

Item No	Referred from:	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>6B</b>	Date:	<b>3 SEPTEMBER 2024</b>
	Title of item:	<b>COUNCIL PLAN 2024-2028</b>
To be considered alongside agenda item:		<b>AGENDA ITEM 8</b>

The report considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting held on 3 September 2024 can be viewed here [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 3rd September, 2024, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#).

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:**

- (1) That Cabinet reviews and recommends the approval of the Council Plan to Full Council (Appendix A) with the four new Council Priorities as outlined below:
  - Thriving Communities
  - Accessible Services
  - Responsible Growth
  - Sustainability
- (2) Delegate authority to the Managing Director and Leader of the Council to approve any minor amendments to wording required as a result of the design process.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:** The Council Plan is a key element of the corporate business planning process, as a high level strategic document it sets out the Council's Priorities for the next four years. As an overarching policy framework document, it guides and influences the use of Council resources; providing a focus for activities, plans, and services that the Council provide. The introduction to the plan highlights the link between the Council Plan and the Medium Term Financial Strategy and service delivery plans.

*Audio recording –*

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Leader of the Council, presented the report entitled 'Council Plan 2024-2028' and advised that:

- The Council Plan sets out the vision and priorities of the administration over the next four years, as well as outlining key projects to support these.
- The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) and Medium Term Financial Strategy would align with this Council Plan.
- There was a workshop held in June for members of the administration where aspirations for the next four years were discussed, and previous achievements were considered.
- Following this a smaller working group was established to develop this, which included Officers and members of the administration, which was then followed up with two further administration workshops in July.
- Officers from the Policy and Communications teams had been involved in the development of the Plan.
- The version presented was a plain text version and further graphics and design would be added at a later stage.

- The overarching theme was 'Working with you for a fairer, greener North Herts', with the four priorities being 'Thriving Communities', 'Accessible Services', 'Responsible Growth' and 'Sustainability'.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Matt Barnes

In response to questions, Councillor Daniel Allen advised that:

- These four priorities had been chosen following evaluation of other Council Plans, consideration of national changes and what the Council wanted to offer. These were decided as achievable priorities over the next four years.
- The Council had reopened the Council offices to the public, were available on the phone and Councillors were available in the community to engage with residents without, or with limited, digital access.
- An annual review of the Plan could be brought to the Committee, should that be requested.
- Finance was the biggest issue facing the delivery of the Plan.
- A response on whether there were areas that would be reduced, with the adoption of the new Plan and its priorities, would be provided outside of the meeting.

In response to questions, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader advised that:

- Responses from Round Two of the Community Survey had not been directly considered with the Plan, but the concepts and ideas have been addressed by some policies and actions within it.
- The Plan did not include everything that would be done over the next four years, but the administration wanted to highlight the key areas where priority would be given, with further detail to be provided in service plans.
- Projects to improve provision for young people had been addressed in the Plan.
- The Plan noted that not all residents had digital access and the Policy team would flag any concerns regarding consultations or reviews where inadequate consideration to non-digital methods existed.
- Support for businesses was included within the 'Responsible Growth' priority, which covered both developments, as well as economic growth. This included the Tourism and Town Centre strategies for engagement with business.
- There were many projects which could fall within multiple priority areas and the most suitable had been chosen.
- The Plan could be reviewed, when requested, and the working group could look at the publication and monitoring of the Plan.
- An explanation could be added to provide context to 'net zero'.

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- The CDP sat under the Council Plan and ensured that the key aspects of the Plan were being managed well and reviewed.
- Overview and Scrutiny could review the CDP and make judgements on performance against the Plan.

- It was not always easy to measure performance, but the CDP helped to reflect what was being done to address the areas within the Council Plan.
- Resources would continue to be an issue, not just finance, but staffing, including the retention and recruitment of staff, was important to deliver on many projects going forward.
- The production of an Economic Development Strategy and Tourism Strategy would be hugely valuable, and the input of Overview and Scrutiny would be key to developing these.
- The Council Plan offered an overarching theme, but other strategies and policies would be developed outside of those listed in the report.
- It was vital that this was communicated to residents through different means.

In response to questions, the Service Director – Place advised that reference to increased opportunity to recycle had been included as changes to the waste collection service would include soft plastic recycling, as well as the introduction of a new bin for paper and cardboard, which would overall increase volume capacity for recycling.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- The process for the production of a Council Plan was always tight, but this felt unfinished, with some priorities lacking clarity and would be difficult for residents to know what they meant in reality. It would be helpful to include some commentary on each to outline what the aim was and what would indicate having achieved it.
- Where timeframes for projects and initiatives were known, these should be included within the Plan.
- There was a lack of tangibility with some of the priorities and they needed to be tied down to actionable content.
- Achieving net zero was already an aim of the Council and strategies had already been developed to help achieve this. Where things had not been achieved, it was important to be honest and open about these areas.
- It was a good start, but needed further development to be a strong, strategic, priority setting document.
- Some areas still had multiple tasks which required completion and there was too much included, with more focus on key areas needed.
- An annual review of the Plan, presented by the Leader, at Scrutiny would be helpful in monitoring performance.
- Would be a good idea to include some of the challenges that local authorities face and make this clearer to set the scene for residents.
- The district council was one layer of government in North Herts, and it would be useful to explore the relationship with others and reflect that in this document.
- More emphasis should be placed on the link to the Citizens Panel, which would be a good way to encourage engagement.
- It would be useful to have some key performance indicators or measurable content against which performance could be judged.
- This was a good Plan with substance that was meaningful. It contained clear objective and whether they were achievable was for the Executive to consider.

In response to a point of clarification, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that this Committee was making recommendations to Cabinet on the Council Plan and comments at the meeting would be provided at the Cabinet meeting where the item was to be considered.

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Tom Tyson seconded and, following a vote, it was:

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