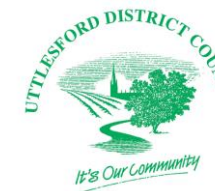


Corporate Plan Delivery Plan 2020/21: Annual Progress Report

Vision: Making Uttlesford the best place to live, work and place



Theme 1: Putting Residents First					
We Will:	Activities	Outputs/Milestones	Resources	Lead CM/ Officer	Changes due to Covid-19
1. Be a council that listens to and acts for residents					
<i>a. Increase the voice and influence of residents in planning and other Council matters</i>	Review the Scrutiny Committee's findings regarding major planning applications and planning obligations	PAS final report to Scrutiny by Dec 2020 Planning Obligations final report to Scrutiny March 2021	Within existing resources	Portfolio Holder for Planning and Local Plan/Assistant Director of Planning	No further changes identified subject to general caveat
<p>Progress Update: As part of the new Local Plan, a comprehensive Engagement Strategy has been developed and is being implemented to ensure local people and community groups are engaged in the development of the new Plan's policies and proposals. For example, a Community Forum, chaired by an independent representative, has been established to stimulate discussion and ideas from a range of groups on key themes relating to the Local Plan. The Council has also committed to holding a 6 month early consultation period on the Local plan as opposed to the statutory 6 weeks. In terms of planning applications, Town and Parish Councils are being pro-actively engaged in pre-planning application meetings with developers so they can comment on applications before they are even submitted. The PAS review has been delayed as all of the information needed to complete its report is still being finalised. A final report will be presented to the Council by end March 2021. The Planning Obligations report will be reported to Scrutiny in the Spring by the member task groups leading on this issue.</p>					
<i>b. Administer public consultations that are effective, accessible, timely and high quality</i>			BAU: Continuous improvement, within existing resources	Portfolio Holder for Council and Public Services/Assistant Director of Corporate Services	Consultations will continue within the constraints of government guidance on social distancing, etc.

Progress Update: Annual consultation on the council's proposed LCTS scheme for 2021-22 was carried out during the late summer of 2020. This was delivered primarily as an online survey, although citizens were offered the opportunity to request paper copies of the response forms, should they want. Supported the CSC in an ongoing customer engagement survey which aims to collect data on how satisfied citizens have been with their most recent contact with the council's Customer Services team. Staff have also been consulted on current working arrangements in two working from home/not working from home surveys. The first of these was carried out during the early summer and a follow up piece of feedback is being undertaken at present.

<i>c. Increase the reach of the Youth Council</i>	Support the Youth Council to participate and engage in a range of activities that enable their voice to be heard and encourage wider membership across all sectors of the community.	Greater participation of young people in the democratic process	Within existing resources	Portfolio Holder for Communities/ Assistant Director of Housing, Health and Communities	Within the constraints of government guidance on social distancing, etc.
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Progress Update: Although recruitment continues to be difficult during the pandemic, particularly in periods of lockdown when the majority of young people are not in school, the youth council still has a small group of active members. We have a representative attending the Community Stakeholder Forums and working groups focusing on the constitution, environment and equality & diversity. As soon as is possible we will look to resume recruitment in schools and aim to raise the profile of the youth council through some work [hopefully supported by the schools and delivered through their curriculum] around environment, climate change, equality & diversity and future housing / community. We are aiming to establish working relationships between youth councillors and district councillors to try and establish direct involvement in council projects and better links into local communities.

<i>d. Improve the council's use of the web and social media to increase communication with residents</i>	To provide enhanced customer contact opportunities including self-service facilities at remote site and extended opening hours through the introduction of 'live chat'	Procurement of appropriate live chat programme by end December 2020. Public launch of live chat facility by end February 2021 Self-service facilities to be established as part of the re-opening of Council services at remote sites	£30,000 - mix of technology and human resource	Portfolio Holder for Council and Public Services/Assistant Director of Corporate Services	No further changes identified subject to general caveat
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Progress Update: The LiveChat function now forms part of a wider customer contact project which also involves new telephony technology. This will allow greater visibility and monitoring of various customer contact channels for Customer Service Advisors, particularly when working remotely, meaning we will be able to improve customer service delivery through better analysis of call data. LiveChat is part of this package although the project plan requires other elements to be installed first which means it is now likely to go live in June.

