

Council Meeting	
Meeting Date	18 February 2015
Report Title	Corporate Plan 2015 - 2018
Cabinet Member	Cllr Bowles – Council Leader
SMT Lead	Abdool Kara – Chief Executive
Head of Service	David Clifford – Policy and Performance Manager
Lead Officer	David Clifford – Policy and Performance Manager
Key Decision	No
Classification	Open
Forward Plan	Reference number:
Recommendations	<p>Council is recommended:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To adopt the text at Appendix I as the council's corporate plan for the period 2015-2018. 2. To adopt the table at Appendix II as the council's high-level action plan to sit immediately below the corporate plan objectives in 2015/16 and to be reviewed annually thereafter. 3. To give delegated authority to the chief executive, in consultation with the cabinet member for performance, to confirm and where necessary amend indicators and targets in the corporate performance indicator set for 2015/16, based on the three-year targets adopted by council in May 2013 (minute No. 16, 2013/14).

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks council's agreement to adopt a new corporate plan to cover the period 2015-2018. It sets out the purpose of a corporate plan and summarises the recent history of strategic planning at Swale, before considering the options for dealing with the fact that the current plan will come to the end of its life in March 2015. The report contains the proposed new plan for 2015 - 2018 at Appendix I, and a proposed high-level action plan for 2015/16, to be updated annually, at Appendix II.

2 Background

- 2.1 The corporate plan is the overarching statement of SBC's medium-term strategic objectives. The council's first plan covered the period 2007/08 - 2010/11, while

the current one commenced at the start of the municipal year 2011/12 and will expire at the end of 2014/15.

- 2.2 The plan is traditionally structured around a limited number of high-level priorities, which articulate both local political aspirations and a considered response to anticipated changes in the council's wider operating environment. These priorities determine the focus of the council's activities and resource allocation for the duration of the plan. They are generally concerned with areas of change and development for the organisation, rather than acting as complete list of the council's disparate range of activities.
- 2.3 The plan is more of an inward-facing document than a public one, although of course it is published on the website and freely available to anyone who wants to read it. Its primary purpose is to ensure that council resources are coherently allocated in support of agreed priorities: as part of this, the plan plays an important role in staff engagement and motivation. Conversely, the objectives set out in the plan do need to be achievable within the resources available to the organisation.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Throughout the development of the version of the plan at Appendix I, there has been a strong sense from many stakeholders that a new corporate plan which continues the work of the current one is the most appropriate option. Much progress has been made over the four years since the current plan was adopted but, as would be expected, there remains more to be done before the council's long-term ambitions in areas such as regeneration or localism are fully realised. The new plan thus needs to update the objectives to ensure that they remain comprehensive in terms of addressing emerging issues within the Borough and more widely.
- 3.2 Given the high proportion of members' aspirations for the Borough which cannot be realised by the council acting alone, the council's ambitions can be split into those which are wholly within the power of the council to realise, and those which are not. With regard to the latter, it would seem sensible in setting objectives to determine the most that the council is able to do in pursuit of them, whether that is influencing partners to work with the council (at one end of the spectrum), through to concerted and systematic lobbying of the actual decision-makers and budget-holders (at the other), and to base concrete, measurable objectives on this.
- 3.3 The priority themes in the version of the plan set out at Appendix I include objectives of both types. The three priority themes represent the overarching statements of what it is that the council is setting out to achieve, and the objectives which sit under them represent the concrete steps it intends to take to achieve them. These themes and objectives are summarised below. Objectives marked with an asterisk are those intended to further the council's aspirations in

policy areas which are not within the its exclusive control, and where we are therefore looking to work collaboratively in some way or another. The final objective under priority theme 3 is intended precisely to strengthen the council's ability to do this effectively.

Priority theme 1: A borough to be proud of

- 3.4 This priority theme focuses on the council's aspirations for Swale as a physical place. It continues the 2007 - 2011 priority of 'Regenerating Swale', but updates this to focus on the delivery phase as we move towards construction work commencing. The theme also carries on much of what is covered by 'Open for Business' in the current plan, including physical economic enablers such as infrastructure, but also covering the need for the Borough to improve its 'brand recognition' to attract both investment and visitors. Finally, the theme picks up many of the place-related elements of the 2007 - 2010 'Cleaner and Greener' and the 2011 - 2014 'Healthy Environment' priorities.
- 3.5 The proposed medium-term objectives under this priority theme are:
- Deliver major regeneration projects;
 - Enhance the borough's economic and tourism offer;
 - Keep Swale clean and tidy;
 - Protect and improve the natural and built environments; and
 - Lobby for better roads and transport*.

