



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL



Cabinet

18 January 2024

Report of Councillor Richard Cleaver,
The Leader of the Council and
Councillor Philip Knowles, Cabinet
Member for Corporate Governance and
Licensing

Corporate Plan 2024-27

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To seek Cabinet support of the draft Corporate Plan for the period 2024 to 2027 and to recommend to Council its approval and adoption from the 1st April 2024.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. **Recommends the new Corporate Plan 2024-27 to Council for approval and adoption from 1st April 2024.**
2. **Delegates the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing to make any minor amendments to the design of the Corporate Plan 2024-27 document prior to final Council approval.**

Decision Information	
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes
Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	High performing Council
Which wards are impacted?	All

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance

- 1.1 The Corporate Plan sets out the strategic framework which the medium-term financial plan will directly support. The annual budget setting process will underpin the ambitions set out in the Plan within the resources available. The approval of the Plan will enable the Council to retain its focus on agreed actions, ensure that there is a clear alignment between the Corporate Plan and the Medium-term Financial Plan.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and S151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 The Corporate Plan is one of the five plans and strategies that only Full Council can adopt – a final decision on the adoption of the Council's Corporate Plan is scheduled to take place at Full Council on 25 January 2024. The Council's Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Protocol outlines that the Leader of the Council will attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees at least every six months to provide an update on delivery against the objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan.
- 1.3 Although not a legal requirement it is best practice for Councils to have a Corporate Plan to show its ambitions and priorities as an organisation.

- 1.4 The Corporate Plan has had engagement with stakeholders and been shaped with the outcomes of consultation.
- 1.5 In terms of governance, the performance and monitoring of the Corporate Plan is fundamental to show transparency and accountability as an organisation.

Completed by: James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Diversity and Inclusion - Yes

- 1.6 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed as part of the formation of the Corporate Plan.

Completed by: Carol Drury, Community Engagement Manager

Climate Change

- 1.7 The Corporate Plan has a priority around sustainability. The Council has an approved Climate Strategy and meeting the actions in the strategy will be fundamental to achieving zero carbon.

Completed by: Serena Brown, Sustainability and Climate Change Officer

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 The Corporate Plan (the Plan) sets out the strategic vision and key priorities of the Council. The Plan underpins the delivery of all of the Council's strategic activity and provides the performance framework for managing the delivery of the actions and priorities in the Plan. It is good practice for a public sector organisation seeking to deliver a wide set of aims and objectives to produce a Corporate Plan and regularly review the activity and achievements against it.
- 2.2 The outgoing Corporate Plan (2020-23) was adopted by Council on the 1 October 2020. That planning cycle has reached its end; thus, the adoption of a new Plan is necessary to set the Council's strategic priorities and framework for the next four years (2024-27).

Development

- 2.3 An evidence-based approach has been undertaken in developing the Plan. On 11 September 2023, Cabinet approved the State of the District (SOTD) 2023. This document, the first of its type for the Council, provided a comprehensive and data driven account of the society and economic performance of South Kesteven. The SOTD further identified four long term strategic challenges for the district (discussed further in paragraph 3.13).

- 2.4 The SOTD was accompanied by a suite of Strategic Socio-Economic Indicators (SSEIs). These indicators encompass demographics, health & wellbeing, crime, the environment, housing, economics and corporate financial performance. Each SSEI is benchmarked against all other English district councils, enabling the South Kesteven's relative performance to be understood. The SSEI suite currently stands at 139 indicators and is kept under constant revision. The SSEI data tables are available in the background papers.
- 2.5 The SSEIs and the SOTD were analysed to develop an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) for the District (available in the background papers). The SWOT was then evaluated to produce draft Priorities, Ambitions and 2023 Outcomes. The three overarching principles that emerged from early member engagement informed the developing plan and were weaved throughout the document:
- Listening and being responsive to the needs of all our communities.
 - Building public trust and confidence by promoting a culture of openness, transparency, and accountability.
 - Providing value-for-money for our residents and businesses through responsible and prudent use of our resources.
- 2.6 The developing Plan was refined through three workshops, which all Members were invited to attend, in early October 2023. The SWOT analysis was presented for the Members to input on to the developing Vision, Mission Statement, Priorities and Ambitions of the Plan. Feedback from the Members confirmed the Priorities and informed further development of the Ambitions.
- 2.7 An all-Member consultation was undertaken on the proposed Vision, Mission Statement, Priorities, Ambitions and 2034 Outcomes from 10-17th November 2023 to offer a further opportunity for input into the key elements of the emerging Plan. The Priorities were supported by 84% of respondents (averaged across the five priorities) and the Ambitions by 90.67%. The consultation outcome is detailed in paragraph 6.1.
- 2.8 A four-week Public Consultation subsequently followed on the proposed Vision, Mission Statement, Priorities, Ambitions and 2034 Outcomes from 22 November to 19 December 2023. The consultation received the second highest response of any consultation undertaken in the last eighteen months. The Priorities were supported by 80.86% of respondents (averaged across the five priorities) and the Ambitions by 86.41%. The consultation outcome is detailed in paragraph 6.2-3. The consultation report is available in Appendix 2.
- 2.9 Meetings were held with Corporate Management Team, Assistant Directors, Service Managers and other key Officers over the course of December 2023 to develop the Plan's Actions. These are specific pieces of work the Council will undertake over the next four years to work towards achieving the Priorities and Ambitions of the Plan.