<p><i>e. Actively and positively engage with and listen to our town and parish councils</i></p>	<p>Continue to promote and develop liaison with town and parish councils through regular meetings of the Local Councils Liaison Forum</p> <p>Ensure that engagement with town and parish councils forms a key part of the council's approach to community engagement and consultation (link to Active Place-maker for our Towns and Villages 3 (b) relating to pre-app process)</p>	<p>Regular meetings of the Local Councils Liaison Forum take place. Feedback is sought from town and parish councils regarding the utility and potential development of the Forum.</p> <p>Effective guidance available regarding good practice in engaging with town and parish councils. Town and parish councils are actively and positively engaged with and consulted on local matters.</p>	<p>Within existing resources</p>	<p>Portfolio Holder for Communities, /Chief Executive</p>	<p>Within the constraints of government guidance on social distancing, etc.</p>
<p>Progress Update: There have been three meetings of the Local Councils' Liaison Forum on 18 February 2020, 15 September 2020 and 11 February 2021</p> <p>Topics included</p> <p>18/2 Essex Association of Local Councils, Local Policing, Local Plan</p> <p>15/9 LGA member code of conduct, Community Governance review, Local Policing, Public health emergency, Local Government review</p> <p>11/2 Public health emergency update including a briefing from the NHS West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group to explain and answer questions about the Covid-19 vaccination programme in Uttlesford, Elections, Local Policing.</p> <p>Agenda items are requested from all town and parish councils ahead of each meeting; feedback on the future of the forum was sought at the February meeting. The meetings held September 2020 and February 2021 were held virtually.</p>					
<p><i>f. Support town and parish councils to better represent their communities</i></p>	<p>Promote awareness through the Local Councils Liaison Forum of "good practice" support available through the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC), especially its Chartermark scheme.</p>	<p>Information provided to town and parish councils about support available through EALC through the Forum.</p>	<p>Within existing resources</p>	<p>Portfolio Holder for Communities/Chief Executive</p>	<p>Within the constraints of government guidance on social distancing, etc.</p>

Progress Update: The Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) attended the meeting in February 2020 and the new Chief Executive Officer Designate introduced herself and outlined the role of the EALC in liaising with local, regional and national bodies and highlighted the services offered to affiliated members. This included an update on the training EALC offered, in particular the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CILCA) and shared information on the bursary scheme available to Clerks. The EALC attend each meeting and are able to contribute examples of local councils that may be demonstrating good practice in relation to items on the agenda.

2. Deliver local government with outstanding levels of transparency and accountability

<p><i>A (i) Implement a corporate change programme to increase accountability, transparency and democracy at the Council</i></p>	<p>Complete work of Governance Working Group to review current and possible future governance structure</p> <p>Participate in the Essex wide discussion on Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution</p>	<p><i>This action falls to the working group of council; any actions arising for Cabinet will be detailed at the appropriate time</i></p> <p>Agreement on the future shape of local government within Essex, ahead of a proposal submission to Government</p>	<p>£50,000 for dedicated/external resources</p>	<p>Leader/Chief Executive</p>	<p>Having been paused completely, there are no further identified changes, subject to general caveat</p>
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Progress Update: The Governance Review Working Group have met six times to find the best governance model, modified as necessary, for the Council. Whilst the GRWG was initially focused on evaluating the alternative models available to the Council, there has been agreement that culture and behaviour are also vital elements of good governance. The Group agreed that measures should be introduced, where possible, to enhance the desired principles that do not require full-scale systemic change.

At the GRWG meeting held on 16 September 2020, it was resolved that the review of the GRWG be continued with the intention that a programme of work be prepared in readiness for a recommendation to be presented to Full Council in July 2021. At the GRWG meeting held on 28 January 2021, the Group resolved to authorise officers to draw up draft proposals for an amended Cabinet model, to be considered by the GRWG before proposing any change to Full Council in July.

