

Supplementary Papers

Scrutiny Committee

held in the Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon OX14 3JE
on Monday, 5 February 2024 at 6.30 pm

Open to the public including the press

8. **Corporate Plan 2024-2028 - to agree an approach to the new corporate plan**
(Pages 2 - 19)

For Scrutiny Committee to consider and provide comments on the report of the Head of Policy and Programmes, on the Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028 approach. (Report to follow)

Cabinet Report



Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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To: Scrutiny,

Date: 5 February 2024

To: CABINET

Dates: 9 February 2024

Vale of White Horse District Council Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 Approach

Recommendation for Scrutiny Committee

The committee is asked to review the approach outlined to develop the Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 and provide feedback or recommendations to Cabinet (meeting on 9 February 2024)

Recommendation for Cabinet

For Cabinet to endorse the approach to develop the new Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028.

Purpose of report

1. To seek endorsement from Cabinet on the proposed approach to develop the next corporate plan 2024 to 2028

Corporate objectives

2. A new corporate plan for the period 2024-2028 is required to establish a strategic vision, ambitions and priorities for the council.

Background

3. Vale of White Horse District Council currently has a corporate plan 2020 -2024 that was adopted at full council on 22 October 2020. This is now within its final year so timely to develop a new plan to set the direction for the next 4 years.
4. There are statutory functions and services that a district council must provide. These therefore must feature in any strategic planning through the lifespan of the new corporate plan.
5. The corporate plan should reflect the financial landscape of a council, that sits alongside the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). For the corporate plan to be a credible strategic framework, it can be aspirational and ambitious but it must be affordable and able to be appropriately budgeted for.
6. It is envisaged that the new Corporate Plan will:
 - Establish the strategic direction for Vale of White Horse District Council for the period 2024-2028, informed by Councillors, Strategic Management Team (SMT), service areas, stakeholders and residents.
 - Provide a framework to align council work to priorities, with a recognition that not all identified priorities will be equal in scale and scope.
 - Target resources towards the priorities identified in the plan, aligning projects undertaken by the council to directly contribute to the delivery of the plan.
 - Showcase opportunities that could either be delivered directly, delivered in partnership or could be influenced by the council as appropriate.
 - Lead a hierarchy of plans that highlight how the work of individual officers, teams, service areas and wider partnerships, contribute to overall council performance and progress against its objectives – the golden thread.
 - Increase residents' awareness of services the council provides and its ambitions.
 - Cater to the district's particular needs while maintaining flexibility to respond to new situations as they emerge.
 - Provide a performance monitoring and reporting framework to improve transparency and accountability and report on progress towards our strategic goals and objectives.

Approach and draft themes

7. In August 2023, an all member briefing introducing the current corporate plan and performance reporting framework and initial plans for the development of a new corporate plan was held.
8. In October 2023, Cabinet members and representatives of the Strategic Management Team (SMT) met to review the current corporate plan, evaluate its strengths, areas for development and ideas to improve and inform a future plan.

9. The discussions also began to outline the approach to progress the next Corporate Plan 2024-28. In summary, key milestones of approach is as follows;
- Develop draft themes and illustrative projects
 - Public and stakeholder engagement on the draft themes
 - Analyse the feedback received
 - Develop the draft corporate plan
 - Corporate Plan 2024-2028 adopted by full Council
10. The development of draft themes considered the status of current priorities and projects, contractual commitments, statutory and legal obligations, service delivery and emerging influences and policies.
11. It is proposed that an engagement campaign on the draft themes and illustrative projects is undertaken to receive the views of the public and interested stakeholders. Analysis of the feedback received and further co-productive work would lead to the development of a fully drafted corporate plan. The draft corporate plan would then be subject to usual democratic and scrutiny process before adoption of the final plan by Full Council in October 2024.
12. The proposed draft themes brought forward by Cabinet members to form the basis of new Corporate Plan are set out in the table below.