The Golden Thread

- 2.10 A 'golden thread' approach is embedded in the Plan. This is the link that connects all work, at all levels of the organisation, directly to the overarching vision, priorities and ambitions of the Plan. To support this the following will be developed:
- Service Plans – setting out how each service will contribute to the delivery of Plan's vision and priorities. These will also include KPIs and success criteria and be monitored by Senior Officers and Cabinet Members.
 - Individual Performance Appraisals – setting out how each individual contributes to the achievement of SKDC's vision and priorities. These will be monitored by Heads of Service.

Performance Management

- 2.11 There are two suites of performance indicators to support the Corporate Plan.
- 2.12 The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will monitor the delivery of the Corporate Plan Actions and the overall performance of the Council. Each KPI is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant & Timely) and agreed via the Overview & Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) to which mid-year and end of year reports will be presented. The selected metrics will be wholly within the Council's control and will offer accountability and stimulate continuous improvement. The suite will be reviewed annually. Draft KPIs are in the process of development with the relevant Officers. This will be presented to the respective OSCs for consideration and approval. The new KPI suite will be reported on from 1 April 2024.
- 2.13 The Strategic Socio-Economic Indicators (SSEIs) will monitor the progress towards the fulfilment of the Council's Vision, 2034 Outcomes, and the overall performance of the district. Each SSEI is benchmarkable against other local authorities, aligned to the Office for Local Government (OFLOG) suite, and will be reported in the annual State of the District (SOTD). The Council has limited influence over the SSEIs. Reporting will evidence whether the district is on the right trajectory and provide insight into the Council's operating environment, enable the identification of challenges and shape the service response.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 The Corporate Plan's structure consists of seven key elements: the Vision, Mission Statement, Priorities, Ambitions, Actions, 2034 Outcomes and Foundations. A summary of the structure is available in the background papers. This section will detail each in turn.

The Vision

- 3.2 The Vision is an articulation of what the Council believes our district should be ultimately. It is what the Council is working towards. The Plan's Vision is: 'A

thriving district in which to live, work and visit'. This is a refinement on the Vision of the outgoing Plan: 'Be the best district in which to live, work and visit'.

- 3.3 The new Vision was developed collectively with Elected Members. It was recognised that a powerful vision should be bold and aspirational, succinctly capturing the ideal of a flourishing district. A vision should also be a tangible ideal, to which measurable progress can be made, whilst galvanising further action.

Mission Statement

- 3.4 The Mission Statement is a definition of the Council's business and purpose. It articulates who we aspire to be as an organisation and our approach to service delivery. This is a new element to the Corporate Plan. It is: 'South Kesteven aims to be a modern and forward-looking Council that delivers effective, efficient and equitable public services to enhance the well-being of our residents, enable prosperity, protect the environment and empower communities for a sustainable future'.
- 3.5 This Mission Statement was unanimously supported by the People Panel on 11 December 2023.

