

**Meeting:** EXECUTIVE  
**Portfolio Area:** Leader of the Council  
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**Agenda Item:**

**4**

## **FUTURE TOWN, FUTURE COUNCIL PROGRAMME**

### **KEY DECISION**

Authors –	Henry Lewis	Ext. 2496
	Richard Protheroe	Ext. 2938
	Karen Griffiths	Ext. 2976
	Greg Arends	Ext. 2081
Contributor –	Scott Crudgington	Ext. 2185
Lead Officer –	Scott Crudgington	Ext. 2185
Contact Officer –	Henry Lewis	Ext. 2496

### **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To set out the proposals for the new Council change programme, Future Town, Future Council.

### **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the proposed Council programme, Future Town, Future Council, as detailed in this report, be approved.
- 2.2 That the programme be used to underpin the development of a new Corporate Plan that will be presented to the Council meeting for approval in February 2016.

### **3 BACKGROUND**

#### **Introduction**

- 3.1 Following the problems of the economic downturn, Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) finds itself in a unique position. It has a balanced budget, a highly motivated workforce, protected front-line services which our community say are important to them, developed funding headroom to invest in social housing at a level not seen in over 30 years, and a town centre that businesses now want to invest in. SBC is therefore presented with a magnificent opportunity to deliver real change for the citizens of Stevenage and have the means to make it happen.
- 3.2 Officers recommend that the Council should adopt a new outcome focussed programme entitled 'Future Town, Future Council' which comprises 9 key

priorities for delivery over the next 5 years. Through the various forms of consultation the Council has undertaken in recent years, residents have identified a number of key priorities for change across the town that SBC either directly or together with our partners must now deliver if Stevenage is to continue to thrive and grow. It is intended that this programme will now guide the Council in terms of its future strategic focus and resource allocation in the years to come.

- 3.3 The Future Town Future Council Programme will underpin the delivery of a new Corporate Plan which is currently in development for 2016/17 and will be presented to the Council meeting in February 2016 for approval. It will set out the Council's strategic priorities and inform service planning and resource allocation across the Council.

#### **4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

##### **Current Strengths**

- 4.1 While this report sets out a challenging change agenda and points to areas requiring improvement or investment, the Council is not at the beginning of this journey. Much has already been accomplished.
- 4.2 The Council delivers a broad range of services in keeping with the communities' needs. Members and officers are committed to the Council's organisational values and to Stevenage. The latest townwide resident survey demonstrates that customers value the services the Council delivers, many of which are delivered cost-effectively and flexibly, in-house. The Council also has a strong record of delivery in partnership upon which to build.

##### **External and Internal Challenges**

- 4.3 The town and the Council continue to be faced with a range of external challenges including further reductions in funding as the Government's austerity policy continues into its second term. There is a far greater demand for housing than can be met within current resources and there is a need for regeneration across the town.
- 4.4 Stevenage also faces challenges that need to be met head on by the Council and other public sector partners. It fares poorly in Hertfordshire in measures of crime, educational attainment and health. Anticipated demographic changes to the town will place further pressure on public services and increase the size of the challenges ahead.
- 4.5 Internally, the Council needs to prioritise and focus. This means using limited resources to achieve the outcomes that matter most. Members and officers must continue to work together. Decisions must be made safely, but more quickly. Work must take place across departmental boundaries using multi-skilled staff. The Council needs to retain the best of its skilled and motivated

staff and managers; and attract staff with new skills and perspectives into the organisation.

### **Feedback from Residents**

- 4.6 Stevenage residents share the concerns set out above. The resident survey in 2015 confirmed again residents' priorities - community safety, the regeneration of the town and housing development continue to rank as the top priorities. These findings predominate whenever and however the Council communicates with residents.

### **Overview of the Programme**

- 4.7 The Future Town, Future Council programme is a five year programme to be delivered in two parts. The first is about delivering a range of key outcomes for our residents. The second is about the changes SBC needs to deliver, as a Council, to be successful in the overall programme.

The programmes are depicted in the diagram below.

