

Delivery Plan – Re-prioritisation due to COVID

Summary: Over the past six months much of the Council's corporate focus has been on responding to the COVID pandemic and supporting local recovery, as well as seeking to maintain core service provision. This has meant that there has been little time or capacity to progress some aspects of the Council's Corporate Plan Delivery Plan.

Cabinet has recognised these pressures and has therefore reviewed the Delivery Plan objectives and actions and identified eighteen priority objectives upon which focus will be maintained in the coming months alongside the Council's ongoing response to the COVID situation. This report details the Cabinet's priorities given the current situation.

Options considered: Given the changing context in which the Council has needed to operate over the past twelve months and which is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, Cabinet recognises that it needs to re-focus its Delivery Plan ambitions to reflect the current situation.

Alternative options considered were:-

- do nothing to re-profile the Delivery Plan actions, or
- agree to "pause" all Delivery Plan actions and concentrate on the COVID response and Business As Usual service provision, which was not considered a viable position given the wider and medium-term pressures the Council faces in terms of its budget etc.

Conclusions:

The report details a practical and measured response to the Council prioritising its Delivery Plan actions in light of the COVID situation.

Recommendation: **Cabinet is asked to confirm the revised Delivery Plan priorities as detailed in the report.**

Reasons for Recommendations: To reflect the changed circumstances in which the Council is operating at the present time in seeking to balance its Corporate Plan priorities against the ongoing COVID situation in which the Council is having to operate.

Cabinet Member(s)
Cllr Sarah Butikofer,
Leader of the Council

Ward(s) affected
All

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Following adoption of a new Corporate Plan by Full Council in November 2019, the Cabinet agreed a detailed Delivery Plan laying out its priority actions for the Council over the four-year term of this Council administration at its meeting held on 3rd February this year.

1.2 The Corporate Plan has six priority themes, with actions proposed in the Delivery Plan under each of these theme headings:-

- Local Homes for Local Need
- Boosting Business Sustainability and Growth
- Customer Focus
- Climate, Coast and the Environment
- Financial Sustainability and Growth
- Quality of Life

In total some 39 objectives to be delivered through 90 detailed actions were proposed to support the delivery of the priority objectives over the period of this administration – ie through until 2023.

1.3 Following agreement of the Delivery Plan, work commenced on a number of the actions detailed in the Plan; but within a matter of weeks, both national and local focus turned to responding to the rapidly developing Coronavirus pandemic situation, meaning that the Council's focus moved to strategic partnership working and frontline community response in supporting our residents who were shielding and self-isolating during the national lockdown. Subsequently much organisational capacity has been directed to supporting local economic recovery, for what has been a very busy summer season for large parts of the District as significant numbers of people have taken domestic holidays rather than travel abroad. This has reduced our capacity to make progress on taking forward many of the Delivery Plan actions over the past six months.

1.4 As the country and Council returned to a “new normal” state in July and August, Cabinet met informally in August to discuss how the Council would move towards a position of “Business as Usual” (as against COVID response) and reviewed the Delivery Plan objectives to consider how the actions in the Plan might be prioritised to reflect the six months of this year “lost” to COVID and recognising that capacity moving forward through the next six months might also be compromised through the ongoing COVID situation.

1.5 The Cabinet therefore agreed a set of priority actions detailed within the Delivery Plan and this report outlines those priorities such that there is a wider understanding of the Council's focus over the next six to nine months. These priorities will be kept under constant review in line with the national situation relative to COVID. New priorities will be added as items are achieved / delivered. It is important that the Council understands that the Delivery Plan is not a fixed plan but will continually evolve.

2.0 The revised Delivery Plan priorities:-

2.1 After discussion by the Cabinet at two Business Planning meetings, the Cabinet has proposed that the following priority objectives form a re-focussed Delivery Plan, at least for the period through until the end of March 2021.

2.2 Local Homes for Local Need

- Progress preparation of the Local Plan (and respond to the Planning White Paper)
- Continued investment in Temporary Accommodation – both as an investment and in terms of reducing the Council's costs providing this service in respect of rising homeless presentations
- Explore through the development of a business model whether the District Council should consider the acquisition of older Victory (Flagship) Housing Trust properties in rural locations and then upgrade and make available for market rent, so as to increase the availability of housing in some of the District's most unaffordable housing areas, due to high property prices fueled by demand for second and holiday homes.