THEME ONE:	Providing the homes people need
THEME TWO:	Supporting climate and nature recovery
THEME THREE:	Creating healthy, sustainable and inclusive communities
Approaches to achieve the themes	Working responsibly and in partnership
	Supporting thriving local businesses
	Building a council for the future

13. Brief descriptions of each of the draft themes above, including some illustrative current and potential projects are appended to this report at appendix 1.
14. The aim for the final plan when adopted, is to make it more accessible, interactive and be provided in a number of different formats. These will be explored further during the development process.

Scope of Engagement

15. It is proposed to undertake a public and stakeholder engagement campaign for a period of up to 6 weeks following endorsement of the approach.
16. Internal and external engagement on the draft themes of the Corporate Plan 2024-28 will help to:
- Convey the priorities and aspirations of the elected administration
 - Test out the themes and illustrative projects.
 - Better understand and respond to the needs of local people, councillors, officers, businesses and partner organisations.

- Facilitate the district to be better informed about the councils work and encourage participation in local democratic decision making.
- Enable residents to influence their “place” which could harness the increased sense of community spirit and local resilience.
- Increase transparency and be more accountable for what we do.

17. Some examples of audiences to be engaged with include;

- External: residents, businesses, town and parish councils, community groups, seldom heard audiences, younger people, other statutory bodies.
- Internal: Councillors, Climate Emergency Action Committee (CEAC), Council officers.

18. Some examples of proposed engagement activities and channels to be used include;

- An online survey using a new engagement platform
- Community outreach events
- Engaging at venues where groups are likely to meet for example community centres, coffee shops, leisure centres
- Interactive briefing sessions for officers and councillors
- Use of social media to promote the campaign

19. Further details of the audiences, proposed engagement activities and channels to be used are available in the Communications and Engagement Plan - copy to be appended to this report. (Appendix 2)

Timeline

20. An indicative timeline for the development of the plan is setting out key dates and activities are as follows:

- February 2024 – Scrutiny committee review the approach and draft themes
- February 2024 - Cabinet endorse the approach.
- March to April 2024 – Engagement on draft themes.
- May 2024 – Analysis of engagement feedback
- June to August 2024 – Development of the draft corporate plan and accompanying performance measures
- September / October 2024 - Scrutiny Committee meeting to review the full draft plan.
- September / October 2024 - Cabinet meeting to approve corporate plan and recommend to Council.
- October 2024 – Full Council meeting to formally adopt the new Corporate Plan.
- October 2024 – Corporate plan comes into effect.

21. To note, while the new plan is being developed, the annual performance reports for the existing corporate plan will also be completed.

Options

22. It is not a requirement for a council to have a corporate plan however not having one would severely inhibit the council's ability to achieve its strategic objectives and priorities while undertaking its statutory functions delivering essential services for the district.
23. To endorse the proposed approach with recommendations.
24. To not endorse the proposed approach.

Financial Implications

25. There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report but there needs to be recognition that the new plan will sit alongside the MTFP.
26. As the Corporate Plan 2024-28 progresses and gets adopted it is likely that existing resources and budget will need to be redirected and refocused towards the outcomes within it. All future budget proposals will be subject to the usual democratic and scrutiny process.

Legal Implications

27. There are no legal implications arising from this report. Legal implications may arise in respect of individual projects or delivery of services while implementing the Corporate Plan 2024-28.

Climate and ecological impact implications

28. There are no climate and ecological implications arising from this report. It is envisaged the development of the new corporate plan will set the strategic vision and direction for the future delivery of projects and initiatives to address climate and ecological issues and achieve better outcomes, including through a new Climate and Nature Recovery Action Plan.

Equalities implications

29. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and there are no implications identified. This will be reviewed further with regard to the proposed Engagement and Feedback exercise that will be undertaken.

Risks

30. The Corporate Plan 2024-28 will be a strategic framework that will be underpinned by a series of programmes of work and projects. As the underpinning work progresses, risks will be detailed in individual project risk registers or captured in the corporate risk register and be subject to the usual democratic and scrutiny process.
31. It is speculated that a General Election may be called during 2023/24 quarter 4, which may impact the proposed stakeholder engagement phase of the development of the Corporate Plan 2024-28. The proposed engagement is scheduled to launch ahead of a potential pre-election period but this will be closely monitored by the project team.