Priorities

- 3.6 The Priorities are the core of the Plan. There are five, each representing a key sphere of activity for the Council. Each Priority is accompanied by a Mission, a succinct statement that encapsulates the Priority and defines its scope. The five Priorities are:
- Priority 1 - Connecting Communities: To enhance the strength, wellbeing, security and capacity of all our communities for a thriving and cohesive society that all our residents are proud to belong to.
 - Priority 2 - Sustainable South Kesteven: To meet the challenge of climate change and ensure a clean, green and healthy natural and built environment for present and future generations.
 - Priority 3 - Enabling Economic Opportunity: To enable and support a dynamic, resilient and growing local economy, which benefits all our communities.
 - Priority 4 - Housing: To ensure that all residents can access housing which is safe, good quality, sustainable and suitable for their needs and future generations.
 - Priority 5 - Effective Council: To deliver trusted, high quality and value-for-money services that fulfil the needs and expectations of all our residents.
- 3.7 The priorities are numbered for ease of reference. The ordering does not denote an internal hierarchy of importance. Successful delivery of all five Priorities is essential to the achieving the Vision of the Plan.

Ambitions

- 3.8 Each Priority contains a series of Ambitions. The Ambitions are broad in scope to set the agenda for this planning cycle. Each Ambition will stimulate a range of programmes and projects. For example, the forthcoming Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan has been developed as the service response to the Ambitions of the Priority: Enabling Economic Opportunity.
- 3.9 There has been a multiplication of the number of Ambitions. The outgoing Plan had fifteen. The new Plan has twenty-eight. This multiplication does not dilute our strategic focus, rather the Ambitions reflect activity the Council is already undertaking, capturing the full scope of the Council's activities. The District SWOT & Ambitions Development Summary (available in the background papers) details the rationale, SWOT linkages and where appropriate alignment to the DLUHC Draft Best Value Guidance for each Ambition.

Actions

- 3.10 The Actions detail specific pieces of work the Council will be undertaking over this Corporate Plan cycle. Progress on Actions will be monitored through the suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which will be reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) and Cabinet, as detailed in paragraph 2.12.

2034 Outcomes

- 3.11 Each Priority contains a series of 2034 Outcomes. The Plan is for the medium term. The Outcomes introduce an element of longer-term strategic planning. Each Outcome articulates an element of what the successful delivery of our Vision for South Kesteven would look like. 2034 has been selected as a decade on from the adoption of this Plan.
- 3.12 The 2034 Outcomes are founded upon a mission-based approach to public policy. This approach holds that the 21st century is being defined by long term strategic challenges that have no simple solutions and will require transformation and innovation to solve. Examples include climate change, economic growth and ageing societies. To tackle the challenges, they are broken down into pragmatic steps termed 'missions'. Missions are concrete, but bold and aspirational targets that set the direction for a solution. The exact solution is not known in advance. The missions aim to stimulate the development of a range of different solutions, projects and workstreams to meet the strategic challenge.
- 3.13 The State of the District 2023 (SOTD) identified four key long term strategic challenges for South Kesteven:
- A Changing Society - The population of the district is an ageing one, growth is driven by internal migration.
 - Opportunity for all – The district is home to some of the least deprived areas in the country, but also has some persistent pockets of severe deprivation.
 - Tackling the Climate Emergency - Lead and champion the local response to climate change with the ambition of a net zero district by 2041.

- Sustainable and Inclusive Growth - The district's economic performance in terms of productivity, earnings and wage growth has been slow over the past decade.
- 3.14 The Plan recognises that the Council cannot solve these challenges or deliver our Vision for the District alone. The Outcomes are intended to provide long term focal points to bring together residents, businesses, skills providers, partners and community groups to develop and deliver action– united by the common goal of a thriving South Kesteven. The course is ambitious and challenging, it is important to be realistic and recognise that Council's role may primarily be convening and influencing. Nevertheless, this provides a positive strategic framework for the Council to face to the future, rather than being purely reactive to events.
- 3.15 Progress towards the 2034 Outcomes and the wider performance of the District will be monitored by the suite of Strategic Socio-Economic Indicators (SSEIs) as detailed in paragraph 2.13.
- 3.16 'Exemplary compared to peer authorities' has been selected the key metric for service performance. This has been chosen to introduce a qualitative assessment of the experiences of officers and residents, rather than a strictly quantitative 'high quality' or 'exceptional value'. Further the local government sector of 2034 will undoubtedly face unique pressures and circumstances currently unknown to the officers of 2024. This metric allows room to take into account the future Council response to its circumstances.