## Future town future council



4.8 A summary of each programme is set out below.

### **Delivering on our Promises**

4.9 The first five programmes are about delivering key outcomes that the residents of Stevenage have told the Council are most important to them.

### **Town Centre Regeneration**

4.10 As the first new town Stevenage has a history of embracing innovation and design. National economic pressures, huge changes to the pattern of retailing and to what people demand from their leisure time, require us to innovate once more.

4.11 The redefinition of Stevenage Town Centre as Stevenage Central, through the regeneration Framework, is designed to achieve a vision underpinned by a number of key ambitions. The Framework seeks to create flexible development areas to attract investment. Those sites, in the form of 'Major Opportunity Areas' are shaped to be attractive to anticipated market demands, to help draw investment from a mix of public and private sectors.

4.12 The Framework vision sees a reinvigorated centre of Stevenage, representing the aspirations of its people, with a mix of retail, leisure and residential offerings, helping to meet the needs of the population well into the future. Stevenage Central will once again become a destination point and will fulfil its traditional role as a meeting place and hub for the community.

4.13 Key ambitions describe the overall outcome for Stevenage people and the heart of the town. In summary they are:

- A town centre with a vibrant evening economy
- Increased numbers of homes
- A hub for public sector services
- High quality design and greener, better integrated public space
- A transport hub and improved connectivity
- Clear public transport, cycle and walking links with the High Street, Leisure Park and Roaring Meg

4.14 These outcomes will be delivered through the commitment of the Council, its partners, including the County Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership, and through the commitment and loyalty of Stevenage people to the town centre.

## **Housing Development Delivery**

- 4.15 Stevenage needs more affordable homes. Housing demand is increasing nationally and locally whilst housing supply is reducing. The latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment highlights that 575 new affordable homes are required per annum. The average house price in Stevenage is £219,600, more than six times average household income. Many first time buyers are priced out of the market and the average cost of private rentals at £721 per month has risen above Local Housing Allowance rates. More than 9,000 social houses have been lost through Right to Buy since 1981 and there are 2,500 people on the Council housing register. Housing remains a key priority for Stevenage residents and for the Council.
- 4.16 The recent changes to the HRA self-financing regime have allowed the Council to plan for a large scale new build programme of social housing across Stevenage.
- 4.17 Key ambitions of the programme include:
- Establishment of a new in-house Housing Development Client Team
  - Appointment of a Development Agent to help design and deliver the new council housebuilding programme
  - Feasibility and viability modelling for the development programme to establish the capital investment required
  - A new Housing Development Strategy and supporting Procurement Strategy that will help to deliver circa 300 new affordable units over the next five years
  - An Open Market Acquisitions Programme that will deliver 67 new affordable homes during 2015/16 and 2016/17
  - A sheltered housing replacement programme

## **Excellent Council Homes for Life**

- 4.18 Excellent Housing, like excellent Council services in general requires similar strong foundations; strong performance, trusting partnerships, excellent staff and management and secure finances. Excellent Council Homes for Life will focus upon all these issues to deliver the outcomes our tenants and leaseholders expect.
- 4.19 The Council needs to ensure it has a viable HRA 30 Year Business Plan. In doing so it will need to assess the local impact of recently announced government policies; such as the Social Rent Reduction, Pay to Stay, the restriction of Housing Benefit for young people and changes to working age benefits, tax credits and allowances.
- 4.20 Over the next five years it is recommended that the housing service focuses resources on the following key areas:

- Completion of the Decent Homes and neighbourhood works programmes
- A major flat block improvement programme for 550 flat blocks
- Improved caretaking and leaseholder services
- Better services for older people
- Customer focused housing management

### **Co-operative Neighbourhood Management**

- 4.21 The Council has been working for many years to ensure that residents are at the heart of everything that we do. In Stevenage, co-operative working is about partnership. It is about the Council and communities working together, co-producing services and giving residents more involvement and control of the services they use and the places where they live.
- 4.22 **The Co-operative Neighbourhood Management Programme will further build upon this good work and ensure improvement to the quality of life and well-being of people living in the town's neighbourhoods. This will be achieved through the phased introduction of new Neighbourhood Action Plans that will coordinate public sector and community resources to solve problems and deliver long lasting outcomes at a local level** together.
- 4.23 In practice Co-operative Neighbourhood Management includes:
- Engaging with communities locally to understand needs and priorities
  - Changing policies, practices and the way we co-design and co-deliver services
  - Building communities' skills, knowledge, talents and capacity
  - Identifying how service providers and communities can work collectively to improve outcomes
  - Engaging with communities to celebrate success
- 4.24 This programme is evolving and will be shaped further through community engagement. Co-operative working is about community designed, community led and community delivered services.

