

# Forest Heath District Council

(This report is a key decision and has been subject to appropriate notice of publication under the Council's access to information rules)

## Report of the Leader of the Council

**CABINET**

**29 MAY 2012**

**CAB12/001**

## **STRATEGIC PLAN 2012 – 2016** (Forward Plan Reference - May12/01)

### **Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)**

In October 2011 the Council agreed a set of draft strategic priorities and key objectives to form the basis of a new Strategic Plan for 2012-16. The priorities and objectives were the subject of public consultation to help inform the development of a delivery plan which sets-out the timescales, commitments and resources required in order to achieve the priority outcomes.

This report provides a summary of the consultation responses and key actions in the delivery plan including the funding required to support the priority areas and objectives.

### **Recommendation**

Cabinet are asked to note the progress since the Council report in 2011 and to endorse and recommend to Council the 2012-16 priorities, key objectives and fully funded delivery plan as the Council's Strategic Plan for the next four years.

### **Contact Details**

Name:

Title:

Telephone:

E mail:

### **Portfolio Holder**

Cllr James Waters

Leader of the Council

01638 719324

[James.waters@forest-heath.gov.uk](mailto:James.waters@forest-heath.gov.uk)

### **Lead Officer**

Ian Gallin

Chief Executive

01638 719324

[ian.gallin@forest-heath.gov.uk](mailto:ian.gallin@forest-heath.gov.uk)

## How will the recommendations help us meet our strategic priorities?

1. The recommendations seek to establish a new set of strategic priorities for the Council. The detailed action plans are directly linked to achieving the outcomes that are sought against each of the priority and objective areas which were agreed by Council for 2012-16.

## Wards affected

2. All wards will be affected as the Strategic Plan 2012-16 includes the detailed action plans that will drive and maintain the Council's service delivery and resource focus for the next four years.

## Key issues

### Background

3. On 13 April 2011, Council approved a framework for the development and production of a new Strategic Plan for the period 2012-16. A Strategic Planning Group (SPG) comprising Cllrs Waters, Roman, Edwards, Burt and McGhee, supported by the Council's Core Management, was formed. Since mid-July 2011 the SPG met 9 times and considered a range of issues relating to the district and principally set out in a 'State of the District' report (June 2011).
4. The SPG agreed on a set of four key priorities to form the basis of a new Strategic Plan for the next four years:
  1. **A STRONGER ECONOMY WHICH IS CAPABLE OF GROWING:** Forest Heath needs a strong local economy, which is accessible to all and supported by effective education and training.
  2. **MEETING THE DISTRICT'S HOUSING NEED:** Forest Heath's housing needs are increasing: the housing register is growing steadily and the number of homeless households is also on the increase. Our growing population will need more homes by 2031.
  3. **STRONGER, MORE ACTIVE COMMUNITIES:** The active involvement of communities is essential for the future development and improvement in the district. We want to do more to support community and voluntary activity across the district and help communities that want to use the new powers in the Localism Act to strengthen and grow their community.
  4. **BEING AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE COUNCIL:** We have always been a low spending, low council tax authority. We have managed our finances prudently and delivered high quality services and excellent value for money for our residents. We are determined to maintain these standards.
5. The SPG held the view that although these were the key areas where the Council should focus its efforts and resources; it did not mean that it would stop delivering other core services. These would continue to be delivered to the best possible standard within the constraints of the resources available.

6. The priority areas were supported by a series of objectives and the SPG instructed CMT to work up a series of detailed action plans designed to achieve the outcomes that would meet these objectives.
7. On 19 October 2011, Council agreed the draft strategic priorities for a new Strategic Plan (as above) and that they should form the basis of public consultation.

### **Consultation**

8. Public consultation took place from 20 October to 9 December 2011 and included 3 business breakfast events, a Town/Parish Forum, letters to key partners and stakeholders and a questionnaire available through the Council's website and customer access points.
9. Over 90 businesses were involved in the business breakfasts that focused particularly on the Economic Growth priority. In terms of individual written responses, 4 were received from businesses; one from SCC; 6 from Parish/Town Councils; and 21 from residents.

