

CABINET

12 MARCH 2024

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

A.1 DELIVERING AGAINST THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN 2024-28 – FINAL PROPOSALS FOR HIGHLIGHT PRIORITIES FOR 2024/25

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The Council's strategic direction is set out in its Corporate Plan which is a fundamental element of the Council's Policy Framework. The Corporate Plan ('Our Vision') was adopted unanimously by Council on 28 November 2023 (Minute 76 refers) and covers the period 2024-28 (and is reproduced at Appendix A to this report). Key elements of delivering against the adopted Corporate Plan is through annual highlight priority actions approved by the Cabinet. The 2024/25 initial proposals for highlight priorities were adopted by Cabinet for consultation purposes in December 2023; this report summarises the responses to that consultation and invited Cabinet to finalise its highlight priorities for 2024/25, giving due consideration to the outcome of the consultation undertaken.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's Corporate Plan 2024-28 ('Our Vision') sets out its strategic direction. That strategic direction itself seeks to reflect the issues that matter most to local people, the national requirements from Government and the challenges that face the district over the time period of the Plan.

The themes of the 2024-28 Corporate Plan ('Our Vision') are:

- Pride in our Area and Services to Residents
- Raising Aspirations and Creating Opportunities
- Championing our Local Environment
- Working with Partners to Improve Quality of Life
- Promoting our heritage offer, attracting visitors and encouraging them to stay longer
- Financial Sustainability and Openness

The Corporate Plan ('Our Vision') itself is set out at Appendix A to this report. Cabinet establishes each year its priority actions to deliver against the Corporate Plan and thereby ensure that the ambition of that Plan is central to its work.

The priority actions do not cover every separate element of the ambition of the four year Corporate Plan; nor are they intended to indicate that other projects, schemes or activities are not being pursued. They are though intended to reflect imperatives across the Council and for the district and actions that it is right to focus on in 2024/25.

Appendix B sets out the final proposed highlight priority actions for 2024/25.

The final proposed highlight priorities for 2024/25 have been reduced following the consultation period. This reflects the engagement undertaken and is to ensure there remains a tight focus

for the Council's activity going forward, considering the totality of the proposed actions and the Council's capacity and resources to deliver against them. Some initial proposed priorities have been removed, or amended, as they are not sufficiently measurable to allow for detailed monitoring and scrutiny; however, this does not mean that activity related to these will not continue.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that:

- a) Cabinet approves the final highlight priorities for 2024/25, as set out at Appendix B to this report; and
- b) Subject to a) above being approved, the Leader of the Council is authorised to agree the specific milestones for reporting against the adopted highlight priority actions for 2024/25.

REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

Adopting highlight priority actions allows Council activity to remain focused against Our Vision, and provides the framework for the annual performance monitoring system of the Council based on the milestones approved as part of the priority actions.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

As part of the public consultation, respondents were invited to make alternative suggestions. Details of these are included elsewhere in this report.

Not adopting highlight priority actions is an alternative option; however, this could risk leading to a lack of focus for Council activity, and would mean there would not specific measurable objectives for the Council which can in turn be scrutinised and support transparency around the Council's work.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The highlight priorities set out at Appendix B seeks to deliver in the year 2024/25 on the ambitions of the four year Corporate Plan 2024-28. Other actions in 2024/25 will also be undertaken as the Council applies the strategic direction of the Corporate Plan to its work overall.

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT (including with the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee and other stakeholders where the item concerns proposals relating to the Budget and Policy Framework)

A public consultation was held on the draft proposed Highlight Priority Actions, which was promoted through the local press, on the Council's social media channels, and in emails to stakeholders such as town and parish councils. The results of this are summarised as below; however, caution should be exercised as despite the promotion of the consultation there was a low level of response, which was weighted towards the rural north of the district:

Theme 1 (Pride in Our Area and Services to Residents)

Just over 70% of respondents felt the proposed priorities in this theme reflected the Council's

adopted Corporate Plan ('Our Vision'), and there was broad support for the priorities in this section; additional suggestions made by respondents broadly reflected priorities in other theme areas – such as around supporting environmental initiatives – or outside of this Council's control.

Theme 2 (Raising Aspirations and Creating Opportunities)

There was the same level of support for proposed actions in this theme, both in their reflection of Our Vision, and on the priorities. Feedback included concerns that there was too much of a focus on Clacton and not the rest of the district, particularly Harwich and Dovercourt; the first proposed action relates to the creation of a Town Board, part of a Long Term Deal for Towns government-funded scheme, though the other priorities are district-wide or focused on Harwich and Dovercourt.

