

# **Development of the corporate plan 2019-2022**

## ***Draft discussion paper for PDRC***

### **Background to the corporate plan**

The council's corporate plan establishes the political and managerial priorities on which the organisation will focus over a four-year period. Without attempting to cover in any detail all of the objectives to be pursued by every department, it sets the tone for future resource allocation, establishing which activities and objectives are priorities and, by implication, which are not.

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, so in an ideal world it will square the circle of establishing clear priorities while also providing a 'hook' for all teams to link their work to the overall ambitions of the council.

The device in the current plan of setting out 15 very specific medium-term objectives but then marshalling them under three much looser 'priority themes' was an attempt at such circle-squaring, one that has been commended and criticised by officers and members over the lifetime of the current plan in roughly equal measure. It is currently undecided whether we would want to attempt something similar with the new plan.

It is also 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, and to some extent it can even be seen as the managerial response to that manifesto, 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. As a key part of the council's overarching policy framework, the plan should also broadly reflect the priorities of the whole council rather than solely the majority group.

### **Work undertaken to date**

The work to develop a new plan for 2019-2022 began earlier this year with a cabinet member working group including Cllrs Dewar-Whalley and Hunt, together with Mark Radford and David Clifford.

This group concluded that in view of the long-term nature of many of the council's most significant ambitions, an evolutionary approach to the development of new priorities would be more appropriate than a revolutionary one, and undertook some analysis of the current 15 medium-term objectives with a view to determining which of them are complete, which need to be continued (with or without a change in emphasis), and where new objectives may need to be added.

A similar exercise was subsequently run with SMT members and heads of service. The main outcomes of these two sessions are summarised in Table 1 below. For ease of reference, the 15 medium-term objectives of the current plan are listed in Appendix I.

**Table 1: Principal changes from current corporate plan suggested by cabinet member and head of service working groups**

Issue	Comments
<p>1. Ensuring physical regeneration drives social, economic and cultural renewal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With major enhancements to the physical infrastructure in Sittingbourne continuing apace, there will be a need in the next corporate plan to ensure the social, economic and cultural potential of the regeneration are fully exploited to the benefit of Swale’s residents and economy.</li> <li>• We will need to retain a focus on further physical regeneration projects (e.g. STC Phase 2, Beachfields/Sheerness, Q&amp;R).</li> <li>• The current objective on matching local skills to local jobs, which is primarily about using the council’s influence, probably needs to be made more specific in terms of increasing higher-skill employment opportunities and securing suitable FE provision in Sittingbourne.</li> <li>• The current plan references economic development in two separate objectives (Objective 1.2, focused on the physical needs of businesses, and Objective 2.1, focused on softer issues such as business advice and support). We need to ensure that the new plan does not lose this emphasis on the importance of developing the borough’s economy, and that it references the need to find ways of meeting the challenge of accommodating further growth.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Housing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The new corporate plan will need to strike a balance between, on the one hand, introducing concrete measures to tackle the social (for the borough) and financial (for the council) implications of the current housing crisis and, on the other, ensuring that we do not over-promise on unachievable objectives.</li> <li>• The plan will ideally also make more of the potential to link development with improved major infrastructure, moving away from the simple ‘lobbying’ for better transport advocated in the current plan to something more along the lines of ‘maximising opportunities’ from good spatial development.</li> </ul>

<p>3. Visitor economy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although tourism does feature in the current corporate plan (primarily under objective 2.1), the new focus on the visitor economy strategy and the decision that the council should have more than a facilitative role in promoting tourism will need to be reflected in the new corporate plan.</li> <li>• An issue with including tourism as a discrete priority is that many of the council's activities which contribute to it (infrastructure, environmental stewardship, business support, cleansing, etc) have a wider impact than tourism alone. We would need to be careful that the plan did not give the impression, for example, that we only pick up litter because it deters tourists.</li> </ul>
<p>4. Quality of life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although there are many quality-of-life issues picked up by the current corporate plan, the text of the objectives does not specifically include the term. We may want to change this in the new plan.</li> <li>• In particular, air quality is an issue which has gained in prominence over the lifetime of the current plan and which will need to be accorded priority in the new plan.</li> <li>• A priority or set of objectives based on quality of life could also pick up spatial development (potentially bringing out more explicitly the link between the corporate plan and the local plan) and/or environmental stewardship.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Financial self-sufficiency and transformation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current corporate plan includes an objective based on improving financial resilience, but the need for increased self-sufficiency, whether through greater commercialism or other more traditional mechanisms, will probably need to feature more explicitly in the new plan.</li> <li>• We will also need to ensure that, as the overarching statement of the council's medium-term strategy, the new plan is adequate as a set of strategic guidelines in making difficult decisions about funding priorities in straitened circumstances.</li> <li>• In very general terms there is a sense that the first four of the five objectives in the 'council' priority theme of the current plan remain not too far of the mark, although the one about innovation needs to be more focused on transformation and the organisation's expectations of third-tier managers given reduced capacity at SMT/HoS level. (The final objective in this priority theme is covered under (6) below.)</li> </ul>

6. Partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two objectives in the current plan focus on policy areas which are primarily the remit of other agencies (health and crime). While these have not diminished in importance, the value of having them specifically listed in the plan is questionable, and it might be better to have a single objective based on enhancing joint working on areas of mutual interest with key partners.</li> </ul>
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As was the case when the current corporate plan was being developed, David Clifford has also had small group meetings with individual cabinet members and their deputies, together with the relevant heads of service. As these meetings have progressed, it has become clear that there is a greater appetite for a more comprehensive rewrite of the plan than seemed at first to be the case.

Drawing on these conversations, and on the analyses undertaken by the cabinet member working group and heads of service, there seem to be some emerging priority areas which could be the makings of a new set of corporate priorities. These areas, which it is worth emphasising are very loosely defined and provisional at this stage, are set out below as a means of stimulating discussion.

