was a new addition to the refreshed plan in 2022.

What has changed:

A new introduction from the current Leader of the Council and Chief Executive highlighting new challenges, political change and new priorities. Also a reflection on what has been achieved towards the strategic themes in the last year.

A new section describing the new approach to partnership working, as this is a central theme of the council's new way of working.

Updated financial information showing the revenue and capital budgets for 2023-24 and key areas of spend (this will be updated again in March once the 24-25 budget is agreed).

Under each strategic theme, new challenges have been included, new activity for 2024-25, and a change in emphasis towards climate emergency, equality, health and wellbeing and safe, strong communities to better reflect the current administration's priorities.

Minor revisions may be made to the plan as circumstances change.

Next steps

Once agreed, there will be a period of engagement with staff and members to socialise the plan and support understanding of the strategic framework and service planning. This will take place between December 2023 and March 2024.

The plan will be designed in the same style as the current council plan to give continuity.

The plan will be published in April 2024, and will be supported by a one-year SMART delivery plan which will be measured and reported on through a set of Key Performance Indicators and in the council's Annual Report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Within current resources – budget to be set February 2024	Yes	Both
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other Financial Information

The council plan is the overarching plan for delivery of all council services, therefore the costs and savings reflect the council budget for the year 2024-25. The council maintains a strong focus on achieving value for money and by reviewing and refreshing the plan for the extended year opportunities to drive more efficiency and vfm have been identified.

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)

This is going correctly to Executive under paragraph 5.1.10 of the Constitution note that the report must be available to the public for at least 5 days prior to the Executive meeting, under paras 3.2.6 and / or 5.1.9.5.

In the event that the Executive approves the recommendation as the Policy will be amended, both in its content and by extension then it needs to be referred to Full Council under paragraph 4.1.1(b).

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Engagement has taken place with the internal steering group of Assistant Directors, the Corporate Leadership Team and the Leader of the Council. Full consultation was carried out in 2020 with residents and stakeholders when the current plan was developed. As this is an extension to the current plan with minimal changes, wider consultation was not deemed necessary.

Public Sector Equality Duty

A stage One EqIA has been completed which identified that the council plan should have an overall positive impact on all protected characteristics. Each programme of work in the delivery of the plan will need its own EqIA.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

No direct impact

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session

N/A

List of Background Papers

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