Again suggestions for other priorities broadly captured other themes, such as biodiversity or civic pride, or fell outside of the Council's direct control – such as improving and widening the A120 in support of Freeport East, though taking the opportunities from Freeport East is a proposed priority.

Progressing the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community was the priority ranked as least important by respondents within this theme.

Theme 3 (Championing Our Local Environment)

In this theme 63% of respondents felt the draft proposed priority actions 'strongly' or 'somewhat' supported Our Vision.

Respondents wanted more detail on the Climate Change Action plan, expressing scepticism on the cost/benefit ratio – while one suggested the proposed action on sport and activity would fit better in a different theme.

Suggestions for alternative priorities within this theme included more electric vehicle charging points, improved cycle infrastructure, and a review of the district's "natural capital" for protection and improvement; the latter is something which to some degree is being picked up through the existing review of the Council's Local Plan.

The draft action to enhance capacity and be tougher on fly-tipping was seen as the least important – receiving no first-choice rankings from respondents – and despite the aforementioned concern about detail, implementing measures from the Council's Climate Action Plan received the most first-choice rankings.

Theme 4 (Working with Partners to Improve Quality of Life)

All respondents felt the proposed actions reflected this Our Vision theme to some extent. Half of respondents did not feel action was required on nuisance vehicles, and some concerns about the need for additional CCTV were raised. The most popular priority was "supporting projects to reduce health inequalities".

Alternative priorities suggested including tackling nuisance parking and speeding; environmental activities; and an action relating to the theme text around volunteering.

Theme 5 (Promoting our heritage offer, attracting visitors and encouraging them to stay longer)

This theme received the least overall support from the respondents, who suggested finding alternatives to the Clacton Airshow. There was support for promoting the district's fixed heritage and the area's museums, and doing more to promote and celebrate the district's natural resources. Another suggestion was to do more to tidy up the area to make it more attractive to visitors, which could be part of the first Our Vision theme (Pride in Our Area).

Fundraising to support heritage activity was deemed the most important priority by respondents overall.

Theme 6 (Financial Sustainability and Openness)

All respondents felt the proposed actions reflected this Our Vision theme to some extent. One respondent felt the review of the Communications and Community Engagement strategies was not necessary.

Suggestions for other priorities included developing opportunities around the district's heritage (which sits under the previous theme); prioritising spending on climate and environment; investment in sustainable opportunities; while one respondent said they felt the Council should focus on their statutory duties as a priority.

Reviewing the Council's Community Engagement Strategy was the penultimate or last priority of all respondents, while conversely "carefully planning the Council's budget" was everyone's first or second choice.

Other suggestions

The consultation survey invited respondents to propose other priorities. These included:

- Public transport
- A local food network to champion local producers
- More of a focus on rural communities

Other consultation activity

A recommendation from the Resources & Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following its consideration of the draft highlight priority actions at its meeting on 10 January 2024, was that the stewardship arrangements for the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community be a priority.

Stewardship is a key principle of the Garden Community approach and therefore is a priority to the project overall; the timeline for agreement of a stewardship model comes after the adoption of the Development Plan Document, and will be aligned with the first planning application – and therefore will not be in place during 2024/25.

This issue was also raised in the discussion held by the Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee when it considered the draft highlight priority actions at its meeting on 11 January 2024.

It has therefore not been recommended for inclusion in these highlight priority actions; but will be considered again as part of the process for developing highlight priority actions for 2025/26 under the Our Vision theme of 'Raising Aspirations and Creating Opportunities'.

The Resources & Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee also recommended that activity arising from the implementation of measures from the new Climate Change Action Plan be fully costs and resourced (or planned to be so). The committee, and the Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee, both recommended that performance against the adopted priorities be closely monitored.

As set out elsewhere in this report, there is a robust performance management process established as part of the highlight priority action monitoring throughout the year; while the specific financial and governance arrangements for each priority action will be subject to separate decisions which will address these recommendations.

During its discussion of the draft highlight priority actions the Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided some suggestions for the measures used for monitoring of performance of some of the highlight priority actions, and areas the specific actions may cover. Overall the committee endorsed the draft highlight priority actions.

Cabinet itself has also undertaken some further development work and assessment of the

priority actions agreed for consultation to ensure that they remain deliverable in totality given the Council’s capacity, and that the priorities can be effectively measured and monitored.

