

Surrey Heath Borough Council
Council
21 February 2024

Council Strategy 2024 - 2028

Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Shaun Macdonald - Leader
Strategic Director/Head of Service	Damian Roberts, Chief Executive
	Sally Kipping – Head of HR, Performance and Communications
Report Author:	Sarah Bainbridge – Organisational Development Manager
Key Decision:	yes
Wards Affected:	All

Summary and purpose

This report sets out a new draft Council Strategy. The draft Strategy was considered by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 24 January 2024, and comments from the Committee are included within this report. It will also be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 13 February 2024 and amendments proposed at that meeting will be circulated prior to the Council meeting.

Recommendation

The Council is advised to RESOLVE that the new Council Strategy 2024 – 2028, as set out at Annex A, to this report be adopted.

1. Background and Supporting Information

- 1.1 This draft Strategy seeks to ensure that the organisation has a clear direction for the future and is delivering the priorities of the new Council. It is part of the Council's efforts to improve accountability and transparency in meeting the needs and aspirations of local residents and stakeholders.
- 1.2 This draft Strategy draws on the feedback received in previous consultations undertaken by the Council with both residents and stakeholders. A draft of the new Strategy was shared with wider partners at the Surrey Heath Partnership meeting in December 2023 as an update to the previous consultation.
- 1.3 The Council Strategy sits alongside the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to set the overall direction of the Council. It plays a crucial role in focusing the resources of the Council on overarching goals to deliver for local residents.

- 1.4 The draft Strategy recognises the key community leadership role of the Council in helping to address the challenges and concerns impacting on Surrey Heath’s residents and businesses, as well as focusing on the services delivered directly by the Council.
- 1.5 The five priorities identified in the new draft Strategy are:
- Protect our Environment
 - Promote Healthier and More Inclusive Communities
 - Support a Strong Economy and Create More Homes
 - Campaign for Residents
 - Deliver Effective Services with Sustainable Finances
- 1.6 The Strategy is delivered each year through a set of more detailed actions and targets agreed in the Annual Plan. The draft Annual Plan 2024/25 – which is also on the agenda for this meeting for consideration – sets out actions to deliver the first year of the new Strategy. This then cascades to team projects and plans and ultimately through to individual staff appraisals.
- 1.7 Following this meeting, the final Strategy will be presented to Full Council for approval (alongside the Medium Term Financial Strategy) on 21 February 2024.
- 1.8 A draft of the Strategy was considered by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee on 24 January 2024, and their comments are set out below, together with resulting changes made within the revised draft Strategy at Annex A:

Comment or Question from Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee – 24 January	Changes made to Council Strategy at Annex A
Members of the Committee praised the layout and look of the new Strategy, and felt that it was easy to read. The Strategy reflected the priorities of the Council following the 2023 elections, and would be published on the website once agreed.	-
It was queried whether references to social or council housing could be added to the references to affordable housing within the Strategy.	Reference to social housing included on p8. (Council housing not referenced as SHBC is not a housing stock-holder)
It was queried whether ‘Drive to Net Zero’ should be reworded to ‘Drive Towards Net Zero’ to reflect the practical difficulties of achieving the target in full within the timeframe of the Strategy.	Recommend retain ‘to’ to ensure the importance of this target is not lessened.

2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 This draft Strategy seeks to ensure that the Council has a clear published direction for the future which draws on the wider aspirations and priorities of local residents and stakeholders.

3. Contribution to the Council's Five Year Strategy

- 3.1 This draft Council Strategy 2024 - 2028 replaces the previous Five Year Strategy.

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 The Medium Term Finance Strategy is being developed alongside the draft Council Strategy and reflects the priorities within it.
- 4.2 In the preparation of the new Strategy, and the subsequent Annual Plans, the Council will always need to have regard to the funding and resources available and ensure that the aspirations set out reflect this.

5. Section 151 Officer Comments:

- 5.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge in 2023 identified the need to set a balanced budget over the period of the Council Strategy, and reduce the reliance on the use of reserves to set the annual budget.

6. Legal and Governance Issues

- 6.1 The Strategy sets the overarching ambitions for the Council to deliver for residents and the borough. This cascades to an Annual Plan agreed each financial year, aligned with the Council's budget, and on to individual staff appraisal targets.
- 6.2 The Strategy is being agreed by the Full Council in line with Article 4.2 (l) of the Council's Constitution; *"matters which are fundamental to the future strategy or strategies of the Council, affect the whole of the Borough and are matters on which the views expressed, in the opinion of the Chief Executive, should be that of the whole Council."*

7. Monitoring Officer Comments:

- 7.1 No Monitoring Officer comments arising.

8. Other Considerations and Impacts

Environment and Climate Change

- 8.1 A key priority in the draft Strategy is Protecting our Environment and delivering the Council's ambitious for net zero emissions.

Equalities and Human Rights

- 8.2 Promoting Healthier and More Inclusive Communities is a key priority in the draft Strategy, including championing greater equity and inclusion.

Risk Management

- 8.3 Without a coherent Council Strategy in place there is a risk that the Council's work and resources do not achieve the desired outcomes for the Borough, residents and businesses.
- 8.4 The Council Strategy was developed alongside the new Medium Term Financial Strategy to ensure that the priorities and aspirations could be supported through the Council's finances. However, significant changes in the Council's financial position over the next four years could impact on the Council's ability to deliver this strategy.

Community Engagement

- 8.5 The new Strategy reflects the feedback gathered in an extensive consultation in 2021 with local residents, community organisations and stakeholders to listen to their priorities and aspirations for the borough. It was also shared with wider partners at the Surrey Heath Partnership in December 2023.

Annexes

Annex A – Surrey Heath Borough Council Draft Council Strategy 2024 – 2028

Annex B – proposed revisions by the Executive at its meeting on 13 February 2024 (to follow, if relevant).