

Corporate plan 2020-2023: Discussion paper for PDRC

Background to the corporate plan

1. The council's corporate plan is the overarching statement of the organisation's vision and objectives for a medium-term period, in practice generally the duration of a single administration. It is the document which sits at the 'pinnacle' of the council's strategies and plans, from which each of those documents should broadly take its cue. As such it represents the principal component of the statutory policy framework within which cabinet exercises its executive decision-making authority. It is cabinet's role to develop each new plan, but adoption is a matter for full council.
2. The plan establishes the political and managerial priorities on which the organisation will focus over the lifetime of the plan. Without attempting to cover in any detail all of the objectives to be pursued by every department, it sets the overall tone for resource allocation, establishing which activities and high-level objectives are priorities and, by implication, which are not.
3. Balanced against this, however, the plan also represents the strategic end of the 'golden thread' which runs down through departments' operational service plans to individual officers' annual performance appraisals as a means of ensuring that the council's efforts across the full range of its disparate activities are marshalled as coherently as possible.
4. In an ideal world the plan will thus square the circle of establishing clear political priorities while also providing a 'hook' for all teams – including those whose roles are essential but only indirectly related to the specific priorities of the administration – to link their work to the overall ambitions of the council.
5. The device in recent iterations of the plan of setting out a number of very specific objectives which are then organised under a smaller number of much broader priorities was an attempt at such circle-squaring, one which has worked fairly well and which we would probably want to carry over into the new plan.
6. It is worth emphasising that the corporate plan is primarily an internal document. Clearly it needs to take significant account of the political manifesto of the administration, but it does also need to be influenced by the type of general strategic analysis that all organisations, including those less overtly political than a local authority, need to conduct from time to time: this would include analyses of the macro environment (economic, fiscal, social, legal, and indeed political) within which the organisation has to achieve its ambitions.

7. As the key component of the council's overarching policy framework, the plan should also broadly reflect the priorities of the whole council rather than solely the administration.

Timetable for developing the new plan

8. The administration elected in May has moved quickly to agree its main priorities and ensure that these are communicated to staff. Action has begun on them, and the need to produce a revised corporate plan has therefore not been as urgent as might otherwise have been the case.
9. In the longer term, however, it is unlikely that any administration's list of purely political priorities would serve a council well as a substitute for a corporate plan, and even less so as the principal component of the statutory policy framework. It is therefore important that the council moves to develop a new corporate plan during this municipal year.
10. There are some constitutional requirements which have an impact on the duration of this work, including the need to ensure adequate consultation with members and with the public. The intention is for the final plan to come to annual council for adoption in May, which will require us to have a consultation draft completed by the end of the calendar year.
11. As the first stage in the consultation process with PDRC, a first draft of a set of possible priorities and objectives is attached at Appendix I. PDRC is asked to comment on the appropriateness of these and make suggestions for improvement. Once the priorities and objectives are broadly agreed, the rest of the plan can be written around these.
12. Between now and the start of the public consultation in the winter, there will be further consultation with cabinet members, group leaders and senior officers. A further PDRC discussion on the consultation draft will be scheduled for early in the new year.

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APPENDIX I: INITIAL DRAFT OF PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

Priority 1:

Building the right homes in the right places and supporting quality jobs for all

- 1.1 Use the local plan review to ensure that future housing delivery is more closely aligned to the borough's housing needs in terms of location, type and tenure, and that opportunities to improve physical and social infrastructure through housing growth are fully exploited.
- 1.2 Work with registered providers and developers to pursue all viable opportunities for increasing the supply of affordable and social housing across the borough.
- 1.3 Develop a new economic improvement strategy to expand the range of employment opportunities in the borough, focusing on higher-skilled employment and considering the role of a living wage.
- 1.4 Support students, workers and businesses to improve the borough's vocational skill levels, and vigorously pursue all opportunities to enhance the provision and accessibility of further and higher education for Swale residents at all stages of their careers.
- 1.5 Implement the visitor economy framework to increase investment, address new visitor demands and grow the value of the sector to the Swale economy.
- 1.6 Encourage the development of high-quality housing with an appropriate range of tenure options on brownfield land in central Sittingbourne, improving both the appearance and the economic and environmental sustainability of the High Street.

Priority 2:

Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges

- 2.1 Develop a coherent strategy to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies, aiming for carbon neutrality in the council's own operations by 2025 and in the whole borough by 2030.
- 2.2 Work with partners to develop measures to identify and address air quality issues throughout the borough.
- 2.3 Establish a special projects fund to provide much-needed capital investment in the borough's public realm and open spaces.
- 2.4 Recognise and support our local heritage to give people pride in where they live and boost the local tourism industry.
- 2.5 Keep the borough clean and well-maintained, and ensure that the council behaves as an exemplar environmental steward.

Priority 3:**Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone**

- 3.1 Take steps to help the most disadvantaged families and communities to embrace opportunities from economic growth, job creation and skills provision.
- 3.2 Reduce health inequality by developing more productive relationships with local health partners and making health implications a central consideration in all relevant council decision-making.
- 3.3 Develop a more communitarian approach to partnership working based on shared objectives with like-minded agencies in the voluntary and community sectors.
- 3.4 Ensure that the council plays a proactive role in community safety, including through the modernisation of CCTV provision and by working in partnership to improve opportunities for young people to engage in positive activities.
- 3.5 Promote improved wellbeing and enjoyment of life by facilitating and supporting a wide range of sporting, cultural and other leisure activities.

Priority 4:**Renewing local democracy and making the council fit for the future**

- 4.1 Review the council's constitution to diffuse decision-making power more widely among elected members and improve the transparency, responsiveness and public accountability of that decision-making.
- 4.2 Develop a cross-departmental corporate ethos focused on the priorities in this plan, and embed the Swale Manager programme to ensure a consistent understanding of the council's expectations of all managers.
- 4.3 Continue to reduce dependence on government-controlled funding sources and support staff to find innovative ways to ensure other objectives can be met in the context of diminished resources.