### **Equal Access to Services for All**

- 4.25 The internet has introduced enormous changes to the way many people interact: with each other through email and social media, and with businesses through online shopping and banking. However, Customer Services at the Council has seen no decrease in the number of phone calls they receive, which currently stands at around a quarter of a million per year. This has made it harder to ensure that staff time is available for customers that are in most need of our help, rather than used to handle simpler transactions like taking payments and reporting missed bin collections.

- 4.26 The Equal Access to Council Services for All Programme will enhance customer experience and improve customer access by increasing the number of contact options available to customers, and by better using technology to enable self-service for a range of transactional services. This will deliver a level of service to customers that traditional channels are not able to fulfil, whilst at the same time freeing up staff to work with more vulnerable customers and urgent cases. This approach will also bring about cost efficiencies through reduced customer contact processes, removal of re-keying and automation of back office processes, and by using the same technology to support the council's commercial services.
- 4.27 This programme, while remaining compliant with prevailing procurement regulations, will also introduce more effective practices so that a broader range of suppliers, including smaller businesses, are able to take part in procurements thus reducing prices, improving quality and increasing supply and availability.

### **Building Stronger Foundations**

- 4.28 To deliver the five programmes outlined above, the Council needs to maximise what can be achieved from the limited resources available. The Council needs to perform at its peak, work even better in partnership and attract and retain the right staff. Finally, SBC needs a stable financial platform so that identified priorities can be funded, in good times and bad.

### **Performing at Our Peak**

- 4.29 The Council is data rich but sometimes intelligence poor. While tools and processes to measure and manage performance and collate information exist and are used, there is a lack of strategic analysis of performance across services and holistically throughout the Council. At both strategic and operational levels decision making processes can often be overly lengthy and not in context with other activities.
- 4.30 The Performing at our Peak Programme will improve the organisation's insight, analysis and intelligence to make better informed business decisions. This will be achieved through more timely coordination of data and the adoption of tools to support ongoing strategic and operational analysis. Joined up information will be provided to Members and officers, and strategic decision making processes will be slimmed down. The Council will embed a culture of staff performance and identify areas in which skills gaps exist and there is a need for improvement.

### **Partner of Choice**

- 4.31 The Council works well in partnership to deliver services and influence policy. Working with partners the Council can achieve better outcomes for the Town and deliver services more efficiently.

4.32 Through the Partner of Choice Programme the Council will strengthen its partnerships; become a partner of choice for others, a partner that others trust and value. Council staff will work to become more outwardly focused, to learn from others and to share what has learned.

4.33 The programme will include work to:

- Strengthen partnership working in our communities
- Learn from successful national partnerships
- Build further shared services with Hertfordshire local authorities
- Establish and deliver opportunities presented for the Town by the national devolution agenda

### **Employer of Choice**

4.34 This change programme is challenging; it requires staff with skills, knowledge and motivation to make it happen. Staff will need to be adaptable, flexible, collaborative and embrace change. Stevenage residents expect excellent services, so staff delivering day to day services must have the skills and abilities to do so. To attract staff and to keep the staff we need, the Council must deliver an environment in which its staff can flourish.

4.35 Key outcomes the Council will seek are:

- To find new ways to recruit, reward and promote the best staff
- An improved, more flexible office environment with improved technology supporting collaborative and project working
- Innovative staff training programmes
- Improved internal communication systems and timely information to better engage staff
- Outward facing managers that lead, facilitate and empower. Staff that work together, take responsibility and think about customers first

### **Financial Security**

4.36 The Council's priorities are to deliver excellent services and the priorities set out in this programme. Financial security is something upon which all of this depends. Neither change nor services can be delivered without resources. Delivering priorities is almost impossible when funds available change from year to year. The financial security programme will ensure sufficient funds are available for the Council's priorities, in good times and bad.