### **Key issues raised during Strategic Plan consultation**

10. Responses were largely supportive of what the Council was proposing with between 93% and 71% of respondents in favour of the individual priority areas. There were very few direct objections to what was proposed with most of what was highlighted going against the Council's statutory responsibilities. For example, preventing new housing development, not supporting the Localism Act or reducing the amount of community engagement.
11. There were requests for greater emphasis on cross-cutting themes and particularly those of sustainable development and the overall need to protect the rural environment whilst promoting economic growth. There was also an expectation that the Council would work in partnership with other bodies, for example in crime prevention, tackling antisocial behaviour and improving rural transport.
12. This detail had not been included in the high level priorities and objectives as the SPG considered sustainable development and environmental protection as being themes which cut across everything the Council does. Indeed any vision going forward would continue to embrace that of being a "clean, green, safe and prosperous" Forest Heath. The Council's wider responsibilities around, for example, open spaces, support for disabled people, youth inclusion or infrastructure improvement remain and work continues in these areas.
13. There were strong links between the key issues highlighted in the consultation, and particularly those from business, with the actions planned to support the priority areas. For example, help and support with marketing the district, recognising the need for the Council to play an important part in lobbying for an A11/A14 link road, improving broadband and incentivising business development. Businesses in all three towns were also keen to develop their own business / retail partnerships with support from the Council and this is also reflected in the action plans.

14. Some consultees called for the inclusion of strategic objectives on issues not included in the draft plan such as promoting markets; infrastructure improvement in Red Lodge; youth inclusion and meeting the needs of disabled people. While these are not specific priority areas, they are all part of the Council's wider business of supporting residents in line with its statutory duties.
15. In other cases, consultees identified areas for inclusion in the strategic priorities where there are no current plans to take action. These included additional car parking in Brandon, Mildenhall and Red Lodge and the removal of parking charges.
16. SPG considered the consultation feedback and this was also fed into the officer working groups as detailed action plans were drawn up.

### **Action planning**

17. Detailed action plans to meet the objectives under each of the four priority areas were compiled by officer working groups led by senior management. The action plans were first considered by SPG in January 2012 with each individual action identifying the resources required to deliver them and also where these were additional to current budgets. Further SPG meetings were used to consider the actions, including the affordability of the plan which is explained in more detail below. A summary of Strategic Plan priority areas, objectives and actions is set out in Appendix 1.

### **Financing the Strategic Plan**

18. The Council's budget, approved in March 2012, made revenue provision for the New Homes Bonus (NHB) introduced from 2011/12. This additional grant, linked to Council Tax on new properties built in the district, is non-ring fenced, which means it can be spent on any council service. The unallocated balances of the 2011/12 and 2012/13 NHB were earmarked to support priority actions arising from the strategic plan. Some £1.594m is available for this purpose. The monies will be applied over the full term of the Strategic Plan (i.e. 2012 to 2016).
19. Capital provision of £1.9m from usable capital receipt balances is similarly allocated to support the Strategic Plan. Of this, £1.5m is for one specific project which requires external match funding and will be considered on an 'invest to save' basis thus eliminating any additional negative revenue implications.
20. Currently, the Strategic Plan deliverables, as highlighted at Appendix 1, are affordable without exceeding the available funding referred to above.
21. Further allocations of New Homes Bonus monies will be made by Government to local authorities in subsequent years. Currently, the Council has made no assumptions about the extent of such funding or its use, due to uncertainty about the wider implications of the Local Government Resource Review (particularly the localisation of business rates / cessation of Revenue Support Grant and the degree of "safety net" protection that councils may receive). Cabinet will be updated as more information becomes available but it is likely to be December 2012 before a clear position is known.

### **Other options considered**

22. The SPG considered a range of information in determining where the Council's plans for the next four years should focus. Detailed delivery plans were shaped with options for achieving the desired outcomes were evaluated as part of the allocation of resources required. In the course of this process some actions were removed and others added or re-cast.

### **Community impact**

23. Particular aspects of the impact on the community have been considered as part of the identification of the high-level priorities (e.g. Community Development) and in identifying specific actions such as that required to respond to inequalities in Brandon. The community impact of individual actions will need to be actively considered when the relevant services organise and plan implementation.

### **What consultation has been undertaken and what were the outcomes?**

24. See above.

### **Financial and resource implications**

25. See above.

### **Risk management implications**

26. The assessment of risk in delivering the Strategic Plan will need to be considered by the Council's Risk Management Group once adopted by Council. Where risk(s) are identified and action is required to treat any or all of them, these will form part of the Council's Strategic Risk Register which is reported to the Performance and Audit Committee. Individual service level risks associated with specific actions are identified as a result of service planning and recorded at the service risk register level.

### **Legal/Policy implications**

27. The Council has the power to adopt a Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan has a direct influence on the Council's Policy Framework and may require individual strategy and policies to be reviewed. In recognition of this, the current development the Council's new Housing Strategy has been carried out alongside the development of the Strategic Plan and some of the specific outcomes and actions therein form part of the Housing Strategy's own delivery plans.

### **Documents attached**

Appendix 1: Strategic Plan 2012-16 – Objective and Actions

### **Background papers**

State of the District: A Statistical Profile of the District – June 2011