Other Implications

32. There are no other implications arising from this report.

Conclusion

33. A new Corporate Plan for the period 2024-2028 is required to establish a strategic vision, ambition and priorities for the council. It is envisaged that the development of this plan will support the alignment of resources to council priorities and increase residents' awareness of the work the council is doing and what the council aims to achieve. An indicative timeline has been set out to illustrate timescales for engagement, development of a draft plan, governance and the adoption of the plan at full Council.
34. A number of draft themes and illustrative projects have been developed by Cabinet Members, informed by SMT, to form the basis of a new Corporate Plan 2024-28.
35. The proposed engagement presents opportunity to be creative and imaginative building on established and emerging techniques that could potentially extend the councils reach and increase participation to co-produce the next corporate plan.

Background Papers

“At the Heart of the Vale” - Our Plan for The Vale 2024-28

Introduction

At the heart of the Vale of White Horse, the Council is making a place that our residents feel proud they can call home. It’s not just our mission and value for today. We want to secure a vibrant, inclusive and happy place for this generation and generations to come. This clear purpose guides how we serve our residents and the Vale today to ensure this prosperous future.

Due to cuts in national spending, we live in a time of very constrained finances, but have shown over the last four years, even with taking on a deficit, how we can achieve value whilst building the Council’s finances. That is why this Plan is titled “at the Heart of the Vale” It is important to us that our plans must put our people and our place at the heart of its goals.

The following themes outline our existing and aspirational plans within the Vale. This is separated into - our three core themes and how we will approach achieving them.

What we will do

Theme 1. Providing the homes people need

All our residents deserve a place they can call home. To this end, we are working towards a new Joint Local Plan (with South Oxfordshire District Council) and we hope to include more genuinely affordable housing and high environmental standards across a range of tenures and a wide housing mix. We will seek to ensure this is matched with the infrastructure needed to support these new homes – not just roads, but schools, community centres, health facilities and sports facilities

Example existing projects to continue

- Housing delivery strategy and action plan
- Supporting infrastructure in development

Aspirational projects

- Higher targets for Affordable Housing (in JLP)
- The Vale’s own stock of genuinely affordable housing
- Consider developing a framework for engaging with Community Land Trusts

Theme 2: Supporting climate and nature recovery

We are committed to helping our residents to prepare for the impact of climate change, as well as reducing our own carbon footprint and doing our own part in reducing our carbon emissions, while supporting nature recovery across the Vale.

Example existing projects to continue

- Progressing with the Council’s carbon neutral strategy
- Supporting the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Partnership

Aspirational projects

- Influencing carbon reduction in communities

Theme 3: Creating healthy, sustainable & inclusive communities

Our communities are far more than simply where we live. We are committed to encouraging and sustaining communities where our residents live healthy lives, work, exercise and travel.

Example existing projects to continue

- Supporting our most vulnerable residents.
- Implementing the Food Action Plan arising from Oxfordshire Food Strategy

Aspirational projects

- Encourage active travel enhancements
- Celebrating our communities through a council run awards scheme

How we will do it

By working responsibly and in partnership

For example

- Providing timely responses to consultations by surrounding local authorities and public bodies in line with our residents' needs
- Working with partners when it is purposeful

And looking ahead

- Enable more collaborative ways of working, including continuing to pursue a new shared HQ with South Oxfordshire District Council.
- Strengthening communications to Town & Parish Councils

Supporting thriving local businesses

For example

- Strengthening our partnership with the organisations and businesses within Science Vale

Looking ahead

- Developing our partnership with green skills providers
- Utilising Local Development Orders where applicable
- Promoting the rural economy and agriculture

Building a council for the future

For example

- Maintaining stable finances
- Using developer contributions effectively

Looking ahead

- "Business as usual done better" – continuing to assess areas for improvement within the Council's operations, through the transformation programme.

