

Meeting Executive
Portfolio Area All
Date 12 October 2023



STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN - MAKING STEVENAGE EVEN BETTER

KEY DECISION

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek approval for the draft Corporate Plan which outlines the Council's vision and strategic priorities for the next five years, and the approach to involving residents, local community groups, partners in its development.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Executive agree the Council's draft Corporate Plan 'Making Stevenage Even Better', as appended to this report.
- 2.2 That the engagement approach with residents, local community groups, and partner involvement be agreed as set out in Paragraph 4.9 of this report.
- 2.3 That following the engagement period a final version of the Corporate Plan is brought to the Executive in January 2024.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Corporate Plan

3.1.1 The Corporate Plan is a key strategic document for the Council and must be considered as part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

3.1.2 The Corporate Plan provides a strategic link between the national and local policy agenda, Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) joint-partnership objectives, and delivery of services. The priorities inform the Council's budget setting process and direction of travel for the Council over the next five years. The outcomes in the plan set out what the Council wants to achieve, and these inform the focus of project work in Service Plans across the authority.

3.2 Future Town Future Council

3.2.1 The previous Corporate Plan 'Future Town Future Council' was agreed by the Council in December 2016 and set out the Council's approach to meeting the needs of the community. On 24 February 2021, the Council agreed to extend the current Corporate Plan beyond its original 5-year term and in July 2021, the FTFC programme was consolidated into four external-facing programmes and one internal-facing enabling programme:

- Transforming Our Town
- More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes
- Cooperative Neighbourhoods
- A Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town
- Making Your Money Count (Enabling)

3.2.3 In June 2023, it was agreed that the significant investment in social housing (£24.6 million in 23/24) should be reflected in the FTFC priority 'More Social and Affordable Homes'. This priority was subsequently amended to 'More Social, Affordable & Good Quality Homes' for 2023/24.

3.2.4 In September 2023, it was agreed that as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy update and in recognition of the need to be transparent about the impact of cost-of-living pressures, the FTFC priority 'Making Your Money Count' would be amended to 'Balancing the Budget'.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 The Future Town Future Council (FTFC) Corporate Plan has been extended beyond its 5-year life twice since 2021. The Council's key drivers, vision and values have changed since it was approved in 2016.

4.2 The Council has faced, and is continuing to face, a number of significant challenges and opportunities that must be considered to inform its vision for the coming years. These include:

Challenges

4.2.1 Financial Pressure

- since 2011 there has been an 85% reduction in Government funding which has led to significant financial pressures on the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- the HRA has been subject to changes in rent policy (e.g., 1% rent reduction 2016/17-2019/20) since the Council paid £199 million to the government for the self-financing deal
- the financial challenge has been exacerbated by increases in inflation which is much greater than council tax rises (capped by government policy), or increases in business rates or availability of Government grants
- when combining both Government funding cuts and unfunded inflation the total reduction in spend per household in Stevenage is equivalent to £325.20 per year
- this has resulted in the Council needing to find cumulative savings in excess of £11Million to meet the shortfall between reduced funding and increases in annual inflation.

4.2.2 National and Local Policy

- in 2022/23 additional legislative regulations were introduced with an increased focus on compliance (e.g., the Social Housing Regulation Act, Building Safety Act and Fire Safety Act) this has required additional investment and has been coupled with new tenant satisfaction and tenancy management requirements in 2023/24
- there is an urgent need to improve energy efficiency in the delivery of council services, maintenance of assets and social housing stock in response to the climate emergency
- Changing political landscape e.g. forthcoming general elections and an uncertain legislative programme
- Low levels of unemployment affecting recruitment and retention of staff
- Change in partnership landscape (Local Enterprise Partnerships to be abolished from April 2024)
- Increasing demands related to the use of services in response to the Cost-of-Living crisis i.e. homeless costs, access to benefits and support services
- All-out election and County Council elections in 2024

Opportunities

4.2.3 Despite these challenges the Council has remained financially resilient and continues to deliver for its residents, this includes:

- £14 million savings since 2010 to bridge the government funding and inflation deficit
- 394 new homes provided since 2014
- a significant period of town centre regeneration including a new bus station, multi-storey car-park, event Island, provision of new residential and commercial property
- £23.95 million business grants administered to Stevenage businesses to March 2022 (18 schemes/4375 businesses)
- £37.5 million Towns Fund funding obtained to support new leisure centre, museum and cycleways