The consultation undertaken in 2023 year as part of the development of the Corporate Plan 2024-28 also helped to shape the proposed highlight priorities of the Cabinet.

The link to the report from the social research agency who supported that consultation exercise for the Council is in the public domain using this link: [Corporate Plan \(Our Vision\) 2024-28 Consultation Findings Report](#).

A paper copy of that Findings Report is available upon request.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (including legislation & constitutional powers)

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| Is the recommendation a Key Decision (see the criteria stated here) | YES/NO | If Yes, indicate which by which criteria it is a Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> Significant effect on two or more wards <input type="checkbox"/> Involves £100,000 expenditure/income <input type="checkbox"/> Is otherwise significant for the service budget |
| | | And when was the proposed decision published in the Notice of forthcoming decisions for the Council (must be 28 days at the latest prior to the meeting date) | Although not a Key Decision, notice of the intention for Cabinet at this meeting to consider the outcome of consultation in order to formally adopt its final priority actions was given as part of the resolved recommendations at Cabinet held on 15 December 2023. |

The recommended highlight priorities will support to deliver against the Council’s adopted Corporate Plan 2024-28. That Corporate Plan decision was a Key Decision for the Council. While this report (and its recommendations) are not of themselves a Key Decision, particular schemes and actions referenced in the highlight priorities may be such decisions and require the relevant prior notification. The legal implications of individual actions will be assessed when they are brought forward for formal decisions to be made.

The Monitoring Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:

The Best Value Duty relates to the statutory requirement for local authorities and other public bodies defined as best value authorities in Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 (“the 1999 Act”) to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness”. In practice, this covers issues such as how authorities exercise their functions to deliver a balanced budget (Part 1 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992), provide statutory services and secure value for money in all spending decisions.

Best value authorities must demonstrate good governance, including a positive organisational culture, across all their functions and effective risk management. They are also required, pursuant to section 3 of the 1999 Act, to consult on the purpose of deciding how to fulfil the Best Value Duty.

Government have recently consulted on revised Statutory Guidance on the Best Value Duty issued to local authorities in England under section 26 of the 1999 Act, which best value

authorities are required to have regard to. To provide greater clarity to the sector on how to fulfil the Best Value Duty, the draft statutory guidance sets out seven overlapping themes of good practice for running an authority that meets and delivers best value. These seven best value themes build on the lessons learned from past interventions, including those which the Government published in June 2020, and reflect what most local authorities already do or are striving to achieve. While these themes are all interdependent, strong governance, culture, and leadership underpin effective partnerships and community engagement, service delivery, and the use of resources, continuous improvement is the outcome of all the themes working well together. A detailed description of these themes, including characteristics of a well-functioning local authority and indicators used to identify challenges that could indicate failure, is set out within the draft guidance.

Members are expected to provide quality leadership by setting a clearly articulated, achievable and prioritised vision for officers to follow that puts place and local people at its heart. A well-functioning authority is expected to have senior officers with the capacity and capability to provide the authority with effective strategic direction. The Council's corporate plan is expected to be evidence based, current, realistic and enable's the whole organisation's performance to be measured and held to account. Strategic priorities must be aligned with the Council's financial strategy and delivery arrangements, and respond appropriately to local need, including the plans of partners and stakeholders. It is important that to ensure whilst the Council strives forward with continuous improvement corporate capacity or capability exists to prevent failure in its Best Value Duty. If a corporate plan is unrealistic, unaffordable and/or has too many priorities the government in its draft statutory guidance considers these as indicators of potential failure, therefore suitable and robust risk management must be in place.

FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The highlight priorities set out at Appendix B include to carefully plan the Council's budget and taking appropriate action to respond to liabilities and cost pressures. In considering all matters, it is vital that the balance of resources can be accommodated by this Council and that it does not put further strain on the Council being able to balance its budget each year; the recommendation from the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee that any new measures arising from the new Climate Change Action Plan must be fully costed and resourced, or planned to be so, accords with this.

The Section 151 Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:

Although there are no significant comments over and above those set out elsewhere in the report, it is worth highlighting the relationship between the delivery of priorities and the Council's budget. As set out in the report to Full Council on 13 February 2024, the cost pressures included within the budget to date broadly reflected unavoidable items. There are therefore many potential additional financial demands that have not yet been funded, which included items to support the delivery of the corporate priorities and objectives such as the Highlight Priorities for 2024/25 and beyond.