Corporate Plan 2024-28 Communications and Engagement Plan

Project name	Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028 Approach
Objectives of project	Stage 1: To launch a six-week public engagement on the key themes for the new corporate plan 2024-28 Stage 2: To report back on next steps Stage 3: To promote the final corporate plan 2024-28
Link to other projects/Strategies	Joint Local Plan Climate Action Plan
Current corporate plan strategic themes	<p>South</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness and accountability <p>Vale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in an open and inclusive way
Date created	November 2023
Last updated	January 2024

Background information/scene setting

Both councils have existing corporate plans that set out six strategic themes. These both run until October 2024:

- <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/about-the-council/corporate-plan>
- <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/about-the-council/corporate-plan>

The councils now need to refresh these plans and look ahead to 2024 – 2028. The aim is to have new plans in place for October 2024. The plans remain as separate documents for South and Vale.

The existing themes are:

South	Vale
Protect and restore our natural world	Providing the homes people need
Openness and accountability	Tackling the Climate Emergency
Action on the Climate Emergency	Building healthy communities
Improved economic and community well-being	Building stable finances
Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs	Working in partnership
Investment that rebuilds our financial viability	Working in an open and inclusive way

The new Corporate Plans will form an overarching, high level vision which informs the work we do and underpins all other council strategies and action plans

The proposed new themes are:

South Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028:
Action on climate change and nature recovery
Inclusion, accessibility and accountability
Thriving and healthy communities
Homes and infrastructure that meet local need
Financial stability and innovative transformation

Vale: Corporate plan 2024-28 - At the Heart of the Vale	
3 core themes	Providing the homes people need
	Supporting climate and nature recovery
	Creating healthy, sustainable and inclusive communities
Approaches to achieve the themes	Working responsibly and in partnership
	Supporting thriving local businesses
	Building a council for the future

Communications strategy

Conversation/feedback vs Consultation

We will avoid the use of 'consultation' – keeping in mind this is a non-statutory process, in the narrative used around the development of the new corporate plan we will refer to engagement, feedback and conversation. We will provide some examples and suggestions around this option.

What will this project be called?

We will explore options for alternatives to 'Corporate Plan' – e.g. A vision for our future etc. with 'corporate plan' used as a strapline. This will help make the subject more engaging for audiences when 'Corporate Plan' could come across as dry.

Seldom heard audiences

One of our priorities will be to engage with seldom heard audiences – those groups representing protected characteristics e.g. age (younger people), ethnicity, disability, rural communities, socio economic groups.

Community outreach events

Part of our plan to reach target audiences will be to get out into the community with drop-in sessions at accessible, public places, such as local cafes, community centres and local facilities such as Cornerstone and Beacon. There are several sessions like this taking place as part of the Joint Local Plan consultation running in January and February – so we can gauge how successful these have been to inform and shape the Corporate Plan sessions.

We will also utilise the extensive databases held by other teams within the council, such as the economic development team for reaching our rural communities and local businesses. This may also include exploring local groups and social housing providers.

Younger audience focus

To reach younger people, we will contact a broad range of youth groups from our equalities database and use the knowledge of colleagues in our community safety who regularly engage with younger people on best practise methods. We will ensure a range of online options are available to reach younger people (online survey, quick polls, social media feeds etc.) and ensure the key messages are tailored to the appeal to this audience.

Internal audiences

We also need to ensure staff are engaged and help shape the plan, since ultimately the corporate plan forms the golden thread through the work we do. We will factor in interactive briefing sessions and potentially service level focus groups.

Plan development post engagement

The aim for the final plan is to provide a number of ways to access it. Alongside a full PDF document (designed and made as accessible as possible), we will provide a HTML version and an interactive version (storymap/flipbook or equivalent). We will also provide an Easy Read version.

