

**Teignbridge District Council
Executive
12 September 2023
Part i**

Council Strategy Review

Purpose of Report

To agree the scope, process and budget for reviewing the Council Strategy

Recommendation(s)

The Committee RESOLVES to:

1. Recommend to Full Council to approve the scope and process for reviewing the Council Strategy as set out in the report and Appendix 1; and
2. Approve a budget of £80,000 to fund additional officer, digital and/or consultancy support as required to prepare the Council Strategy, as well as consultation and engagement activities associated with its preparation.
3. Establish a Working Group of District Councillors to oversee the review of the Council Strategy.

Financial Implications

These are as set out in section 2.1

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Legal Implications

These are as set out in section 2.2

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Risk Assessment

These are as set out in section 2.3

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Environmental/ Climate Change Implications

These are as set out in section 2.4

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Executive Member

Executive Member for Strategic Direction (Cllr Martin Wrigley)

Appendices

1. Proposed Council Strategy Review Process
2. Council Strategy Working Group Draft Terms of Reference

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to agree to the review of the Council Strategy and the process, scope and budget for doing this as set out in this report and Appendix 1.

2. REPORT DETAIL

2.1. Financial

- 2.1.1. The Council's ability to deliver services is limited by the availability of finance and it is therefore essential that the Council makes prudent decisions which reflect the current financial situation.
- 2.1.2. The Council's priority should be to ensure that the statutory services of the Council can be delivered effectively and efficiently to ensure we can be a financially sustainable Council. The review of the Council Strategy will help to focus spending priorities firstly on delivering the statutory services before considering other projects and third sector funding.
- 2.1.3. There is very limited available resource within the Council to undertake a review of the Council Strategy at this time and no existing budget to fund consultation exercises proposed for its preparation. The process for an effective and wholesale review of the Council Strategy therefore requires additional resource to be identified. It is requested that a budget of £80,000 is made available to fund additional officer resource and to bring in consultancy and/or digital support as required, as well as to cover costs associated with consultation and engagement activities. The £80,000 would be a budget pressure to be funded from reserves in 2023/24.

2.2. Legal

- 2.2.1 There are no legal requirements to prepare a Council Strategy but it is a cornerstone of good governance and its preparation helps to establish the framework for ensuring that the Council can be financially

sustainable in delivering its statutory duties alongside any other discretionary services

2.3. Risks

2.3.1 The Council Strategy provides the framework in which Council services and projects are prioritised and delivered. An updated and fit-for-purpose Council Strategy (and supporting performance monitoring framework) enables the Council to be accountable for its decisions around funding, resources and work programmes, and maximises opportunities to bring the greatest benefits to the communities it serves.

2.4. Environmental/Climate Change Impact

2.4.1. Whilst there are no direct environmental or climate change impacts arising from this report, the review of the Council Strategy will look at how the Council can structure its resources to meet national and local carbon budgets and minimise our contribution towards further global warming.

2.5. Background

2.5.1. On 14th January 2020 Full Council adopted the current Council Strategy 2020-2030. This is a ten-year plan, intended to set out the priorities and performance management framework for Teignbridge under the ten headings of:

- Action on climate
- A roof over our heads
- Clean scene
- Going to town
- Great places to live and work
- Investing in prosperity
- Moving up a gear
- Out and about and active
- Strong communities
- Vital, viable councils

2.5.2. These ten areas have been the focus of the Council's work since the adoption of the Council Strategy 2020-2030, with multiple projects being delivered to support these priorities and bringing major benefits to our communities and environment.

2.5.3. Performance against the ten priorities has been monitored through annual business plans and performance monitoring reports reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3. Reasons for reviewing the Council Strategy

3.1.1. It is important that the Council Strategy is reviewed regularly to ensure that it remains relevant, up to date, and aligns with the Council's financial position. The Council Strategy's key purpose is to set out a vision that is supported by clear and deliverable goals and to give the Council a common purpose towards which all services should be focused on achieving.

3.1.2. The agreed review timescale for the adopted Council Strategy is four years from adoption, which would mean a review in January 2024. Significant events which have taken place over the last 3 years have had, and continue to have, lasting impacts on our communities. These include challenges relating to the current cost-of-living crisis, low comparative wages with the rest of Devon and the UK, pressures on our health services, and subsequent impacts on the health and wellbeing of our residents. It is important that the Council responds to these issues swiftly to ensure that its priorities are aligned to those which deliver the most benefits to the people we serve. With a new Council recently in post as of May 2023, it is a timely opportunity to carry out a review and have an updated strategy in place to focus the Council's spending and priorities for at least the next administrative term.

