

CABINET
16 JANUARY 2020

Corporate Plan 2020-24

Cabinet Member(s): Leader, Cllr Bob Deed
Responsible Officer: Chief Executive, Stephen Walford

Reason for Report: To consider the new corporate plan for the council in light of comments and feedback from all four policy development groups that reviewed the working draft in December 2019. It is proposed that the new corporate plan will replace the current plan which expires in March 2020.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Cabinet recommends to Council that the new Mid Devon Corporate Plan be adopted. That delegated authority is given to the Chief Executive to make minor changes to layout or images as necessary prior to publishing.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: This report introduces the final draft of what will replace the current corporate plan. The new corporate plan will set the overarching direction of travel for the council and will guide all future decision-making for the next four year cycle.

Financial Implications: The adoption of a new corporate plan will set the direction of policy travel for the council at a strategic level. However, it does not have any direct actions associated with it at this point, and the council's financial context will continue to be set at a strategic level via the annual budget and Medium Term Financial Planning processes. To that end, subsequent decisions that may be taken to realign activity to the new corporate plan in due course, will each be subject to the appropriate impact assessments given to decisions made by the council in the normal way.

Legal Implications: As above.

Equalities Impact Assessment: As above

Risk Assessment: As above.

Climate Change: As above.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The current council Corporate Plan expires in March 2020. The council administration has substantially changed following the local elections in May 2019, and a cabinet of mixed political makeup now forms the executive.

1.2 As part of the arrangements for renewing the Corporate Plan, the new approach was discussed at an early stage with the new cabinet once those members had collectively had the chance to consider shared priorities. It was

then the subject of an all-member workshop session on 6th September 2019, where the whole membership had the opportunity to contribute.

2.0 **Background**

2.1 The member ‘away day’ produced not only a range of content, but also confirmed that there was cross-party support for a continuation of the four ‘thematic’ headings of the council’s current Corporate Plan approach (Community, Economy, Environment, Homes). This is notable since it also goes in some way to the format of governance arrangements of the council, since the four Policy Development Groups (PDGs) are based on these overarching headings. By agreeing to continue with the overarching themes, the council is giving clarity and certainty to the PDGs that are currently in place – making the most of experience and knowledge already clustered around these themes as a format for continuing policy development and onwards recommendations to cabinet. It is worthwhile recalling at this point that the council’s most recent Corporate Peer Review (March 2017) described the PDGs as *‘a novel concept that provides an opportunity for wider member involvement in the work of the council...[providing] a resource for the council to develop new policy ideas and recommend these to cabinet’*.

2.2 Alongside the four headings, there was an almost universally-agreed notion of embedding sustainability more prominently within the new plan. This would seem to be supported by a range of discussions and motions discussed by full council in recent months. This has been effected by introducing the plan as a matrix model rather than being presented as a purely thematic-based approach. There is no (and no need for) exact science about the formatting, but bearing in mind this will be the top-level public-facing expression of the council’s approach to prioritising outcomes, it is important for it to be well-understood without a lengthy supporting narrative.

2.3 After the member workshop, the content was refined in discussion with the cabinet to try and balance the many and varied priorities that were put forward, with the result that the first draft of a new Corporate Plan was taken to members via the PDGs in November and December 2019.

3.0 **Member Views**

3.1 The first draft of the new corporate plan was presented to each of the four Policy Development Groups (PDGs) to seek their views and comments so that the final version is seen by the whole membership as a genuinely co-produced document, as part of an open and transparent process. These meetings were as follows, and their recordings and minutes can be found in the usual places via the council’s website:

- 3.1.1 Environment PDG – 26th November
- 3.1.2 Economy PDG – 28th November
- 3.1.3 Homes PDG – 3rd December
- 3.1.4 Community PDG – 10th December

- 3.2 At the time of the draft going through each of the PDGs, it was only in a text format – so members will not have seen the proposed layout and imagery until this point.
- 3.3 The detailed list of feedback can be found at Appendix B, however the broad consensus was one of support, with a few common points of interest to note:
- 3.3.1 Balancing the need for the corporate plan to be an ambitious and aspirational reflection of the council’s intent, with the financial reality (as currently known) which makes it extremely challenging to deliver all that the council would wish to see.
 - 3.3.2 The tension in many of the statements where clearly there is going to need to be a balanced judgement made in future about how, and to what extent, some of these issues should be addressed.
 - 3.3.3 Reflecting on what was directly in the control of the council, and what would need us to influence partners, stakeholders and government.
- 3.4 There were also specific comments made on the following, which cabinet may wish to consider:
- 3.4.1 Should we remove many of these priorities where we have little or no direct control?
 - 3.4.2 Should it be shorter and concentrate only on projects we are going to deliver?
 - 3.4.3 Should we include areas where we explicitly disagree with the government’s position? (Right-to-Buy for example).
 - 3.4.4 Should we explicitly include reference to trying to increase the amount of incubator and start up space available as part of the ‘Economy’ actions?