Priority theme 2: A community to be proud of

- 3.6 This priority theme focuses on the council's aspirations for the people of Swale. It continues the emphasis placed on encouraging more active communities in the 'Embracing Localism' priority of 2011- 2014 and the 'Safer and Stronger' priority of 2007 - 2010. It seeks to recognise that the council, and the wider public sector more generally, can never be the whole solution to the issues faced by communities in Swale, and that an important role for the council is in enabling and empowering residents to find their own answers to the difficulties they want to overcome.
- 3.7 Strongly aligned to this, the theme also covers the people-focused elements of the 2011 - 2014 'Open for Business' priority, such as support for indigenous business growth and the need to improve qualifications and skills. Finally, the theme picks up members' concerns and aspirations with regard to the health and mental health agendas, recognising the role the council needs to play in influencing local provision.
- 3.8 The proposed medium-term objectives under this priority theme are:
- Foster economic growth and prosperity for all;

- Encourage active communities and support the voluntary sector;
- Reduce crime and disorder;
- Use our influence to ensure local skills are matched to local jobs*; and
- Work collaboratively to improve health and mental health*.

Priority theme 3: A council to be proud of

- 3.9 This priority theme focuses on the council's need to develop its own organisational capacity and culture as it continually reassesses how it can best achieve the outcomes of the other two priority themes. In part, this is related to the 2007 - 2010 priority of 'Becoming a High-Performing Organisation', but it acknowledges that the criteria for evaluating councils' performance have become more complex and more opaque during the lifetime of the current plan. The theme recognises the need to develop and sustain non-traditional sources of income while also minimising expenditure by encouraging innovation and experimentation in delivering services.
- 3.10 The theme additionally makes a clear reference to members' focus on the need to improve residents' perceptions and customers' experiences.
- 3.11 Finally, in including an explicit objective to enhance the council's capacity for achieving outcomes collaboratively (e.g. through lobbying, influencing or partnership working), this priority theme also seeks to deal as positively as possible with the problem that many of the most significant political aspirations for the Borough covered under the first two priority themes are simply not within the power of the council to realise on its own.
- 3.12 The proposed medium-term objectives under this priority theme are:
- Improve residents' perceptions and customers' experiences;
 - Ensure that Swale's internal governance and decision-making are second to none;
 - Encourage innovation at every level;
 - Strengthen our financial and political resilience; and
 - Enhance our capacity for achieving outcomes collaboratively*.

High-level action plan

- 3.13 The plan at Appendix II is intended to sit below the broad objectives set out above and in Appendix I. Action plans of this type have historically been used as intermediaries between the corporate plan and individual departments' and divisions' annual service plans, and as such are generally updated on an annual basis.

- 3.14 Some of the actions on the plan at Appendix II are at a greater level of detail than others, and there is also a range of likely durations, with some actions achievable by the end of 2015/16 and others expected to range over a longer term. Both of these features are in accordance with the corporate plan's focus on change and development rather than on cataloguing the day-to-day activities of every team in the council: some of the actions needed to pursue the organisation's medium-term objectives will be fairly straightforward and quickly completed, whereas others will be as complex and long-ranging as the objectives themselves.
- 3.15 Keeping the action plan updated on an annual basis enables completed actions to be removed and new ones added in response to any new risks to, or opportunities for, the achievement of the objectives.

Equality impact

- 3.16 Members are reminded of the council's duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between different groups in society. Case-law on this duty has established that having 'due regard' involves a conscious state of mind, and that it must be exercised with rigour and with an open mind in such a way that it influences the final decision. The equality duty is not a duty to achieve a particular result, but rather to have regard to the need to achieve the aims of the duty when making decisions.
- 3.17 A full assessment of the equality impact of the recommendations in this report is attached at Appendix III. As noted in the assessment, the corporate plan and its associated high-level action plan are in general at too high a level of abstraction for impacts to be assessed appropriately, and many of the pieces of work which will flow from it will need their own impact assessments at the time that specific decisions related to them are being considered. The impact of the plan itself on the aims of the equality duty, without reference to these more detailed pieces of work, is at this stage considered to be low, and no adverse impacts requiring mitigation have been identified.

Recommendation

- 3.18 Council is **recommended** to adopt the text at Appendix I as the council's corporate plan for the period 2015 - 2018, and to adopt the table at Appendix II as the council's high-level action plan to sit immediately below the corporate plan objectives in 2015/16 and to be reviewed annually thereafter.
- 3.19 The corporate performance indicator set was updated in 2013/14 with a view to ensuring that, taken as a whole, it provides a broadly balanced and holistic overview of the entire organisation's performance. This new indicator set was adopted by council in May 2013, together with three-year targets to cover the period 2013/14 to 2015/16 (council minute No. 16, 2013/14).