With the above in mind, and similar to previous years, it is proposed to review these items using a risk based approach, but outside of the annual 'base' budget setting cycle, with any associated decisions subject to separate reports or included within other key financial reports during the year.

The funding to support the above will come from existing one-off budgets, such as the reserve

set aside to invest in the Council's assets, the balance of the 2024/25 new homes bonus along with the favourable outturn variance from 2022/23. These amounts are separate to the money held in the Forecast Risk Fund. Any longer term / on-going financial impacts will be considered as part of the development of the forecast in future years.

USE OF RESOURCES AND VALUE FOR MONEY

The following are submitted in respect of the indicated use of resources and value for money indicators:

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| <p>A) Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;</p> | <p>The Corporate Plan 2024-28 includes the critical theme of "Financial Sustainability and Openness" and Cabinet intends to pursue this theme in order to secure services and functions for the residents the Council serves. To this end, the proposed highlight priorities outline actions that at this stage appear appropriate to support good resource management.</p> |
| <p>B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including; and</p> | <p>The development of highlight priorities each year seeks to keep the organisation focussed on measures aimed at securing the intentions of the Council's Corporate Plan. These highlight priorities sit between the Council's Corporate Plan and the individual decisions that will relate to the actions and activities necessary to achieve the intentions for the highlight priorities at Appendix B. As such, this process seeks to add to the governance reassurance of the Council around good decision making and awareness of cross cutting risks.</p> |
| <p>C) Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.</p> | <p>Performance against the annual highlight priorities is measured during the year concerned (and beyond) and the experience obtained from that monitoring assists the Council on its continuous improvement journey</p> |

MILESTONES AND DELIVERY

The Council has worked rapidly to reach this point following the unanimous adoption by Council of the Corporate Plan 2024-28 on 28 November 2023, and adoption of the proposed highlight priorities for 2024/25 on 15 December 2023.

The commencement of the consultation was delayed due to the pre-election protocol coming into effect for the Bluehouse ward by-election, but the overall adoption timeline for the highlight priorities 2024/25 has been maintained by analysis at pace of the engagement responses to inform the final proposals.

Once adopted, work will then begin to formulate the reporting template to enable regular monitoring of progress against the highlight priority actions to both Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny committees.

ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION

The most significant risk associated with this process is that the overall package of highlight priorities for 2024/25 do not match the issues that matter most to local people, the national requirements from Government, the challenges that face the district and the capacity of the

organisation and funding to deliver those activities and actions in 2024/25. This risk is considerably mitigated by the process of consultation and evaluation of the resource needs associated with each activity and action which has taken place prior to the adoption of the finalised highlight priorities. As indicated earlier, the development of the priorities for delivery will require further decisions and these risks should be identified with appropriate mitigation and solutions proposed for consideration.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

In developing the proposed final highlight priorities for 2024/25, consideration has been given to the general equality duty set out in S149 of the Equality Act 2010. This requires that the Council (as a public authority), in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Further consideration of equalities implications will be given in respect of each and every decision that will, in due course, be taken in respect of the actions and activities that will form the finalised highlight priority actions. The views of residents, businesses and partners will help to frame that consideration in so far as that related to those with protected characteristics and implications of taking particular decisions on those actions/activities.

SOCIAL VALUE CONSIDERATIONS

The actions and activities that deliver against the highlight priorities will seek (collectively) to secure social, economic and environmental benefits for the district and its residents. More generally, the Council will continue to encourage the creation of job opportunities for local people, support young people into apprenticeships and provide opportunities for local suppliers (and in particular SME businesses) to be represented in the Council's supply chain.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S AIM TO BE NET ZERO BY 2030

The consideration of measures to support the Council's net zero by 2030 aim will be a feature of consideration of each of the required decisions involving Cabinet that will be associated with the activities and actions that will form the highlight priorities for 2024/25. The initial proposed priorities itself references the Council's next Climate Change Action Plan; the recommendation from the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee that any new measures arising from the new Climate Change Action Plan must be fully costed and resourced, or planned to be so is noted; this would be a requirement of the plan itself, rather than adoption of the Highlight Priority Actions.

