

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan

For Full Council 1 March 2023

Summary

Lead Member: Cllr Ben Chapelard – Leader of the Council

Lead Director: Lee Colyer – Director of Finance, Policy and Development

Head of Service: Jane Clarke – Head of Policy and Governance

Report Author: Jane Clarke – Head of Policy and Governance

Classification: Public document (non-exempt)

Wards Affected: All

Approval Timetable	Date
Management Board	14 December 2022
Cabinet member	14 December 2022
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	16 January 2023
Cabinet Advisory Boards	23-25 January 2023
Cabinet	9 February 2023
Full Council	1 March 2023

Recommendations

Committee recommendations as supported by the Cabinet member:

1. That the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan at appendix A is noted and referred to Full Council on 1 March 2023.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's key strategic priorities have historically been set out within its Five-Year Plan. The most recent Five-Year Plan ran from 2017-2022. Work was initiated in 2019 to update and refresh it but this work was put on hold due to the need to focus attention on responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic and then to allow any long-term consequences to become apparent and the Council's operating context to become clearer. At the elections in May 2022, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council experienced a change of political control with 'The Borough Partnership' forming a new political administration. The Borough Partnership is made up of Liberal Democrat, Tunbridge Wells Alliance (TWA) and Labour councillors alongside the independent councillor for Paddock Wood (East). From this Partnership the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group was elected as Leader of the Council and he formed a Cabinet made up of Liberal Democrats, TWA and Labour members.
- 1.2 Given the continued uncertainty facing the Council (no long-term financial settlement from central government, Covid-related changes to the high street and working practices, inflationary pressures, the cost-of-living crisis and frequent changes to central government policies - including on planning), the Borough Partnership has agreed to set out an interim Plan setting out the priorities and direction of travel of the Borough Partnership.
- 1.3 Since the establishment of the Borough Partnership, Cabinet members have been working to understand the detail of their cabinet areas and to establish a common set of priorities and a direction of travel for agreement at Full Council. The attached Plan: 'Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan' sets out the strategic direction of the Borough Partnership, highlights the administration's political priorities alongside some priority actions for achieving those priorities, and explains the revised operating principles for how the Council will deliver excellent services for residents of the Borough over the next two years.
- 1.4 The Plan will also assist Council staff to plan services effectively, ensuring that they are in line with the political priorities of the Administration, and that the limited resources available are prioritised to ensure both best value for the Council taxpayer and the best outcomes for residents. The Plan sits alongside a number of other plans and strategies including both the Local Plan and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- 1.5 Once agreed, work will begin on the production of a longer-term Strategic Plan setting out challenges and priorities over the medium-term. Work will also take place to produce a 'People Strategy' that will ensure that staff resources, structures and working practices support the overarching objectives of the Council and reflect the wider operating environment in which the Council exists.

2. Focus on Five

2.1 The Administration has five key priorities, called 'Focus on Five'. These are:

- Safeguarding Finances
- Vibrant and Safer Towns and Villages
- Carbon Reduction
- Genuinely Affordable Housing and Social Rental Housing
- Digital Access, Transparency and Local Democracy

2.2 These are the overarching priorities that the Administration believes will provide the best outcomes for residents. Whilst there is no ranking between the Focus on Five priorities, it is clear that Safeguarding Finances underpins the other four priorities and acts as an enabler for sustainable and deliverable projects and services.

3. Operating Principles

3.1 The Borough Partnership have outlined a number of operating principles which will ensure that services are delivered in the most effective way:

- Being an outward-looking Council
- Valuing staff
- Being a learning Council
- Digital First

3.2 Alongside these operating principles, an approach to managing finances to help reduce the budget deficit in a responsible way has been developed:

- User pays
- Enabling
- Carbon Reduction
- Preventing future costs
- Delivering (good) growth
- Being opportunistic

3.3 There is more detail in the Plan at Appendix A around to explain these operating principles more fully.

4. Priority Actions

4.1 The last section of the Plan sets out the priority actions that are and will be taken to achieve the political priorities of Focus on Five. These actions are listed under the political priority they meet, and as such each political priority may include responsibilities for more than one Cabinet Member.

- 4.2 Some actions have already been completed by the Borough Partnership, such as the in-year Budget Review, which reduced the Council's in-year 2022-23 budget deficit and reduced the magnitude of the ongoing deficit, a Cost of Living Summit, which brought together a range of local groups to assess how the Council and partner organisations can support those struggling as a result of increased utility and other costs, the Big Green Week which sought to raise awareness of the Council's declared climate emergency and practical ways in which residents can make a difference and a series of Cabinet Roadshows which took Cabinet meetings to a variety of locations across the Borough with an opportunity for local residents to ask questions and engage.

5. Preferred Option and Reason

Agree the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan and refer to Full Council

- 5.1 The preferred option is for Cabinet to agree the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan and refer the document to Full Council for approval as a new corporate strategy document.
- 5.2 Agreeing a Plan that sets out the key political priorities and direction of travel for the Council ensures that staff can plan services and budgets in an effective way which supports the political priorities of the Council and delivers on the key actions that Councillors believe will improve the lives and wellbeing of the residents of the Borough.

Not Agree the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan

- 5.3 The Borough Partnership does not have to agree a strategic Plan and could decide to run Council services without setting political priorities or a direction of travel. However, this would risk services or projects being delivered in a way that does not meet political expectations or deliver on any outcomes that will improve the lives of residents in the Borough. The Council is also a Best Value authority and must always consider how its actions and projects deliver the best possible value for the taxpayer. Without an agreed Plan and approach to delivery, there is a risk that Best Value will not be achieved.

