

Cabinet Meeting	
Meeting Date	6 February 2019
Report Title	Corporate plan 2019-2022: Adoption of final draft
Cabinet Member	Cllr Bowles, Council Leader
SMT Lead	David Clifford
Head of Service	Head of Policy, Communications and Customer Services
Lead Officer	
Key Decision	No
Classification	Open
Recommendations	Cabinet is asked to recommend council to: 1. Adopt the text at appendix I as the council's corporate plan for the period April 2019 to March 2023.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report reviews the purpose of the corporate plan and outlines the consultative approach which has been taken to developing a new one. It summarises the new priorities and objectives which have resulted from this process, considers the mechanisms available for monitoring progress towards these, and finally invites members to adopt the text at appendix I as the council's corporate plan for the period April 2019 to March 2023.

2 Background

- 2.1 The corporate plan is the overarching statement of the council's medium-term strategic objectives. It sets out in broad terms the council's overall direction over the next few years, and tries to provide a clear steer for decision-makers in terms of the issues and ambitions which are and are not priorities. Its purpose is to act as a point of reference when detailed decisions are being made on a day-to-day basis, rather than to set out the substance of those decisions in advance.
- 2.2 Swale first adopted a corporate plan in 2007, as a way of strengthening its focus on what was really important to it in the light of its recognition of the need to improve its overall performance at that time. A new plan has been developed every four years since then, and the version at appendix I thus represents the fourth such plan to be adopted.
- 2.3 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 a complete list of the council's disparate range of activities.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Given the long-term nature of many of the council's most cherished ambitions, each new corporate plan generally has a more evolutionary than revolutionary relationship to previous versions. However, significant progress was made on several of these ambitions during the lifetime of the last plan, and this is reflected in the way in which the text at appendix I tries to build upon the organisational learning from these successes.
- 3.2 In some cases this has resulted in new objectives which represent more of a departure from previous ones than has typically been the case in the past, but the new plan does also recognise the need to balance such ambitions against the restrictions to the council's freedom of action which are likely to be imposed by ongoing financial constraints and uncertainty during the plan period.
- 3.3 This is reflected in the way that the first two priorities are outward-facing ones, outlining what the council wants to achieve for the borough, while the third is more internally focused, outlining among other things how the council will try to obviate or minimise the impact of financial constraints on its ability to make progress on the first two priorities, while still being clear that those constraints will inevitably represent a brake on what it is able to achieve.
- 3.4 As with the previous version of the plan, each priority is broadly based but includes a small number of more detailed and specific objectives. This structure is intended to 'square the circle' of the plan's dual purpose, being at once the apex of the council's policy framework *and* the source of the 'golden thread' which runs through departmental service plans to every individual officer's appraisal targets: the objectives are specific enough to represent clear political ambitions, but the overarching priorities are general enough that every officer should be able clearly to relate her function to one (or more) of them. This is of course important in terms of staff engagement and motivation.
- 3.5 As outlined in section 5 below, a broad and sometimes iterative process of consultation was followed in developing the new plan. Emerging from this process, the priorities and objectives proposed for the new plan are as follows:

Priority 1: Delivering regeneration

- 1.1 Continue to support Swale's economy to provide a diverse and increasing range of employment opportunities across the full spectrum of skill and wage levels.
- 1.2 Support residents and businesses to improve the borough's vocational skills.

- 1.3 Implement the visitor economy framework to increase investment, address new visitor demands and grow the value of the sector to the Swale economy.
- 1.4 Progress the redevelopment of Sittingbourne town centre and extend regeneration into other parts of the borough.
- 1.5 Develop a coherent and flexible long-term plan to help Sheppey fulfil its potential for the benefit of all its residents.
- 1.6 Take steps to help the most disadvantaged families and communities to embrace opportunities from regeneration, skills provision and economic growth.