OTHER RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS OR IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

Crime and Disorder

Individual highlight priorities set out in Appendix B seek to specifically support anti-crime and disorder measures and, more widely, each action/activities that will form part of the finalised highlight priorities for 2024/25 will, in due course, be considered against the duty under S17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

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| | to (within the limits set out in that section) do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder, misuse of drugs etc., re-offending and serious violence. |
| Health Inequalities | Individual highlight priorities set out in Appendix B seek to specifically support measures to address and respond to health inequalities. |
| Subsidy Control (the requirements of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and the related Statutory Guidance) | While this is not a matter for this report, subsidy control considerations will be undertaken in respect of any relevant actions/activities undertaken as Highlight priorities for 2024/25 (and more generally where relevant). |
| Area or Ward affected | All |

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

The development of the Cabinet’s annual highlight priorities in support of the Corporate Plan ambition, and the reporting on them, follows the rhythm set out below:

- Initial draft proposals for the Highlight Priorities for the following financial year will be considered at the meeting of Cabinet that also considers the Initial budget for the Council for the same year (in December).
- The initial proposals will be subject to consultation; including Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- The outcome of consultation and finalised proposals for the Annual Highlight Priorities for the following financial year will be considered early in the New Year.
- Following the adoption of the Annual Key Priority Actions, the performance triggers will be built into the performance monitoring system of the Council based on the milestones approved as part of those Priority Actions.
- Officers will report to the relevant Portfolio Holder on delivery of the Priority Actions and Portfolio Holders will determine, by exception, if issues need to be reported to Cabinet throughout the year.
- Each quarter, a summary report on delivery against all of the Cabinet’s Annual Highlight Priority Areas for the year will be reported to Portfolio Holders and then published as part of the Council’s transparency data. Overview and Scrutiny Committee members may then identify specific key actions where there is performance against relevant milestones that should be subject to further enquiry and these may then be referred to the next relevant meeting of the Committee.
- A half-yearly report on performance against the Annual Key Priority Actions will be submitted to the relevant Cabinet Meeting (in October). This not only enables the Cabinet to consider the delivery of key actions in that year but also to encourage the start of the process to set key actions for the following financial year.
- The half-yearly report will be available for Overview and Scrutiny Committees to include in their work programmes so as they can consider the likely achievement of the envisaged outcomes envisaged.

The Council is currently at Step 3.

The Outturn position on performance against the Cabinet's Annual Highlight priority actions for the previous financial year will be timed to be reported to the Cabinet Meeting at which budget Outturn for that year will be reported.

In considering the annual highlight priorities for 2024/25, Cabinet has been made aware of the following deliverables across the lifetime of the Corporate Plan 2024-28.

These deliverables are in addition to the multi-million pound investment schemes the Council is responsible for that are referenced in Appendix B that will span several of those years:

2024/25:

- Council to implement significant savings.
- Review the Council's arrangements against the Government's Best Value Duty Guidance.
- Apply learning from major projects.
- Use data on cost and performance to support improvements/efficiency.
- To receive and assess the external pay review for the Council.
- Address the implementation of the Beach Hut Strategy.
- Develop and implement a Social Value Policy for the Council.
- Considering measures to address nuisance driving/noisy vehicles.
- Reviewing the Council's engagement strategy

2025/26:

- Undertake a Community Governance Review.
- New Waste, Recycling and Street Cleaning arrangements
- Updated Local Plan (pre-examination).
- Council to implement significant savings.
- Develop a District-wide Coastal Strategy.
- Develop a new Open Space Strategy.
- Look at opportunities for a Beach Festival.

2026/27:

- Council to implement significant savings.
- Tendring-Colchester Borders Garden Community – Spades in the ground to commence.

Following internal and external engagement on the draft highlight priority actions which were agreed for consultation, these have been further refined to produce a focused set of final proposals (set out in Appendix B), to ensure the adopted priorities are deliverable and measurable. Work may well continue on those actions no longer included, but they will be subject to separate internal monitoring and scrutiny.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS

Council on 28 November 2023 (Minute 76) – Adoption of the Corporate Plan

Cabinet on 15 December 2023 (Minute 62) – Delivering against the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-28 – Initial Highlight Priorities for 2024/25

Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 January 2024 (Minute 36) – Delivering against the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-28 – Initial Proposals For Highlight Priorities for 2024/25

Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 January 2024 (Minute 20) – Delivering against the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-28 – Initial Proposals For Highlight

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| Priorities for 2024/25 |
| BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL |
| None |

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| APPENDICES |
| Appendix A – Our Vision (adopted Corporate Plan) Appendix B – Final proposed highlight priority actions for 2024/25 |

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