

Forest Heath District Council

(This report is not a key decision. This report has been subject to appropriate notice of publication under the Council's Access to Information Rules)

Report of the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Resources, Governance and Performance

CABINET

18 FEBRUARY 2014

CAB14/132

DRAFT WEST SUFFOLK STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2016 (Decisions Plan Reference: FEB14/04)

1. Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)

- 1.1 A draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan has been prepared, to cover the period 2014-16.
- 1.2 The strategic plan is a revision of the previous Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Council plans, taking account of the changed economic climate, sharing of services and other developments since 2012. The strategic plan sets out the vision and priorities for Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils, as well as the high level projects and actions that will support the delivery of these priorities.
- 1.3 This report summarises the progress so far in developing the document, including the input from the informal joint Overview and Scrutiny committee meetings.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 **Cabinet is invited to consider the points raised during the informal joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussion (in paragraphs 4.5 and 4.7) and recommend the draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014-2016 to Council.**

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3. How will the recommendations help us meet our strategic priorities?

- 3.1 Adopting a new West Suffolk Strategic plan for 2014-16 will align and update the two councils' existing strategic priorities for 2012-16.

4. Key issues

Strategic Plan

- 4.1 Since the spring of 2013, work has been underway on the development of a revised Strategic Plan for West Suffolk for 2014-16. The drivers for this work have been the need to review the existing priorities for 2012-16 in light of a more constrained financial position; and to take the opportunity to align the plans for both councils where appropriate.
- 4.2 The work has involved the development of a draft **vision** and **priorities**, based on a review of the two council's existing priorities, and set against a background of evidence about the two council areas and the issues they are facing. The three priorities that emerged from this work were around **economic development; resilient families and communities;** and **housing**. A fourth priority around efficient and effective councils was discussed, but was considered to be implicit in everything the councils did. It was agreed that this should instead be covered through specific projects and actions and through the wider text in the strategic plan document about the councils' behaviours.
- 4.3 A set of potential **projects and actions** was then identified, drawing on existing plans, as well as the views of individual Ward members that emerged through discussions that took place in political groupings in the summer. These were then refined through a series of meetings between pairs of portfolio holders from the two councils with their respective heads of service. A particular focus of these portfolio holder meetings was on identifying any projects and actions that were now completed, or no longer needed, as well as those that could generate savings or income for the councils. Where any new projects or actions were identified, these were discussed and challenged in order to ensure they were, or could be, funded.
- 4.4 In January and February 2014, the draft document was then considered by St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath's **Overview and Scrutiny Committees**, who met together for two informal joint sessions. At their first meeting on 22 January 2014, the Committees made a number of helpful suggestions about the documents, which resulted in a revised version of the document. These comments were primarily around how the priorities had been selected; the approach to families and communities in priority 2; and the relationship between the council's "day to day" work and the priorities in the document. The drafting changes to address these concerns have been incorporated in the draft at Appendix A.
- 4.5 At their second meeting on 5 February 2014, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees made further comments as follows:
- i) the wording of the third priority, relating to housing, was discussed. On the one hand, some felt that the priority needed to be more specific and should be reworded as "suitable homes that meet the needs of our communities". On the other hand, others felt that the breadth of the

current drafting, "Homes for our communities", was helpful and that the wording should remain as it was; and

- ii) on p11 of the draft document, it was suggested that the wording "maintain existing relationships with other parts of the public sector" should be changed to "strengthen existing relationships with other parts of the public sector".

4.6 Two points were also raised which related to wording in the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy, which is considered under a separate agenda item at this Cabinet meeting. These were as follows:

- iii) on p8 of the draft MTFS document, it was suggested that the wording around West Suffolk's ageing population should be amended to demonstrate that while older people may need support, they still make an important contribution to their local community. It was suggested that the final sentence of paragraph 5 should therefore begin with "Some older people...." Rather than "Others...."; and

- iv) the wording in the final paragraph on p8 should be revised to show that West Suffolk's ambition is for our schoolchildren to aim higher than county or national averages in their educational attainment. It is therefore proposed by officers that the final words "to bring it in line with county or national averages" be deleted.