### **1. Continuing regeneration**

- In view of the considerable progress that will have been made in Sittingbourne town centre by the end of the current corporate plan period, there is a sense that this success needs to be built on and expanded both in terms of the geographical scope and the 'depth' of the resultant regeneration.
- With regard to the first of these, there has been considerable organisational learning from the STC project, which could now be used to target similarly transformational redevelopments in other geographical areas. With this learning in mind, and in view of the range of partnership and funding models which have been developed by local authorities in recent years, there is potentially scope for the council to be bolder than has previously been possible in its efforts to secure regeneration of key sites, primarily on the Island. There have been some discussions about how there could be multiple 'ways in' to the problem of enabling Sheppey to fulfil its economic potential, which might not all be about the council taking the lead on the redevelopment of specific sites.
- With regard to 'depth' of regeneration, we need to ensure that the physical redevelopment of parts of the borough really does drive the social, economic and cultural renewal that everybody wants to see. In particular, there is a need to help disadvantaged communities and individuals to take advantage of new opportunities to improve their economic fortunes.
- In some cases this could involve working either singly or with partners to provide very bespoke help to relatively small neighbourhoods. Linking this with the

transformation discussed under (4) below, this could be part of a broader pattern of diversification away from all universal services being delivered in a uniform way towards more differentiation based on the divergent needs of different neighbourhoods. (Finding a better solution to the way waste is collected from terraced streets in Sheerness would be a case in point.) It has been suggested that this new focus on residents as individual customers (or at least as small groups of customers) could be the council's side of a 'new deal' between the council and residents, with residents being asked more explicitly to adopt and maintain behaviours that contribute to the wellbeing of society as a whole.

- There is also still a clear need to improve the provision of skills in the borough, including re-skilling and lifelong learning opportunities for people who are already mid-career.

## **2. Quality of life**

- There is a need to continue many of the ambitions currently set out under the 'borough to be proud of' priority theme, including those not explicitly linked with regeneration. Members have to date been fairly receptive to the suggestion that these could be brought together under the banner of 'quality of life'.
- It would be good if possible if the links between the corporate plan and the local plan could be made more explicit, and one way of doing this would be to recognise in the corporate plan the role that good development can play in enhancing quality of life – this is essentially the council's 'place-making' function. Some of the infrastructure improvements the borough so badly needs will likely only be possible if they are aligned to housebuilding, and we need to be realistic about this.
- There is a clear political will at the local level to do whatever is in the council's power to improve air quality at key sites, and the higher profile that this issue has acquired in recent years needs to be reflected in the plan. Given the plan's level of detail, it cannot be expected to resolve tensions between objectives which are potentially mutually conflicting, but it does need to recognise openly that those tensions are there and provide some strategic 'steer' as to how the council might hope to see them resolved as more detailed action plans are agreed.
- The plan will also need to provide a steer on the council's future approach to housing as a social issue beyond simple numbers of new homes to be constructed. Given the wide range of national factors which have contributed to the current housing crisis however, the council's own range of options is limited and the plan will need to avoid over-promising on solutions.
- A future priority area on quality of life might also be the place to include some kind of objective on the reinvigoration of partnership working, with the emphasis being on the identification of areas of mutual interest with other agencies so that joint work programmes and/or performance targets can be agreed. The council

has long recognised that many of its most cherished ambitions for the borough cannot be realised by it acting alone, and we do have a history of successful partnership working across a range of policy areas, but these partnerships have become harder to sustain in recent years as funding cuts have led to a decrease in the capacity of agencies to engage. A corporate plan objective which recognised this and tried to identify a different, more goal-oriented basis for future joint working initiatives might be helpful.

### **3. Leisure**

- There have been some suggestions that a priority focused on leisure would be a good way to bring together objectives around issues such as culture, sport and heritage, always with the visitor economy in mind but resisting the temptation to base the whole priority on tourism for the reasons already discussed.

### **4. Financial self-sufficiency and transformation**

- The inclusion of the internally-focused 'council to be proud of' priority theme in the current corporate plan has been extremely helpful to officers, and has raised the profile of some of the unglamorous but important actions that have needed to be undertaken to ensure the council remains well positioned financially and in other respects for the future. It would be helpful if the new plan could also include an internally-focused priority, probably based primarily on financial self-sufficiency and ongoing transformation (the latter perhaps encompassing both digital services and the diversification of service delivery models considered under (1) above).

### **Timetable**

The intention is for the final plan to come to full council for adoption in February. This means that we should have a consultation draft completed by approximately mid-October. Between now and then there will be further consultation with cabinet members, group leaders and senior officers. A further PDRC discussion on the consultation draft is scheduled for November.

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## **Appendix I: Current corporate objectives**

### ***Priority theme 1: A borough to be proud of***

- 1.1: Deliver major regeneration projects
- 1.2: Enhance the borough's economic and tourism offer
- 1.3: Keep Swale clean and tidy
- 1.4: Protect and improve the natural and built environments
- 1.5: Lobby for better roads and transport

### ***Priority theme 2: A community to be proud of***

- 2.1: Foster economic growth and prosperity for all
- 2.2: Encourage active communities and support the voluntary sector
- 2.3: Reduce crime and disorder
- 2.4: Use our influence to ensure local skills are matched to local jobs
- 2.5: Work in partnership to improve health and mental health

### ***Priority theme 3: A council to be proud of***

- 3.1: Improve residents' perceptions and customers' experiences
- 3.2: Ensure that Swale's internal governance and decision-making are second to none
- 3.3: Encourage innovation at every level
- 3.4: Strengthen our financial and political resilience
- 3.5: Enhance our capacity for achieving outcomes collaboratively