6. Consultation on Options

- 6.1 The Tunbridge Wells Borough Plan has been informed by a range of consultation activity including online surveys and engagement at 'Cabinet Roadshow' events. Whilst not bespoke to the Plan itself, this has enabled the Cabinet to create a direction of travel within this Plan that can be the focus of further engagement going forwards.

Recommendation from Cabinet Advisory Board

- 6.2 The Cabinet Advisory Boards were consulted on 23-25 January 2023 – The Plan needed to be reviewed, with consideration given to the comments raised at all three of the Cabinet Advisory Boards. An updated Plan would then be presented to Cabinet and on to Full Council for approval.

7. Implementation

- 7.1 Following a positive decision at Full Council, the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan will provide the template for delivery of further engagement and actions that will achieve the political priorities of the Borough Partnership.
- 7.2 The Tunbridge Wells Borough Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis through the Cabinet Advisory Board and Cabinet and will be amended and added to as appropriate to reflect changing circumstances. Following business case and budget approvals, projects that result from the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan will be monitored through the Council's Project Management Office, and a quarterly update provided on the RAG status of each project through the quarterly performance summary.

8. Appendices and Background Documents

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan

9. Cross Cutting Issues

A. Legal (including the Human Rights Act)

Each local authority has a statutory duty 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". The Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan demonstrates compliance with that duty.

There are no consequences arising from the recommendation that adversely affect or interfere with individuals' rights and freedoms as set out in the Human Rights Act 1998.

Claudette Valmond, Head of Legal Partnership, 16 November 2022

B. Finance and Other Resources

The Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan is a new strategy document that is not currently accommodated within the budget or the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Once the priorities and direction of travel are set, the Council can then develop business cases for any actions of projects that aim to deliver on the priorities, and if these are agreed, the budget and MTFS will be amended accordingly.

Any new projects that may be proposed as part of a public consultation, or through further consideration of the Plan would need to be considered as part of a robust business case for the financial viability and affordability to the Council.

Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development, Section 151 Officer, 16 November 2022

C. Staffing

This report outlines the strategic work to be undertaken over the medium term, and as such provides information on some of our future staffing requirements.

The HR Strategy, and other HR processes and procedures will take into account the requirements within the Plan to assess the level of need for skills and take account of any other HR and staffing issues that need to be addressed.

Nicky Carter, Head of HR, Communities and Customer Contact, 16 November 2022

D. Risk Management

Risks associated with Council services are contained in separate risk registers, and managed through the Council's strategic risk management procedures, and in accordance with its risk management strategy.

Any new projects that are approved through the Council's decision-making processes, will need to show comprehensive business case and project planning, which will include identification of risks.

Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance, 16 November 2022

E. Environment (inc. Biodiversity) and Sustainability

Carbon reduction is a key political priority within the Plan, and as such there is the potential for the actions within the Plan to make a positive impact on the environment, biodiversity and sustainability.

Alongside this, a Climate Emergency Impact Assessment must be undertaken at the start of any new project as part of project planning to ensure decision-makers are fully aware of the environmental impacts of the proposed decision.

Gary Stevenson, Head of Housing, Health and Environment, 16 November 2022

F. Community Safety

Whilst there are no direct impacts on community safety as part of the decisions in this report, it is clear that the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan provides the Council with an opportunity to positively impact on the areas of community safety, crime and disorder. As individual decisions and projects are brought forwards, relevant actions should show how they positively or negatively affect community safety through the project planning and decision-making process.

Section 17, Crime and Disorder Act 1998

17(1) Without prejudice to any other obligation imposed on it, it shall be the duty of each authority to which this section applies to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area.

Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance, 16 November 2022

G. Equalities

There are no impacts identified on any protected characteristics as part of this report. The Council and decision-makers will need to consider any relevant impacts as part of its project planning processes, as and when new projects and decisions are considered through the Plan.

Section 149, Equality Act 2010

149(1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance, 16 November 2022

H. Data Protection

There are no impacts on data protection considerations as a result of the decisions within this report.

Article 5, General Data Protection Regulation 2016

1. Personal data shall be:

(a) processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject;

(b) collected for specific, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes;

(c) adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes for which they are processed;

(d) accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date;

(e) kept in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the personal data are processed;

(f) processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures.

I. Health and Safety

There are no health and safety considerations as a result of the decisions within this report.

Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance, 16 November 2022

J. Health and Wellbeing

Whilst there are no direct impacts on health and wellbeing as part of the decisions in this report, it is clear that the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan provides the Council with an opportunity to positively impact on the areas of health and wellbeing listed below. As individual decisions and projects are brought forwards, relevant actions should show how they positively or negatively affect the health and wellbeing of residents in the Borough through the project planning and decision-making process.

- 1. Areas of deprivation: Will the proposal have an impact (positive or negative) on those living in areas of deprivation within the borough (40% most deprived in the country). These are Sherwood, Southborough and High Brooms, Broadwater and Rusthall.*
- 2. Healthier lifestyle opportunities: Will residents be more or less able to make healthier lifestyle choices such as physical activity (e.g. active travel, access to green spaces or access to leisure facilities), healthy eating (e.g. proximity or access to take away shops, allotments, food stores) and being smokefree*
- 3. Social and Community networks: Will the proposal make it easier for people to interact with one another e.g. encouraging community engagement*
- 4. Living and Working Conditions: does the proposal improve work or home environments, increase job, education or training opportunities, improve access to health services or housing*
- 5. General Socioeconomic, cultural and environmental conditions: Are there any other factors that may impact the above*

Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance, 16 November 2022