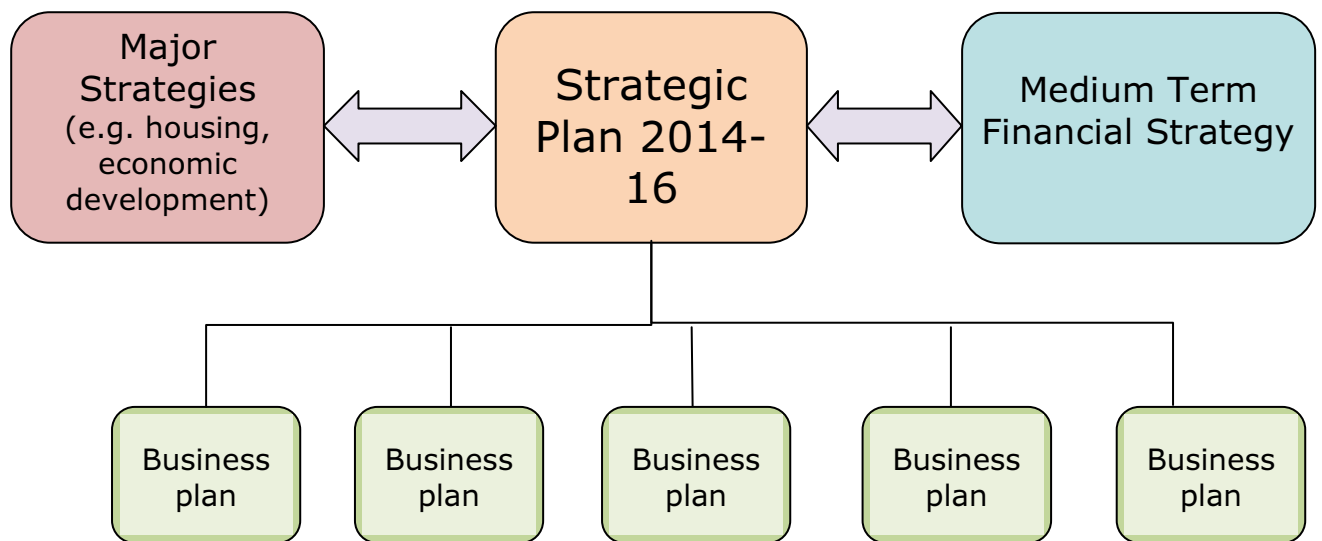
4.7 During the Overview and Scrutiny discussion on 5 February 2014, Councillor Cox, SEBC, also noted his concerns about some aspects of the document. These were raised with officers after the meeting and included the following points:

- v) the wording of point 3 under priority 1 (on p10) appeared to overlook those with more practical or vocational skills. Councillor Cox therefore suggested that the word "right" be added before "educational attainment"; and

- vi) in paragraph 7 of p11, it was suggested that the word "will" should be changed to "may" in the first sentence, in recognition of the fact that some councillors and staff had some of the new skills needed to work in the new ways outlined.

4.8 The result of the work so far outlined above is a draft plan, attached at Appendix A to this report. If agreement is reached to publish a joint Strategic Plan along the lines of this draft, it will be one of the earliest of its kind in England.

4.9 The projects and actions included in the draft document attached at Appendix A are intended to reflect those activities that are over and above business as usual, rather than an ongoing programme. They are also those activities that deliver a priority, or change the financial make up of the Council, and that are achievable in the period to 2016. Other projects and actions will be included in the Councils' business plans as follows:



4.10 The draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan is now being presented to both Councils' Cabinets and then full Councils in February 2014, alongside the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. Subject to agreement being reached, the document would then be typeset and formatted for publication in March, in advance of the new financial year. A communications plan for the final stages of the process is also being finalised to ensure all Members and staff are updated on how the final plan has developed since the original discussions in spring 2013.