Flipbooks examples: [Kildare Council](#) and [Cheltenham Council](#)

Communications and engagement objectives

- To engage a wide range of people with the high-level themes of the new corporate plan and to encourage their feedback
- To reach and engage with seldom heard audiences
- To engage staff and councillors in the feedback

Key messages

Internal messages

- We are developing a new corporate plan for 2024-28
- The new plan will present a high-level vision for the council
- These themes will lead the golden thread that runs through everything we do at the councils
- The plan sets the direction for all the work we do and underpins all other council strategies and action plans
- We need your feedback to help shape the themes we prioritise.

External messages

- Join our big conversation - help shape our priorities for the next four years
- Help shape the future of your area
- We think our priorities should be xxxxxxxxxx – do you agree?
- What matters to you?

Known timescales

August – December 2023	Research and preparation period
Tuesday 10 October 23 South (am session) Vale (pm session)	Cabinet member and SMT workshops to discuss approach to new corporate plan In person sessions. Result of these workshops will inform the corporate plan approach.
December 2023 to February 2024	Draft themes prepared <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement survey prepared • Databases for engagement agreed and signed off • In person events organised including resourcing • Engagement material for in person events prepared and printed • Hard copies of all engagement materials printed and distributed to deposit locations • Comms material drafted and prepared • Content for social media prepared • Videos produced • Animations produced • Social media graphics • Posters produced
January – February 2024	Endorsement of engagement approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 February – Scrutiny – Vale • 6 February – Scrutiny – South • 9 February – Cabinet – Vale • 15 February – Cabinet – South

<p>Stage 1 March - April 2024</p>	<p>Stage 1 Six-week public and stakeholder engagement launched and promoted to audiences At this stage the engagement focuses on the broader themes identified (rather than a draft document). See audience list, channels and outputs below</p>
<p>Stage 2 May-August 2024</p>	<p>Stage 2 Feedback and report on engagement results Next steps promoted – Corporate Plans drafted (May-September 2024) During this period agree and prepare the range of ways to present the new plans (see details below).</p>
<p>Stage 3 September - October 2024</p>	<p>Stage 3 Review of draft corporate plans Scrutiny (South and Vale) Cabinet (South and Vale) Adoption of new plans at both Full Councils in October 2024 Full launch of finalised Corporate Plan Promotion of new plan</p>

Audiences

<p>Internal</p>	<p>External</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior management team (SMT) • Council leaders and cabinet members • Council Staff • South and Vale councillors • Corporate plan project board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town council and parish councils • Residents • Businesses

Internal	External
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups representing protected characteristics / seldom heard audiences e.g. age (younger people), ethnicity, disability, rural communities, socio economic groups • Youth groups/ Schools, colleges • Oxfordshire County Council • Other Oxfordshire councils • Other partner agencies • Local media / influencers (particularly those with an interest in local planning)

Channels

Internal	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emails • eNewsletters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staff news (Weekly) ○ In Focus - Cllr news (monthly) • Staff intranet news (Internal) • All staff briefing sessions (In person or virtual) • Jarvis news articles and pop ups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eNewsletters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ South & Vale news (monthly) ○ Town & Parish newsletters (as needed) • Social media: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Facebook (including paid adverts) ○ X/Twitter ○ Instagram ○ LinkedIn ○ WhatsApp Communities ○ YouTube ○ Nextdoor • Council website (External) • Online news and newsletter articles • Social media posts, animations and video • Leaflets/ flyers • Pop-up banners • Posters • Press releases • 'Join the Conversation' platform for online survey

Databases we can use to reach audiences:

- Consultation and Engagement database (mainly residents)
- Town and Parish Council database
- Equalities database (groups representing protected characteristics)
- Economic Development database (businesses)
- Planning database (organisations)
- Staff establishment lists

Engagement format

- Online survey in Citizen Space with paper option/alternative formats available upon request
- Public meetings with display boards / presentation of options (locations tbc: community centres, coffee shops, Beacon, Cornerstone, leisure centres)
- Shorter quick polls
- Interactive consultation formats. Explore options for gamification to work alongside more traditional methods of consultation – for example Menti, priority setting exercises, budget simulator, online polls? (Nextdoor/Facebook)

