

TITLE	Council Plan Refresh 2022/23
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on Thursday 24 March 2022
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council - John Halsall

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

There is a need to refresh the Council Plan to pick up on emerging priorities since it was developed and to ensure better clarity and communication around the strategic priorities. The Annual Review is an important opportunity to look back at what has been achieved over the past year and use this to support further service delivery, improvement activity and changes in focus to the Council Plan for coming years.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive recommend Council to:

- 1) note the slight change in articulation of the strategic priorities as proposed;
- 2) agree the proposed changes to the Council Plan and updates to strategic themes as summarised within this report and set out in Appendix 1;
- 3) adopt the Annual Review for 2020/21 as contained in Appendix 2 and highlights for 2021/22 as contained in Appendix 3.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council Plan covers the period 2020-24 but since its development there have been many changes with Covid-19, Brexit and rising food prices impacting on people's lives and living standards. It is therefore important to refresh the Council Plan.

The changes proposed are set out within the report, which are designed to provide a more coherent set of strategic priorities; embed inclusivity throughout the plan; and incorporate emerging priorities, address feedback from the Local Government Association (LGA) peer review and include statutory services.

The report also presents the Annual Review, which provides context to the changes proposed to the Council Plan, by looking back at the achievements throughout 2020/21 and to date for 2021/22.

This report and appendices were considered by the Executive at their meeting on 7 March 2022

BACKGROUND

The Council Plan 2020-24 was approved by the Council just ahead of the Covid-19 pandemic starting and therefore it is now important that the impacts of this are considered as part of a refresh and then more detailed review of the Council Plan.

Having considered the Council Plan in its current state, some key areas for refreshing were identified:

- Changes to the key strategic themes
- Responding to the LGA Peer Review
- Increasing focus on emerging opportunities and shorter term priorities
- Incorporating statutory obligations

It is also recognised that with the current financial uncertainty it is appropriate to have a more comprehensive review of the Plan later in the year, alongside development of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Key Strategic Themes

It is proposed to update the key strategic themes within the Community Vision and the Council Plan to make these sit together in a more cohesive manner with similar style for each. This also allows greater focus and clearer communication around five outward focused themes supported by two organisational themes as below.

Current Strategic themes

- Safe, Strong Communities
- Enriching Lives
- A Clean and Green Borough
- Right Homes, Right Places
- Keeping the Borough Moving
- Changing the Way We Work For You

Proposed revised strategic themes

- Providing Safe, Strong Communities
- Enriching Lives
- Enjoying a Clean and Green Borough
- Delivering the Right Homes, in the Right Places
- Keeping the Borough Moving

Supported by two organisational themes or enablers

- Being the Best we can be
- Changing the Way we Work for You

Emerging Priorities

Since the Plan was originally written there are several emerging priorities which are being built in through this refresh. The detail of these is contained in the Council Plan (see Appendix 1) but they are highlighted below:

- Equality – including working towards “Achieving” in the LGA Equality Framework
- Tackling poverty – being picked up through development of a partnership Anti-Poverty Strategy and supporting 4 year programme
- Customer excellence – ensuring that residents are put at the heart of everything we do and delivering a programme to support this
- Data and insight – driving better use of data at all levels of the council to provide intelligence and support evidence based decision making

- Health and wellbeing – supporting delivery of the new strategy and leading an early intervention approach
- UNICEF Child Friendly Area Programme – maximising on the opportunities of being one of the few councils accepted onto the programme embedding children’s rights within systems and services
- Social care reform – preparing for the changes to charging and responding to the increasing demand for care

As well as the priorities set out above which have been incorporated, it is clear that there is not much reference to the statutory, day-to-day services for which the council is responsible within the Plan. These have therefore been threaded throughout the refreshed Council Plan enabling staff to see how they are contributing to and involved in the Council’s success.

LGA Peer Review Feedback

Whilst there were no surprises to the feedback received from the LGA peer review held in November, there are three aspects which we identified for increased priority and prominence in addressing:

- Restate and bring to life a narrative about the Council's ambitions for its residents to deliver the future vision for Wokingham - the place, the people, and the opportunities
- Ensure there is a commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners to become the focus for the entire community
- Further embedding of the Council vision ensuring a golden thread throughout all the strategies, identifying the impact that the adopted strategies have on the council’s priorities and delivery plans, and what a priority and non-priority means

These have all been incorporated within the refreshed Council Plan and work programmes are being developed to bring about the changes or focus required.

Annual Review

The annual review, included as Appendices 2 and 3, sets out some key achievements for the Council during 2020/21 and 2021/22: providing an opportunity to better promote the work and achievements of the Council.

BUSINESS CASE

It is important that the changes proposed and highlighted above are included at this point in time to demonstrate the priority given to these areas of work. It is expected that these changes will be delivered over a number of years, but it is not appropriate to wait longer before the full review of the Council Plan is concluded.

By acting now on these priority areas of work, the Council is best able to respond to the increased challenges that many people are facing; can be seen to be tackling inequality and poverty and embedding inclusivity as a key thread throughout our work.

Work to address the LGA peer review feedback will lead to short term improvements including:

- A clear communications and marketing strategy will be established with a supporting campaign to sell the council and the Borough
- Working with key partners across the public, voluntary and community sectors in the borough to establish a vision for Wokingham Borough, as a place, with clear aspirations

- Influencing alignment of shared priorities and objectives across our partners to maximise benefits for residents and focus Council strategies, policies and delivery plans
- Mapping strategies to establish a clear hierarchy and cascade from the Community Vision and Council Plan through other strategies, rationalising what is a strategy and ensuring that these are focussed on the agreed priorities.

All these initiatives help to better communicate what the council is about, what it is seeking to achieve and how it is working with partners to achieve this: increasing focus on priorities and improving outcomes for residents.

Whilst the LGA peer review programme is voluntary, it is important to address the feedback received in a timely manner. Failing to do so would impact the council's reputation with the LGA and amongst peers.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources 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)	£0	Yes	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	

Other Financial Information

The Council Plan will be delivered within existing resources, if any additional funding is required a further report would be brought to the Executive.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

There is no consultation being carried out as part of this refresh: the more detailed review of the plan later in the year will include a more comprehensive consultation process, engaging with stakeholders in identification of changes.

Public Sector Equality Duty

The initial Council Plan was supported by an EqIA and the review to be undertaken later in the year will also take the same approach. The refresh is only making small changes that help to increase the focus on equalities, inequality and disadvantage across the Borough.

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

There are no changes proposed within this refresh that would impact negatively on carbon neutrality aspirations.

List of Background Papers
Council Plan 2020-24
Annual Review 2020/21
Annual Review 2021/22

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