- growth in the life science industry through work with partners, including a new £65 million European Headquarters for Autolus Therapeutics, a new life sciences development at the Forum (anticipated to generate economic growth of £98 million and 1,850 jobs) and the establishment of new training facility (Stevenage Innovation and Technology Centre (SITEC))
 - Commitment to its Cooperative Council principles and understanding resident priorities through the introduction of Cooperative Neighbourhood Walkabouts and development of Neighbourhood Plans.
- 4.3 In consideration of these challenges and opportunities, Members of the Executive met in early September to discuss the future focus of a new Corporate Plan. Informing the discussion were the findings of the Resident Survey (2021), the Tenant Survey (2021), and the Cooperative Neighbourhoods Resident PropTech Survey (2023). The survey findings captured the main concerns and priorities of over 3,000+ residents. Across all 3 surveys the main priority areas were:
- tackling climate change
 - anti-social behaviour
 - provision and maintenance of new and council homes
 - delivery of good local services
- 4.4 The feedback from residents alongside conversations with Members, indicates that now is an opportune time to refine the Council's vision to ensure emphasis on the areas that matter most to residents. The proposed areas of focus for 2024-29 include:
- Prioritisation of the impact of Climate Change
 - Narrowing the focus within 'Neighbourhood' services to 3 specific areas:
 - Clean Neighbourhoods and Green Spaces
 - Community Safety
 - Culture and Leisure
 - Building on the success of Stevenage Works by recognising the importance of 'Enterprise & Skills' and providing opportunities for local people and businesses under the 'Transforming Our Town' programme
 - Highlighting the significant investment in new homes and social housing by clarifying the 2 key housing focus areas:
 - new home provision
 - maintenance of good quality social housing
 - Introducing 3 cross cutting themes which are applicable to the delivery of all 5 strategic priorities – Equality, Diversity & Inclusion; Health & Wellbeing; Technology.
- 4.5 Internally, the Council is striving to prioritise effective delivery of services in a challenging financial environment. This means using reduced resources to achieve the outcomes that matter most. Members and officers continue to work together through the 'Transformation' programme of work to introduce efficiencies that will provide a better service for residents and meet saving commitments. This is coupled with a need to remain transparent about the financial realities set out in section 4.2. The Council's ability to remain financially resilient and continue to effectively deliver the services that residents want is represented in the strategic

priority 'Balancing the Budget' and underpins successful delivery of the proposed strategic priorities for the next 5 years.

- 4.6 Appendix A sets out the five strategic priorities of the proposed 'Making Stevenage Even Better' model, which aims to deliver improved outcomes and real change for Stevenage residents. The changes within the new Corporate Plan seek to build on the FTFC programme of work, and the long-term objectives of existing FTFC programmes will remain. The performance and quality of each programme will continue to be monitored as part of robust governance and corporate performance arrangements, including the quarterly performance reporting of milestones and measures to the Executive, and the regular review of governance actions and risks as part of the wider performance framework.
- 4.7 The 'Making Stevenage Even Better' Corporate Plan will articulate to the public our key priorities and objectives over the next five years. It operates as the strategic policy framework for the Council ensuring that services consider the Council's key priorities when undertaking planning and resource allocation. It has been produced as a short, easy-to-read, public document which seeks to involve as many stakeholders as possible and help support the Council's intention to obtain meaningful feedback as part of formal consultation activities. Presenting the model in this format will help encourage discussion and debate as part of the Council's commitment to its Cooperative Council ambitions to deliver a 'co-produced' document that has involved residents, the local voluntary sector, partners and business.
- 4.8 A detailed Plan on a Page (PoaP) will be developed to sit alongside the one-page model. This will be a short plan articulating clearly to the public the 'Making Stevenage Even Better' top 10-15 key outcomes against each of the 5 strategic priorities. The PoaP will set out to residents where the Council will focus improvement efforts each year over the next five years. These outcomes will be supported by key corporate performance targets, indicators and milestones to ensure performance can be monitored on delivery.
- 4.9 Following agreement by the Executive, the Making Stevenage Even Better PoaP will be sent out for a short 6-week consultation with residents, local community groups, partners, businesses, Members and staff. The survey will be circulated via a social media campaign, the Council's enewsletter to residents, an article in the Chronicle and posters on Neighbourhood Notice Boards. It is not envisaged that this will be a large-scale consultation exercise as the Council has already carried out extensive consultation on the key priorities as set out in section 4.3. As a Budget and Policy Framework item the draft will also be formally submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October. The final version of the Corporate Plan will be presented at Full Council alongside the Budget in February 2024.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 The Council is in the process of refocusing resources to support the priorities outlined in the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan through the budgetary cycle for 2024/25. Any additional resources required to support the

programme over and above that identified will be reflected as part of the financial planning and budget setting process for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

5.1.2 Legal Implications

5.1.3 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5.2 Risk Implications

5.2.1 The risks associated with individual service areas and objectives will need to be considered through normal service planning processes.

5.2.2 A strategic risk register has been developed for the Making Stevenage Even Better programme to ensure risk is effectively managed across the programme. It will be monitored by the strategic Programme Board on a quarterly basis.

5.3 Policy and Service Delivery Implications

5.3.1 The Corporate Plan is the keystone in the Council's policy framework. It sets out the Council's strategic priorities and informs the corporate improvement and change programme.

5.3.2 The Corporate Plan impacts on all Council services, and this will be reflected in all Business Unit Service Plans for 2024/25.

5.4 Equalities Implications

5.4.1 All projects and activities leading to policy or service change in fulfillment of the strategic priorities within the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan will be assessed through the Council's Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Executive Report: [Future Town Future Council](#)

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Draft Corporate Plan - Making Stevenage Even Better