4.37 Key initiatives that will deliver financial security include:

- An on-going programme to improve the Council's financial prospects for the next five years



- An efficiency programme improving processes and using technology to deliver more for less
- A new income programme, improving finances through expansion rather than by cutting priority services
- A procurement review to obtain better value for money from our contracts

4.38 All the programmes set out above will be informed by what has been successful in local authorities elsewhere, by being innovative and taking a measured, but less risk averse, approach to investment.

### **Programme Outcomes**

4.39 The Future Town, Future Council Programme will be outcome based. Its success will be measured by what it achieves and whether it achieves these outcomes to the timeframes that are planned. More work is required to establish challenging but realistic outcome targets. These will be reported to a future meeting of the Executive.

### **Resources**

4.40 Resources have been set aside in the Medium Term Financial Strategy to fund the immediate need to get the programmes up and running.

4.41 More work is required before the medium term resourcing requirements for the programme can be understood. In particular work needs to be undertaken to establish the priority projects within each programme. This work will be undertaken in October and November 2015 so that a further report setting out medium term resourcing requirements for the programme can be submitted to the December Executive.

### **Governance**

4.42 The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for delivery of the Future Town, Future Council Programme and will report on progress to the Leader and to the Executive. The Leader is finalising lead Members for different elements of the programme in discussion with the Chief Executive.

4.43 Officer sponsors will work closely with Member Leads to deliver individual programmes. The proposed sponsors for the programmes are set out in the table below.

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Officer Sponsors</b>
Town Centre Regeneration	Scott Crudgington & Peter Bandy
Housing Development	Matt Partridge
Excellent Council Homes for Life	Matt Partridge
Neighbourhood Management	Aidan Sanderson
Equal Access to Services for All	Richard Protheroe
Financial Security	Clare Fletcher
Employer of Choice	Scott Crudgington
Performing at Our Peak	Richard Protheroe
Partner of Choice	Henry Lewis

- 4.44 New governance arrangements will be required to ensure that decisions can be made quickly but in line with Members expectations and the interests of the people of Stevenage.

### **Next Steps**

- 4.45 Communications is a key issue that cross cuts each of the nine strands and consists of two elements; initial communication to launch the programme and ongoing communication with internal and external stakeholders during the life of the programme.
- 4.46 A communications launch of the Programme will be planned following agreement of the Executive. Furthermore an all Member session will be held in December to ensure all Members cross – party are aware of the key Council priorities and activities for the next five years.
- 4.47 Communication will also be considered and planned carefully during the development of each strand of work within the programme. This will ensure that key stakeholders internally and externally receive regular targeted and strategic updates on each strand as appropriate.
- 4.48 The Council’s new Corporate Plan ‘Future Town, Future Council’ will be developed following agreement of the Future Town Future Council Programme. The Corporate Plan will articulate to the public our key priorities and the objectives that support their achievement over the next five years. It operates as the strategic policy framework for the Council ensuring that services consider the Council’s key priorities in service planning and resource allocation.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

- 5.1.1 Resources have been allocated in the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy to fund elements of the programme in the short term. A further report setting out future funding requirements will be submitted to the Executive in December 2015.

### **5.2 Legal Implications**

- 5.2.1 There are no legal implications arising.

### **5.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 5.3.1 Equalities and Diversity issues will be considered within each strand as part of the development of the specific projects and deliverables. Furthermore an Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out on the new Corporate Plan to ensure that objectives and activities that support the plan comply with the Equality Act 2010.

## **5.4 Policy Implications**

- 5.4.1 The Future Town, Future Council Programme will be used to inform the development of a new Corporate Plan which is the keystone in the Council's policy framework.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

BD1 - Stevenage Borough Council – Town Wide Survey 2015

<P:\Corporate\Consultation\Stevenage BC Residents Survey 2015 report - FINAL v2.pdf>

### **APPENDICES**

None