2.3 Business Growth

- Post COVID support for tourism businesses
- Re-purposing the High Street – to include leadership of the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone programme
- Support for existing indigenous businesses / strategic sites, recognising the shortage of serviced land and premises in the District

2.4 Customer Focus

- Develop and implement a new Customer Service Strategy – to include response times, improved complaints handling and reporting
- Development and implementation of the “Digital by Design” programme to capture the benefits of “channel-shift” seen through COVID through further development of the website to allow greater self-service options for customers to obtain Council services
- Development of new Communications and Engagement strategies

2.5 Climate, Coast and the Environment

- Develop policy and response to our declaring a Climate Emergency including deeper understanding of the Council's Carbon Footprint and aspirations to achieve “net-zero” status by 2030 – adverts for an Environmental Policy Officer and a Climate Change Projects Officer have been placed during the week of the 14th September to take forward this work

- Develop and deliver some significant environmental improvement projects as part of our response to declaring a Climate Emergency to include:-
 - Progressing and rolling-out more rapidly the Council's programme of tree-planting in support of the stated ambition to plant 110,000 over this four-year term of the Council, and
 - Delivering a programme of Electric Vehicle Charging Points across the District – two schemes have recently been launched in Holt and Sheringham; with installation of other points underway at Cromer, Fakenham and Wells and should be “live” by the end of the calendar year. The Council also proposes providing such facilities in North Walsham but has had some difficulties in securing the necessary site given availability of electricity infrastructure.
- Maintain the Council's work through Coastal Partnership East in the development and implementation of innovative coastal adaptation policies and schemes

2.6 Financial Sustainability and Growth

- Implement Zero-Based Budgeting for the 2021/22 financial year
- Update the Council's Property Strategy to maximize use of assets and return on investments
- Develop and implement a Commercialisation (Income and Savings) Strategy

2.7 Quality of Life

- Undertake a Residents Survey to inform the development and implementation of a new Quality of Life Strategy for the District including the Council's grant support for voluntary and community organisations
- Deliver the new Leisure Centre at Sheringham
- Maintain and develop the quality and offer of our beaches, woodland and open spaces

2.8 Work is now being undertaken to develop performance framework indicators for the management and oversight of these objectives, so as to allow monitoring and regular reporting of progress, both for Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This will be achieved through the In-Phase corporate performance management system which continues to be developed to support the Council's project oversight, management and service improvement.

3.0 Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.1 The Head of Finance and Assets is to present an updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy to Cabinet at its December meeting and this will provide more detail as to the financial implications of the re-focussed Delivery Plan proposals in the context of the wider financial position faced by the Council relating to COVID.

4.0 Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from the re-focusing of Delivery Plan priorities, project governance arrangements will be developed and put in place for each of the priority objectives in due course.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 Given the uncertainties around the COVID pandemic in the coming months, there are some risks about the capacity of the Council to deliver against these revised Delivery Plan objectives. However, the Cabinet has carefully assessed both current service delivery demands and pressures against wishing to make progress on the administration's stated priority objectives and it is considered that this re-prioritisation exercise is a measured and balanced approach in maintaining the Council's medium-term ambitions and aspirations for North Norfolk alongside the more pressing COVID response.

6.0 Sustainability

- 6.1. This report does not in itself raise any issues in respect of sustainability. However, it does detail the priority actions of the Council in seeking to respond to climate change issues within the Climate, Coast and the Environment theme within the Corporate Plan.

7.0 Equality and Diversity

- 7.1. This report does not in itself raise any issues in respect of equality and diversity. It does however identify key themes of housing, the economy, quality of life and customer service, all of which seek to address equality and diversity issues across the District and within the Council's delivery of services.

8.0 Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

- 8.1. This report does not directly raise any issues relating to Crime and Disorder.

9.0 Recommendation:-

Cabinet is asked to confirm the revised Delivery Plan priorities as detailed in the report.