- 3.20 Council is therefore further **recommended** to give delegated authority to the chief executive, in consultation with the cabinet member for performance, to confirm and where necessary amend indicators and targets in the corporate performance indicator set for 2015/16, based on the three-year targets adopted by council in May 2013.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The council is under no statutory duty to adopt a corporate plan, so the option not to have a plan in place beyond 2014/15 is a valid one. However, the decision to produce the council's first corporate plan back in 2007 has been widely recognised as sound one: while many factors have contributed to Swale's organisational improvement over the last few years, the opportunity to agree clear objectives and then to focus sustained effort and resources on them over a medium-term period has certainly been beneficial. The option to dispense with a corporate plan altogether is thus not recommended.
- 4.2 A further option would be to adopt a new corporate plan which established a wholly different direction for the council. However, while it is important that the council undertakes regular reviews of its strategic objectives to ensure that they remain the most appropriate ones in the light of emerging local issues and changes in the broader context within which it works, this does not mean that each new corporate plan should represent a radical departure from the last one.
- 4.3 Four years is not a long time in terms of strategic ambitions for a borough, and many of the council's most significant aspirations for Swale will take longer than the lifetime of a single plan to realise. While it is entirely appropriate that the opportunity should be taken to review and update priorities and objectives, it is therefore not recommended that the new plan should abandon the overall direction set by the current one.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 The corporate plan is primarily an internal document, and as such the proposed text and action plan at Appendices I and II have been developed in close consultation with members and senior officers. In particular, the appendices as they are presented here accommodate the views and priorities of cabinet members, the policy development and review committee, the strategic management team and all heads of service.
- 5.2 The plan has also been subject to external consultation involving the publication of a draft version and a set of consultation questions to solicit feedback. This was publicised for example through the Swale Community Empowerment Network (SCEN) and the Swale Public Services Board (PSB), as well as through the council's Facebook and Twitter accounts. At the time of writing the consultation had not yet closed, but no responses had so far been received.

- 5.3 This compares with six responses received to the consultation exercise carried out before the current corporate plan was adopted, which followed a similar pattern of publicity to the one about to finish, with the exception that the council did not at that time use social media. It should be borne in mind that the current corporate plan represented a fairly radical departure from its predecessor, and several of the consultation responses at that time related to this, for example questioning how ‘embracing localism’ could be a priority rather than a philosophy, and commenting on the apparent downgrading of the regeneration priority from the 2007 - 2010 plan. Clearly, with the proposed plan at Appendix II representing the development and evolution of the current plan, this issue does not arise in the same way.
- 5.4 In addition, two of the six responses received last time were from partner agencies on the Public Services Board. These organisations will have experienced significant reductions in their budgets over the intervening years, and may no longer routinely respond to consultations of this nature. However, discussions are currently ongoing with the Swale Clinical Commissioning Group on how our respective strategic and operational planning activities could be better aligned, and this could yet result in some suggestions to amend the corporate plan and/or its high-level action plan before it is finally adopted.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The report proposes a new corporate plan to replace the current one, which expires at the end of 2014/15.
Financial, Resource and Property	The corporate plan to some extent represents the narrative complement to the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) in that it sets out in broad terms what the council intends to achieve given the distribution of resources established by the MTFS, albeit that its focus is on change and development rather than on cataloguing the complete list of activities the council expects to undertake. In general it is anticipated that the actions in the high-level action plan which sits beneath the corporate plan (Appendix II to this report) will be achieved within the resource allocations established in the MTFS.
Legal and Statutory	The council is under no statutory duty to prepare or adopt a corporate plan. However, section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 (as amended) does impose a general duty, known as the ‘Best Value Duty’, to ‘secure continuous improvement in the way in which [the council’s] functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness’. One of the purposes of the corporate plan is to provide clear strategic direction on agreed medium-term objectives in order to facilitate optimal and equitable resource allocation, thereby improving the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of council services.

Crime and Disorder	The proposed plan includes an explicit medium-term objective to 'Reduce crime and disorder' (Objective 2.3). No further specific implications have been identified at this stage.
Sustainability	The proposed plan includes an explicit medium-term objective to 'Protect and improve the natural and built environments' (Objective 1.4). No further specific implications have been identified at this stage.
Health and Wellbeing	The proposed plan includes an explicit medium-term objective to 'Work collaboratively to improve health and mental health' (Objective 2.5). No further specific implications have been identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The corporate plan is a key tool in managing council risks, particularly those listed on the strategic risk register. Together with the high-level action plan at Appendix II, the plan at Appendix I addresses all of the risks on the current register with the exception of safeguarding, which while a strategic risk in terms of its impact, is more operational in terms of the actions which are taken to reduce the likelihood of it materialising. No specific health & safety implications have been identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	Decision-makers are reminded of the requirement under the Public Sector Equality Duty (s149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the need to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper could directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and at this level of abstraction does not vary between groups of people. The results of this analysis are set out in the impact assessment attached at Appendix III.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Making Swale a Better Place: SBC corporate plan 2015 - 2018
- Appendix II: High-level action plan 2015/16
- Appendix III: Community impact assessment

8 Background Papers

- SBC corporate plan 2012 – 2015: <http://www.swale.gov.uk/corporate-plan/>