Outputs: Media/social media/engagement events

- We will develop video – vox pops with residents (contacts via consultation mailing lists) also featuring leaders/cabinet members. Videos can be embedded in consultation pages - (produced in house)
- Animation / explainer style videos
- Designed graphic posts – ensure consistent design (In house – Canva or professional designer)
- Pop up banners for public drop-in sessions
- Specific material for younger people? For example, Tik Toks
- Printed postcards / posters (In house – Canva or professional designer)
- Easy read consultation material
- Sign language video?
- Printed material (posters? postcards) in community centres, libraries and arts centres.
- Drop-in sessions / outreach events in the community – cafés?

Launch video

Our aim is to involve a range of residents / business contacts / councillors. The concept is for a short one-minute video featuring a montage of different voices expressing what matters most to them for example, family – affordable housing matters to us, young person – the environment matters to me etc – with summary at the end from council leader for example, we want to hear from you. We are currently recruiting for volunteers to take part in the video.

Indicative communications action plan (Stage 1)

When	What	Audience	Key messages
October	Focus Groups	Cabinet Members / SMT	What do we want our priorities to be for the next four years?
March week commencing 11 March 2024	Survey launch – Citizen Space	General audience	Join our big conversation – help shape our priorities What matters to you?
11 March	Press release	Local media and influencers	We've launched our big conversation – we want residents to help shape our priorities for the next four years
11 March ongoing (see separate social media plan for six weeks)	Social media - Video launch	Social media followers	Video tailored to each channel Explore Tik Tok / Insta for reaching younger audience
11 March – 15 March	Targeted distribution list	Rural audience	We've launched our big conversation – we want our rural communities to help shape our priorities for the next four years. We want to know what matters to you.
11 March – 15 March	Targeted distribution list: Economic Development database	Business audience	We've launched our big conversation – we want our business community to help shape our priorities for the next four years. We want to know what matters to you.
11 March – 15 March	Equalities database	Seldom heard targeted audiences	We've launched our big conversation – we want you to help shape our priorities for the next four years. We want to know what matters to you.
13 March	Staff newsletter Jarvis news article	Staff	We've launched our big conversation – we want staff to help shape our priorities for the next four years
March TBC	Email In Focus	Members	We've launched our big conversation – we want members to help shape our priorities for the next four years. We want to know what matters to you.
March/April TBC	Staff briefings/ Service level focus groups	Staff	We will need your feedback to help shape the themes we prioritise.

When	What	Audience	Key messages
March TBC	South and Vale news	Residents	We've launched our big conversation – we want residents to help shape our priorities for the next four years. We want to know what matters to you.
March TBC	T&P newsletter	Town & Parish Councils	We've launched our big conversation – we want residents to help shape our priorities for the next four years
March TBC	Email	OCC/Oxfordshire councils	South / Vale Councils have launched our big conversation – we want residents to help shape our priorities for the next four years
March TBC	Targeted distribution lists Option for focus groups?	Younger people	We've launched our big conversation – we want you to help shape our priorities for the next four years We want to know what matters to you. Complete our short survey for a chance to win a £30 Nando's Voucher
March/April TBC	Drop-in events – see separate plan	Residents – potential those we are less likely to hear from	Conversations with people about what matters to them.
March/April TBC	Posters/leaflets	Visitors to libraries/arts centres	Community centres, libraries and arts centres.

Evaluation – how will we measure success?

- Number of people taking part (to include analysis of different audiences)
- Number of survey responses received.
- Have we successfully engaged with our seldom heard audiences?
- Have we received meaningful feedback? Is the feedback integrated with the new plan in a meaningful way?
- Social media engagement (especially click throughs) and sentiment
- Video watch rates / drop off-rates
- Media coverage

We have engagement participant numbers from the previous development of the corporate plans – we need to be mindful that the numbers may have been particularly high due to the pandemic situation.