Priority 2: Delivering improved quality of life

- 2.1 Keep the borough clean and well-maintained, and continue to provide excellent environmental stewardship.
- 2.2 Maximise opportunities from sustainable development to improve infrastructure and create attractive and functional new neighbourhoods.
- 2.3 Work with partners to develop measures to address air quality issues throughout the borough.
- 2.4 Develop a pragmatic and adaptable approach to helping local families to access affordable decent housing.
- 2.5 Promote improved health, wellbeing and enjoyment of life by facilitating and supporting a wide range of sporting, cultural and other leisure activities.

Priority 3: Delivering the council of tomorrow

- 3.1 Continue to reduce dependence on government-controlled funding sources and support innovative ways to ensure other objectives can be met in the context of diminished resources.
- 3.2 Experiment with a more differentiated approach to service delivery for key neighbourhoods and key groups of customers.
- 3.3 Encourage innovative ideas at every level of the organisation and embed the Swale Manager programme to ensure consistent understanding of the council's expectations of all managers.
- 3.4 Develop new approaches to partnership working based on shared objectives with statutory agencies, other councils, and the private and voluntary sectors.
- 3.5 Continue to ensure that Swale's internal governance and decision-making are second to none.
- 3.6 These priorities and objectives will form the basis of the annual service plans created by individual departments, and via that route will be linked to individual officers' appraisal targets. Each year the council produces an annual report, which accounts for progress towards the achievement of the priorities. It is intended that this reporting function will be significantly augmented from 2020, when the first annual report on the new plan is produced, so as to provide a fuller and more robust measurement of progress.

- 3.7 Another means for monitoring performance against the plan is through quantitative indicators, and a refreshed corporate performance-indicator set, together with new targets, is currently under development following a root-and-branch appraisal of the purpose and ongoing value of existing indicators. There are a number of reasons why alignment between the corporate plan and the corporate indicator set can never be absolute, but indicators will nonetheless be grouped around individual objectives so that progress towards the latter can be quantified as well as possible. The new indicator set will come to council early in the new municipal year.
- 3.8 The corporate 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. The intention for this iteration of the plan is additionally to produce a shorter, more readable version, based on the summary of the priorities and objectives, which may assist with both public and staff engagement. The latter is of course particularly important, and an internal communications campaign including presentations at key staff forums will be developed to help all officers understand what the priorities and objectives are about and how they relate to their job roles.
- 3.9 Council is now **recommended** to adopt the text at appendix I as the council's corporate plan for the period April 2019 to March 2023.

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 March 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, providing an opportunity to agree clear priorities and then to focus sustained effort and resources on them over a four-year period. 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.
- 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 plan at appendix I includes new objectives and some potential new areas of work for the council, it is nonetheless not recommended that the new plan should completely abandon the overall direction set in previous iterations.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 In view of the overarching and sometimes relatively abstract nature of the corporate plan, it has historically been difficult to engage the public with its development. For this new plan, the option to consult with the public primarily through social media was considered, but was rejected as not being well suited to a high-level policy such as a corporate plan, the purpose and content of which require a certain level of explanation and caveating.
- 5.2 The decision was therefore taken that Swale would ask town and parish councils to engage with the development of the plan and the consultation on the final product, as a more fruitful way of gauging the opinions of interested residents and communities. The leader or deputy leader, together with the chief executive or head of policy, offered to attend a meeting of all the borough's town and parish councils to discuss the plan at a very formative stage, and the offer was accepted by nine councils from across the borough (Bredgar, Dunkirk, Faversham TC, Hartlip, Leysdown, Minster, Ospringe, Rodmersham and Warden).
- 5.3 These meetings were a useful opportunity to hear about what was important in different places, and while in many cases the issues were very specific to the locality, there were a number of common themes, including the distinctive needs of rural communities and the need for Swale to work more collaboratively with local councils both to realise shared ambitions for small areas and to influence other agencies more effectively to prioritise the needs of Swale's communities. These themes have been taken up in the plan at appendix I.
- 5.4 A consultation draft of the plan was published in November, and was sent to all the borough's town and parish councils as well as a wide range of partner organisations. A public version was made available online and publicised on social media. We received formal responses from six local councils (Borden, Dunkirk, Faversham TC, Oare, Teynham and Tunstall), as well as from the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership.
- 5.5 Responses were on the whole favourable, with two essentially stating simply that they agreed with the plan as consulted on. There was a good level of support for the objective of strengthening collaboration between the borough and local councils. As was the case at the local council meetings attended by the leader and chief executive/head of policy, consultation responses from parishes raised disparate issues, many of which were not directly related to borough council functions, but there was some commonality across the themes of housing, planning, air quality and healthcare infrastructure.
- 5.6 Some relatively small amendments were made to the text as a result of suggestions received in consultation responses. The intention is to write to all organisations which took the trouble to make submissions, setting out the council's individual response to the issues they raised.