4.0 Finalising the New Corporate Plan

- 4.1 It is anticipated that the new Corporate Plan will be in a position to be adopted by full council alongside the budget at February’s meeting of full council.
- 4.2 The changes made to the substantive text of the first draft are limited to the inclusion of the additional reference as shown in 3.4.4 above. However, the draft as published contains additional contextual and supporting information as well as proposing a layout and design appropriate for the public document. As such, cabinet is invited to consider the views as put forward by members, in addition to their own views, in order to allow the finalised document to be recommended to full council on 26th February 2020.
- 4.3 It is proposed that the current system of publicising ‘priority activities’ each year and publishing these online, continues as per the delegations agreed under the previous administration – in order to be transparent on delivery activity while ensuring the document is kept ‘live’ on an annual basis. This ensures that officer activity on key priorities, as set out in operational

business plans, is made public in terms of understanding how council resources are being deployed.

Appendices

Appendix A - Proposed Corporate Plan 2020-24

Appendix B - Bullet point feedback from members as captured from previous discussion

List of Background Papers:

Draft Corporate Plan Report (to each of the 4 PDGs); available here:

<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/documents/s15755/Draft%20Corporate%20Plan%20for%20PDGs.pdf>

Appendix A – Corporate Plan 2020-24

Appendix B – Feedback on First Draft

Feedback from the PDGs in relation to the corporate plan

Environment PDG:

- Car park pricing mechanism – how would that be seen to be helping our town centres if the Council was also encouraging outside business parks like J27?
- Concern that the plan was a 4 year programme and that there were too many things to achieve in that timescale.
- Right to Buy – this is a Government Policy and should not be included.
- Promote sustainable farming practices – Some Members felt that this was down to DEFRA and others thought that it should be kept in the plan as an aspiration for farming communities to network and share good practice.
- Emissions from cattle and food production.
- Community Land Trusts.

Community PDG:

- Pleased to see that health and healthier living were part of the plan.
- ANOB for Exe Valley should be promoted.
- The need to understand what the Council could lobby others on and what could be directly influenced.
- The welcome change in emphasis due to the climate change declaration.

Homes PDG:

- The tension within the document between competing priorities and competing objectives. Decisions on how to implement activity and actions would be taken at a more detailed level at the appropriate time. However, it was important that the Corporate Plan set out what the Council was trying to achieve for the good of the local community.
- The difference between having direct control over an issue as a district council as compared to only having the ability to influence or lobby, for example, lobbying Devon County Council regarding the provision of post 16 education within the district. This was a good example of an issue that was collectively important across the district but which the Council had no direct control over.
- Another example of the Council working with partners would be to promote issues for the over 65s such as free bus passes as a means of promoting healthy lifestyles physically, socially and mentally.
- The need for a national policy for new developments regarding such issues as the installation of solar panels on new buildings.
- Concerns about whether information regarding emissions from farm animals and agriculture's contribution to emissions was truly accurate?
- Developers had become increasingly keen on stating that 'building materials were locally sourced' but where a product was made and transported from needed to be borne in mind as well.

Economy PDG:

- The tension within the document between competing priorities and competing objectives. Decisions on how to implement activity and actions would be taken at a more detailed level at the appropriate time. However, it was important that the Corporate Plan set out what the Council was trying to achieve for the good of the local community.

- It was stated that it would be good to know what the advantages and disadvantages were under each subject area, for example, the promotion of the Exe Valley as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It was explained that the word 'consider' was important in relation to this as the promotion of the AONB could be an aspiration but the implications of this needed to be fully 'considered'.
- It was suggested that incubation and start-up space be moved as a specific ambition under the Economy column rather than remain in the overarching comment at the top of the draft document.
- Projects and ambitions that were impossible to achieve, for example, due to a lack of funds, would not be included in the draft or final document. The final approved Corporate Plan needed to include realistic goals and aspirations.
- It was felt that it was correct to include lobbying or the abolition of 'Right to Buy' in the Homes column of the draft document since this reflected the views of the Homes PDG in the previous council and appears to have cross-party support in the new council. However, it was reiterated that full Council would need to sign off the final document and agree all the aspirations within it.
- The Chairman commented that he felt that the overarching comment at the top of the draft document reflected a change in the Council's commitment to the Climate Change Declaration as well as a number of green initiatives.