5. Other options considered

5.1 The councils could retain their existing strategic and corporate plans for 2012-16 without updating or aligning them. However, this would miss opportunities to reshape the priorities in the light of changes in the councils' funding over the plan period so far.

6. Community impact

6.1 **Crime and disorder impact** *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

6.1.1 Under the proposed second priority of "Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active", the councils would continue to work with partners to improve community safety.

6.2 **Diversity and equality impact** *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 The draft plan includes a number of priorities where a particular emphasis is placed on meeting the needs of different groups.

6.2.2 Where appropriate, individual policies and projects referred to in the Strategic Plan have already undergone, or will undergo, an Equality Impact Assessment.

6.3 **Sustainability impact** *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 The overall set of draft priorities seeks to take account of social and environmental concerns whilst promoting economic development. Where appropriate, individual policies and projects will undergo a Sustainability Impact Assessment.

6.4 **Other impact** *(any other impacts affecting this report)*

6.4.1 N/a.

7. **Consultation** *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

7.1 Major public consultation exercises were carried out by both councils in 2011 on the draft Corporate and Strategic plans for 2012-16 and on the councils' budgets.

7.2 Consultation on the revised set of priorities, projects and actions included all ward members through political group meetings, and some dialogue with staff through staff briefings. The results from the SEBC, FHDC and Suffolk County Council budget consultations were also used to feed into the development of the revised set of priorities, projects and actions, as were the priorities of a wide range of partner organisations and those included in Vision 2031 (with which the draft strategic plan is fully aligned).

7.3 The councils are currently developing plans for a year-round programme of consultation events during 2014 that will cover some of the strategic issues in the draft plan, and will allow opportunity for more focused consultation on specific projects and actions to supplement the usual single-issue consultation exercises run by services.

8. **Financial and resource implications** *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 The revised Strategic Plan for 2014-16 will shape the allocations made in the Medium Term financial Strategies (MTFS) for this period. As in previous years, the MTFS for 2014-15 and 2015-16 (which is considered as a separate agenda item) will make reasonable assumptions about the likely future financial context for the councils and seek to identify areas where future pressures will be addressed. However, the scale of financial changes that will need to be made to ensure the West Suffolk priorities can be delivered in 2015-16 in particular is more significant compared to previous years.

8.2 Early indications show that although the list of projects and actions in the draft plan have not added to the financial pressures faced by both authorities, they are also insufficient to address the significant budget gap anticipated in 2015-16. For this reason, the interaction between the strategic plan and MTFS will be particularly important in the setting of budgets for 2015-16, as the councils' priorities will be used to inform real choices about the allocation of resources.

9. Risk/opportunity assessment (potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)

Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
	High/Medium/Low		High/Medium/Low
Lack of funding to support full set of projects listed in Appendix A	Medium	Finance team involvement in business planning to fully assess value for money of detailed proposals	Low
Future changes in the wider economic environment affect the delivery of economic development and housing objectives	Medium	Ongoing monitoring of local economic conditions. Wider changes in model of service delivery to allow prioritisation of economic and housing priorities	Low
Unable to meet public's expectations of what the councils will deliver	Medium	Effective communications to educate residents about new ways of working	Low

10. Legal and policy implications

10.1 Councils are not required to have a strategic or corporate plan. If adopted, the new West Suffolk strategic plan would replace the two existing council plans (see links in paragraph 12.1 below)

11. Ward(s) affected

11.1 All

12. Background papers

12.1 If adopted, the West Suffolk Strategic Plan for 2014-16 would replace the following existing council plans:

Forest Heath District Council Strategic Plan:

https://www.forest-heath.gov.uk/downloads/download/385/strategic_plan

St Edmundsbury Borough Council Corporate Plan:

http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/plans_and_policies/upload/CorporatePlan2012-2016.pdf

13. Documents attached

Appendix A: Draft West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014 -2016