Policy Development and Review Committee

- 5.7 PDRC has been involved in the development of the new corporate plan from a fairly early stage. The deputy leader and the head of policy took a discussion paper to the committee in July setting out the main issues, some areas of potential divergence between the existing plan and the new one, and a very provisional list of possible new priority areas.
- 5.8 There was a very full discussion on this, which resulted in a number of themes and issues being picked up in the new plan, including the need to extend regeneration into areas beyond Sittingbourne, including rural areas; to diversify as well as expand Swale's employment offer; to focus more on housing and health inequality; and to improve the council's ability to deliver on objectives collaboratively, ranging from better lobbying of government and national agencies at one end of the spectrum to better working with the voluntary sector and town/parish councils at the other.
- 5.9 The leader and the head of policy attended a further session of the PDRC in November, where the committee considered the public consultation draft of the new plan. This was generally well received by most members of the committee, with one or two suggestions for minor amends. A minority of committee members did express more significant reservations, particularly in respect of objective 2.2. However, a motion to ask to cabinet to defer adoption of the plan until June 2019 was unsuccessful when put to the vote.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	This report includes the text of the new corporate plan which is due to replace the current one when it expires in April 2019. The corporate plan represents a key component of the council's overall budgetary and policy framework, and as such adoption is a matter for full council.
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 aims to achieve given the resources established by the MTFS. Conversely, it is anticipated that the activities required by the plan will generally be funded within the resourcing framework established in the MTFS.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	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 priorities in order to facilitate optimal and

	equitable resource allocation, thereby improving the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of council services. No specific procurement implications have been identified at this stage.
Crime and Disorder	The proposed plan includes some specific points on crime and disorder, and the partnerships which are needed to tackle them. No further implications identified at this stage.
Environment and Sustainability	The proposed plan includes some specific points on the environment and sustainability. No further implications identified at this stage.
Health and Wellbeing	The proposed plan includes some specific points on health and wellbeing. No further implications identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The corporate plan is a key component of the council's risk management processes, particularly as risks on the comprehensive risk register are generally expressed (however artificially) as risks to the achievement of a corporate-plan objective. This approach has worked well during the life of the current corporate plan, and given that the new one at Appendix I is structured in the same way, this should be able to continue into the future. No health-and-safety implications have been identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	The public sector equality duty requires decision-makers to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and advance equality of opportunity right throughout the decision-making process. An equality impact assessment has been conducted, the results of which are attached at Appendix II. This concludes that the corporate plan is in general at too high a level of abstraction for the aims of the equality duty to be relevant in any concrete way, although they are likely to be much more relevant to many of the pieces of work which will flow from it. 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 nothing requiring the mitigation of adverse impacts has been identified. It is believed at this stage that the plan involves no unlawful discrimination.
Privacy and Data Protection	No implications identified at this stage.

7 Appendices

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

- Appendix I: Corporate plan 2019-2022
- Appendix II: Equality impact assessment

8 Background Papers

8.1 The following documents may be considered as background papers to this report:

- SBC corporate plan 2015-2018: <https://www.swale.gov.uk/corporate-plan-2015-2018/>