3.1.3. In addition, there are improvements that can be made to the adopted Council Strategy that would enable Councillors to take better ownership of

the goals and ambitions set out in it to guide better decision making over the next administrative term. There will be key questions for Councillors about what they do and don't want to support moving forward and how they wish to focus resources. There is also an opportunity to establish a much more effective framework for monitoring and scrutiny which will hold the Council to account and focus resources where they are most needed. The adopted Strategy is considered too large in scope, which spreads resources too thinly and risks failure to deliver services or becoming financially unsustainable.

4. Scope

4.1. Consideration of scope of the Council Strategy

4.1.1. It is proposed that a wholesale review of the Council Strategy is carried out given the significance of recent and ongoing global and national challenges (including the pandemic, war in Ukraine, climate change, cost of living crisis and technological advances). These events are having tangible impacts on residents, businesses and environments as well as on the Council's own budget and legislative requirements.

4.1.2. The Council Strategy should have a time horizon that enables us to react to changing needs and opportunities, as well as plan to achieve longer term ambitions. The current Strategy is a ten-year plan but depending on what the review of the Strategy seeks to achieve, it may be that a shorter term plan (such as that covering the next administrative term) would be more appropriate. Rather than setting out a defined time period or monitoring stages for the strategy at this point, it is proposed to explore this as part of the review once visioning and intelligence gathering exercises have started to identify the main objectives and how long they may take to deliver.

4.1.3. It is proposed to review the Council Strategy in two stages:

Stage 1: Headline Themes

The headline themes will be designed to set out the key objectives which Council services will be focused on delivering. These will be high level and reflect the biggest issues affecting the district. It is anticipated that these will be presented in a concise and accessible format (for example a one page infographic) rather than a detailed document.

Stage 2: Action Plan

The Action Plan will be a living document that is limited to an agreed set of specific, deliverable and measurable projects or services, aligned to at least one of the headline themes. They will first and foremost reflect the statutory services we are required to provide, followed by non-statutory ambitions which seek to tackle the biggest issues affecting the district where achievable and financially viable. These actions should identify where we have control and/or influence so that the projects we choose as priorities can have real, positive impacts on our communities. The Action Plan will be supported by a monitoring framework against which progress and performance will be routinely reviewed.

5. Process

5.1. Consideration of how the Council Strategy will be prepared

5.1.1. The proposed process and timetable for preparing the Council Strategy is set out in Appendix 1. This assumes that additional resource will be made available as requested in section 2.1.3 to achieve the indicative timescales of meeting Milestone 1 (consulting on headline themes) in February 2024 and Milestone 2 (adopting the Council Strategy comprised of headline themes and action plan) by June 2024. Without the additional resource requested it is unlikely that these milestones can be met.

5.1.2. It is proposed to establish a Member working group to oversee the review of the Council Strategy. It is requested that this 'Council Strategy Working Group' is set up as a working group of the Executive to give advice and guidance to Officers when developing strategies and to deepen cross-

party Councillor involvement in their preparation. A draft Terms of Reference for the Working Group is included at Appendix 2.

- 5.1.3. The preparation of the Council Strategy will involve collaboration with a range of interested stakeholders and be subject to a public consultation. Specifically, it is proposed to draw on recent resident surveys and involve agencies delivering services within the area, District Councillors, town and parish councils and Council staff within the formative stages of its preparation. This will be followed by wider public consultation on a draft strategy and is shown in Appendix 1.
- 5.1.4. The Council has aspirations to become a 'Community Powered Council', meaning that we would put community power at the heart of our operating model. This may influence the way in which the community is involved in the preparation of the Council Strategy but in itself is not part of the consideration of this report.
- 5.1.5. Decision-making on the approach, consultation document and final strategy will rest with Full Council.

6. Options

6.1. Consideration of alternative options

- 6.1.1. The alternative options to the proposed recommendations are:
- a) Undertake a light touch review of the current Council Strategy focusing on progress and performance against agreed targets and objectives; or
 - b) Delay review of the Council Strategy for 12 months following examination of the Local Plan when resource required to undertake the review is more likely to be available.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1.1. Given the scale and nature of change seen over recent years and the impact this has had on our communities, it is recommended that a review of the Council Strategy is carried out as expediently as possible. This report recommends a preferred approach for doing this which will help to ensure that the Council's spending priorities are aligned with the projects and services most likely to have the biggest impact on the quality of life for our residents, alongside meeting statutory duties.

Appendix 1: Proposed Council Strategy Review Process



Appendix 2: Council Strategy Working Group Draft Terms of Reference

Introduction

The Council Strategy will provide a framework in which Council services and projects are prioritised and delivered. It will establish a vision and key objectives for the Council alongside an Action Plan to deliver these ambitions.

Council Strategy Working Group (CSWG) Membership

Membership will be comprised of 9 councillors (with deputies permitted if necessary) nominated by the council's political groups to bring the Working Group into political proportionality overall.

The meetings will be an open forum for all District Councillors to attend if they wish and all Members will be notified when meetings are held. However, the 9 named Members will be the primary advisors and their involvement will ensure continuity throughout the process of preparing the Council Strategy.

The CSWG meetings will be attended by a lead Officer and other officers of the Council as required. Other specialists may be invited to attend as and when necessary to advise the CSWG on specific matters.

Chairing

The CSWG Chair and Vice Chair will be elected annually by the members of the group, at the first CSWG meeting following establishment of the Working Group.

Roles and responsibilities

The purpose of the CSWG is to provide cross-party Councillor involvement in the preparation of the Council Strategy. It will act in the capacity of an informal 'sounding board', giving opinions, advice and guidance to officers to review the Council Strategy. The CSWG will not have decision-making powers.

The CSWG will be expected to consider a range of information and provide advice on matters such as:

- Timetable and process
- The implications of evidence and other intelligence
- Consultation and engagement
- Draft Headline Themes and Supporting Objectives
- Drafting of the Action Plan and consideration of costs, resources, impact, achievability, delivery mechanisms, KPI's and community collaboration opportunities
- Any other matter which bears on Council Strategy preparation and contents
- Ongoing scrutiny and monitoring of the Council Strategy

Decision-making

The CSWG is not a decision-making body. It will seek agreement and consensus on Council Strategy matters and advise officers as appropriate.

It will sometimes be necessary to compromise to achieve agreement. A form of collective responsibility should apply to CSWG agreements to support the progress of the Council Strategy through the formal decision-making processes within the council.

There may be instances where a vote will be required by the nine members of the CSWG to check that there is broad consensus on a particular matter. This will not constitute a decision but will provide officers with an indication of the likely level of support or objection on a particular issue.

Administration and support

The CSWG will meet as and when required according to the timetable for preparation. This is likely to involve regular (bimonthly) meetings in the period leading up to its adoption (September 23 – June 24) with less frequent meetings following that which are focused on scrutiny and monitoring.

Officers leading preparation of the Council Strategy will organise and administer the CSWG including room bookings, meeting invites, preparation of reports and meeting notes.

Written notice of meetings, along with the agenda and associated papers, will be sent to members of the Council Strategy Working Group five days in advance of any meeting. Other Members will be notified of the meetings via the Members Newsletter and can obtain papers on request via named Officers.

Agenda items can be requested by the Members of the CSWG. Other Members not on the CSWG wishing for items to be discussed should request they are added to the agenda via their Group representatives on the CSWG.

If any Elected Member of the CSWG wishes to submit papers for a meeting these should be sent to the Chair at least 7 working days in advance of the meeting and copied to michelle.luscombe@teignbridge.gov.uk.

Papers will be marked as confidential where necessary and these should not be circulated outside of the Council. Late items may be distributed when considered appropriate by the Chair.

Meetings will be held as required to ensure the timely progress of the Council Strategy. The meetings will be held at the Council Offices or via Teams.

Reporting

There will be no formal minutes of the Group but a note will be taken of the subject matters discussed, witnesses invited and any broad points of agreement or matters to be considered further.

The notes will be available to Councillors and council officers but should not be made public as they may contain sensitive information in advance of formal publication of committee reports.

A summary of the discussions and how they have informed Council Strategy preparation will be appended to formal reports taken to Full Council when decisions relating to the Council Strategy are being sought.