The Foundations

- 3.17 The Plan is underpinned by three elements that are collectively called the Foundations. Each is integral to the success of the Plan. These are:
 - Financial Sustainability – how the Plan will be funded. A commitment to and the practice of sound and prudent financial management is crucial, especially in the current challenging operating environment.
 - Performance Management – how delivery will be monitored, improvements driven, and open and transparent accountability upheld. Detailed in paragraphs 2.11-3.
 - Corporate Values and Equalities – the ethos in which the Plan will be delivered. These values are the Council's 'true north' that underpin the organisational culture and expected colleague behaviours.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to have a Corporate Plan. This is not a prudent or viable approach. The absence of a Corporate Plan would result in a lack of strategic direction and at best an ad hoc and disjointed focus. Effective performance management and delivery of the Best Value Duty would be compromised.

- 4.2 The Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) published draft statutory guidance on compliance with the Best Value Duty for local authorities in July 2023. 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”*.
- 4.3 The guidance provides greater clarity to local government on how to fulfil the Best Value Duty by describing what constitutes best value, the standards expected by the department and the models of intervention at the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities’ disposal in the event of failure to uphold these standards. DLUHC is currently analysing consultation responses to the draft guidance. The final document is expected in 2024.
- 4.4 The draft guidance is clear that possession of a Corporate Plan is a marker of well-functioning local authority under the Best Value theme of Leadership. The Corporate Plan is required to be *“evidence based, current, realistic and enables the whole organisation’s performance to be measured and held to account. Strategic priorities are aligned with the authority’s financial strategy and delivery arrangements, and respond appropriately to local need, including the plans of partners and stakeholders.”*
- 4.5 It is considered an indicator of potential failure if the *“Corporate plan is out of date, unrealistic and unaffordable and/or has too many priorities”* or is absent entirely.

5. Reasons for the Recommendation

- 5.1 The Corporate Plan will give a strategic framework for operational and medium-term financial planning and provide a clear direction for the Council. This provides a clear view of what the Council is delivering for the public, residents, businesses, key stakeholders and for our own staff.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 An all-Member consultation was undertaken on the proposed Vision, Mission Statement, Priorities, Ambitions and 2034 Outcomes from 10-17th November 2023 to offer a further opportunity for input into the key elements of the emerging Plan. The Priorities were supported by 84% of respondents (averaged across the five priorities) and the Ambitions by 90.67%.
- 6.2 A four-week Public Consultation subsequently followed on the proposed Vision, Mission Statement, Priorities, Ambitions and 2034 Outcomes from 22 November to 19 December 2023. The consultation received 587 responses: the second highest response of any consultation undertaken in the last eighteen months. The Priorities were supported by 80.86% of respondents (averaged across the

five priorities) and the Ambitions by 86.41%. The consultation report is available in Appendix 2.

- 6.3 Support for the Priorities and Ambitions in the abstract was complicated by mixed public commentary. Respondents were concerned about the practical viability of the proposals, the capacity of the Council to deliver and perceived favouritism of certain geographies over others. The consultation was clear that the Plan will require concrete action plans for delivery, robust, transparent and accountable performance management to ensure public confidence. These elements are in place. The Consultation Response Action Plan is available in Appendix 2.
- 6.4 The Corporate Plan proposals were presented to Youth Council on 14 November 2023. The Youth councillors were invited to participate in the public consultation. The response from the Youth representatives was supportive of the Corporate Plan.
- 6.5 The proposed Vision, Mission Statement, Priorities and Ambitions were presented to and discussed by People Panel on 11 December 2023 to obtain the views of SKDC staff. All proposals were universally supported by the Panel.

7. Background Papers

- Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities: Draft Best Value Duty Guidance, [Best value standards and intervention draft guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1154442/best-value-standards-and-intervention-draft-guidance.pdf)
 - Corporate Plan 2024-27 Public Consultation 2023 Report
 - Strategic Socio-Economic Indicators (SSEI) Databases
 - State of the District 2023
 - Corporate Plan 2024-27 Structure Summary
 - District SWOT and Ambitions Development Summary
- Available at <https://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13922>

8. Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Corporate Plan 2024-27
- Appendix 2 – Corporate Plan 2024-27 Public Consultation 2023 Report
- Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment