

REPORT TO: Council
LEAD CABINET MEMBER: Leader of the Council
LEAD OFFICER: Chief Executive

21 February 2019

Business Plan 2019-24

Purpose

1. The Council has worked to develop a new Business Plan for 2019-24. This report presents the proposed Business Plan for 2019-24 to Council for consideration.
2. The Business Plan (Appendix A) has been recommended to Council by Cabinet at their meeting on 6 February.
3. The report also presents the outcomes of a public consultation that was carried out between 19 November and 7 January. This consultation has provided valuable feedback from local people and given communities an opportunity to engage with and shape the plan.

Recommendations

4. Recommended the Council:
 - a) Approve the Business Plan (Appendix A), incorporating feedback from Scrutiny and Overview Committee;
 - b) Authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with Portfolio Holders, to prepare detailed implementation plans and associated performance measures and ensure these are reflected in directorate service plans and quarterly position reports during 2019/20; and
 - c) Authorise the Chief Executive to make any minor wording changes required before publication, in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

Reasons for Recommendations

5. The Business Plan sets out the overarching priorities for the Council and details the actions that are currently planned to be carried out up until 2024. The plan is updated each year. The Business Plan is used to ensure officer and financial resources are allocated appropriately to achieve the actions and objectives detailed within it.
6. The Business Plan informs the subsequent agreement of annual service plans, prepared by the Council's directorates, setting out service, team and individual objectives, aligned to the vision and aims that have been set.

Background

7. In advance of a detailed Business Plan being prepared for 2019-24, residents, businesses, parish councils, partners, councillors and staff were asked for their views on a proposed high-level set of priorities. The consultation ran for just over six weeks and closed on 7 January. A longer consultation period than normal was carried out, so people had extra time to respond due to the Christmas and New Year period.
8. The four priority areas people were asked their views on were:

(a) Economic Development

There is a booming economy in South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge. But this isn't growth that we can take for granted. As the recent Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review identified this growth needs to be nurtured and sustained. We must also encourage and support small businesses that provide local jobs in our villages.

(b) Homes that are affordable for everyone to live in

The high cost of housing in the district means that home ownership is difficult for many people, even those on good incomes. Good quality market housing that meets the needs of people of all ages will be important. This includes high environmental standards and good transport links to make sure the cost of living in the home is affordable once all bills are considered. Alongside market housing, there is a need to accelerate Council house building and deliver more social housing too. These allow local families to live near to where they grew up, places of work and support network.

(c) Climate and Environment

The Council can examine what it can do to reduce its carbon footprint, to include the environment as a consideration in its dealings with others and to act as a showcase for environmental responsibility. We also need to understand the impact of climate change on our district, integrate this into our policies and actions, and consider how we can incorporate climate change impact measures on many levels into new housing and employment developments.

(d) A 21st Century Council

We need to ensure that we have a skilled and talented workforce that can serve our local communities. We will also need to develop income generation initiatives to help maintain high quality services and outcomes - harnessing technology where appropriate to help improve access to services and enable us to respond to customers through a variety of channels

Consultation Responses

9. Almost eight out of every ten people who responded agreed that each of the proposed priority areas suggested should be focused on by the Council. The percentage breakdown is below:
 - (a) Economic development (79%)
 - (b) Homes that are affordable for everyone to live in (79%)
 - (c) Climate and environment (78%)
 - (d) 21st century council (77%)
10. The survey also gave an opportunity to provide more detailed feedback on each of the above priority areas. A summary of the key issues that were raised, plus details of how this feedback has gone on to shape the development of the Business Plan, is

included below. A more detailed breakdown of consultation responses is attached at Appendix B.

Growing Local Businesses and Economies (title changed following consultation)

11. Feedback on the economic development priority showed that the most common perceived barrier to achieving the aims set out within it was transport (47%). The main theme was the need to make it easier to get to places of work without relying solely on the car. Around 10% of people also highlighted access to housing and housing affordability, availability of rural broadband and concerns over balancing growth with the need to maintain what makes South Cambridgeshire a great place to live. When asked if there was anything else that should be focussed on, transport was once again the top concern with 36% of people saying this barrier needs to be addressed. 20% of people also said that there needs to be enough emphasis in the plan on people already living and working in the district.
12. Following consultation, the economic development priority has been developed to reflect the above areas of feedback. The title of the priority area has been changed to 'growing local businesses and economies' and actions developed to provide increased focus on people who are already living and working in the district. Actions have also been added to reflect work that is planned to improve environmentally friendly transport links and to increase the availability of rural broadband.

Housing that is affordable for everyone to live in

13. Affordability was the key issue raised when people were asked about the proposed housing priority (26% of respondents). Their views were mixed and included the need for more social housing, more help for first time buyers to get a foot on the property ladder and stepping up efforts to make homes cheaper to run through measures such as better insulation. One junior doctor said that they cannot afford to buy a home in the district and will be moving to another part of the country because of the price of housing. Transport was once again mentioned with 14% of respondents saying this is a barrier to housing that is affordable to live in. When people were asked what else the Council should focus on under the housing priority, 18% of people said transport should be more of a focus when the Council considers housing. There was a range of responses on the best way to tackle this. They included concentrating more on delivering alternatives to the car, to making sure the car is focussed on more when housing is considered.
14. The consultation responses were for the most part supportive of the high level aims of this priority. In particular, the aims that have been developed as part of this priority reflect the feedback that was received in relation to the quality and range of housing available, as well as the creation and development of thriving communities that are serviced by improved transport links.

Being green to our core (title changed following consultation)

15. Transport was again the key focus (27%) in the responses the Council received on the climate and environment priority. The bulk of the responses centred on the need for greener transport. Waste and fly tipping was the second most popular area of response with 20% of people commenting. Responses ranged from the need for more resources to tackle fly tipping and to try and secure higher penalties, to more focus on making recycling easier. When asked what else the Council should be focusing on as part of the climate and environment priority, tackling transport issues

(31%), investing and supporting renewable energy generation (18%) and higher quality of insulation and energy generation as standard on new homes/offices (15%) were highlighted. Improving the energy efficiency of homes and office blocks included a suggestion of the Council trying to make solar panels mandatory.

16. Responses relating to this priority largely confirmed the areas of focus that were presented under the Climate and Environment heading within the consultation. However, since consultation the Council has further developed an ambitious set of targets within this priority, including becoming a Zero Carbon Council by 2050. Business Plan actions have also been developed to address concerns around transport, such as looking into how electric vehicle charging points can be delivered across the district, as well as work that will be undertaken to speed up fly-tip response and increase rates of recycling.

A modern and caring Council (title changed following consultation)

17. Customer service was the most important area of focus (21%) under this priority. Communities said they wanted the Council to be accessible and for it to be easier to contact the right person. There were also mixed responses to the use of technology for people to get things done online. There was support for investment in technology, but customers also wanted to make sure that it was still possible to speak to someone over the phone or face-to-face if necessary. When asked what other things the Council should focus on, 25% of people said the Council needs to be efficient and work smarter. People wanted to see quicker decisions and for the Council to be working with other councils to ensure no duplication of work. Although 77% of people supported the principle of the areas of work proposed under the 21st century Council priority, 12% of people questioned the title. The comments received suggest the '21st century Council' title is confusing and many people would already expect any business to be acting in a way fit for the 21st century.
18. Following consultation feedback, the title of this priority has been altered to 'a modern and caring Council', to better capture the overarching intentions and reduce confusion around the purpose and meaning of the priority. The delivery of continual service improvement and excellent results for local people has been placed very much at the core of the actions falling within this priority, including through the retention and development of staff, as well as the use of technology to improve access to services.

Budget consultation responses

19. The consultation also asked people for their views on our budget, a proposed £5 per year increase in Council Tax for the average band D home and for comments on how the Council can bridge the funding gap due to ongoing national cuts to the grants we receive to deliver services. The most popular response (18% of respondents) was for the Council to make sure income was being generated to bridge some of the gap. 13% of people also said they were concerned about cuts to services as they did not want service quality to reduce. The consultation also saw 13% of people explicitly say they support increasing Council Tax by the amount proposed, with one respondent adding that they feel our proportion of Council Tax is too low. Only 5% of respondents said Council Tax was too high.
20. The above responses are particularly reflected within the 'a modern and caring Council' priority, which includes a focus on generating new and innovative sources of income, as well as attracting and developing staff, investing in technology and reviewing the way that we carry out tasks, all as part of a commitment to deliver continuous improvement for South Cambridgeshire's business and residents.

Consultation method and next steps

21. The Council took a new approach to gathering views on the Business Plan this year. Rather than asking for views on a detailed plan, which could be interpreted as complete, views were gathered in advance of the detailed plan being drafted. By asking for views on a set of high level priorities in advance of the detail being completed it has increased the number of responses we have received. Responses were also received from at least one person living or working in almost half of South Cambridgeshire communities.
22. Survey Monkey – an online tool – was used to gather feedback. Three unique links to the survey were set up to help us gather information about where respondents originated from. The most popular route for respondents was by seeing the consultation on social media – 102 responses. Second most popular was through our website (this included people who saw the consultation in South Cambs Magazine and went online), 61 responses. A further five responses originated from a direct appeal to businesses through the Council's e-newsletter.
23. The consultation also achieved feedback from a good spread of age groups. However, under-18s were under represented with only one response. Some respondents also preferred not to disclose their age range. The breakdown was:
 - (a) 18 to 35 – 18%
 - (b) 36 to 50 – 29%
 - (c) 51 to 64 – 36%
 - (d) 65 and over – 13%
24. It is recognised that the Council cannot deliver all the services which the community require and want on its own. The Business Plan reflects the need to continue to work in partnership to deliver services. These include the Council's work with Registered Social Landlords to deliver the Housing Strategy, with the Police on Community Safety and as a constituent member of the Greater Cambridge Partnership and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.
25. A summary document that makes the Business Plan easy for parishes, businesses and communities to understand will be developed once the aims and priorities included in it has been agreed by Council.

Options

26. The attached Business Plan has been recommended to Council by Cabinet. Council is recommended to approve the Business Plan for 2019-24.
27. Council could choose to request further amendments prior to the Business Plan being agreed.

Implications

28. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

Financial

29. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-24 and Budget Estimates for 2019-20, take into consideration the priorities in the Council's Business Plan to make sure they can be resourced.

Legal

30. The Business Plan forms an integral part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework and therefore is reserved for Council approval as required by the Constitution.

Risk Management

31. Once agreed, the Business Plan sets out the priorities for the Council to deliver. The actions and timescales for delivery are monitored and reported on as standard.

Equality and Diversity

32. Updated and new impact assessments form part of the implementation of Council actions during 2019-2020.

Climate Change

33. 'Being green to our core' has been identified as a key theme included in the Council's proposed Business Plan. In doing so, the Business Plan states that the Council will "create a cleaner, greener and zero-carbon future for our communities." This will be achieved through the delivery of a range of actions, as detailed at Appendix A.

Effect on Strategic Aims

34. The Business Plan is the vehicle for the effective delivery of the Council's priorities.

Background Papers

- 35.
- (a) Proposed Business Plan 2019-24 (Appendix A)
 - (b) Summary of public consultation (Appendix B)
 - (c) District Profile: An Economic, Social and Environmental Summary Profile of South Cambridgeshire (Grant Thornton, 2017) (Appendix C)

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