The Council has been actively engaged in discussion with ECC and other Essex Councils regarding devolution and local government reorganisation. However, the publication of the white paper has been postponed, partly due to the timings and acknowledgement that local authority resources are required elsewhere in responding to the pandemic. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) has invited three areas, Somerset, North Yorkshire and Cumbria, to submit proposals to create unitary authorities as work in these areas had been underway for some time and was at an advanced stage. MHCLG has said it is committed to empowering regions through devolving money, resources and control. Essex district councils together with Southend and Thurrock councils commissioned Grant Thornton to evaluate the strengths and opportunities for closer working and further devolution of powers without requiring reorganisation and together with Essex County Council, Essex continues to look at the opportunities for joint working and other partnership opportunities.

<p><i>A (ii) Implement a corporate change programme to increase accountability, transparency and democracy at the Council</i></p>	<p>Planning Committee working group to review arrangements for start time and/or geographical location of applications (north committee/south committee)</p>	<p>Review completed and agreed recommendations adopted</p>		<p>Portfolio Holder for Planning and Local Plan/Assistant Director of Planning</p>	<p>This work on changes to the planning committee will be paused due to all meetings taking place remotely.</p>
<p>Progress Update: The informal Planning Committee Working Group has met to consider how to best to proceed with the Planning Committee’s duties. An all Planning Committee member briefing is now held a few days prior to each Committee meeting to allow members to clarify aspects of officers’ reports in advance of the formal Committee meetings. During the initial stages of Covid 19, a virtual Planning Committee was established and met more regularly than was previously the case to ensure as many applications as possible could still go to Committee on time. The “virtual” Committee now operates very effectively online. Recently, it has been decided to start Committee meetings at 10am and to run for the whole day if the agenda requires this to happen.</p>					
<p><i>A (iii) Implement a corporate change programme to increase accountability, transparency and democracy at the Council</i></p>	<p>Review Equalities Policy</p>	<p>Revised policy adopted by October 2020</p> <p>Full training programme for members and officers completed by Dec 20</p> <p>Listening events completed by January 2021</p>		<p>Portfolio Holder for Environment and Green Issues; Equalities / Assistant Director of Housing, Health and Communities</p>	<p>Having been paused completely, there are no further identified changes, subject to general caveat</p>
<p>Progress Update: The Equalities Policy has been reviewed and adopted by Council. Mandatory training was offered to all staff and Councillors, however there will need to be a follow up session for those that did not attend. The first listening event will be held on the 11th March 2021. Members of an overview board have been identified and an internal staff group is being encouraged.</p>					
<p><i>b. Seek external review of and recognition for positive change achieved by the Council</i></p>	<p>East of England Local Government Association (EELGA) to review the strategy around Local Plan</p> <p>Planning Advisory Service reviewing the process of major planning applications</p>	<p>Action plans to be developed once the outcomes of the reviews have been received</p>	<p>Within existing resources</p>	<p>Portfolio Holder for Planning and Local Plan/Assistant Director of Planning</p>	<p>No further changes identified subject to general caveat</p>

Progress Update: The EELGA Peer Review Group has been working with both officers and members to review the Local Plan strategy with a number of all-member briefings and workshops having been held. The PRG continues to give on-going support to officers and members on the preparation of the Local Plan generally. The PAS review has been delayed as all of the information needed to complete its report is still being finalised. A final report will be presented to the Council by end March 2021.

<i>c. Deliver a comprehensive continuing member development programme</i>			BAU: opportunities for further development are being identified ad hoc until a planned approach can be resumed, within existing resources	Leader/Assistant Director of Legal and Governance	No further changes identified subject to general caveat
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Progress Update: The Member development programme has been impacted by Covid-19, preventing in-person training sessions taking place, and the economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic at the beginning of the financial year. However, development has taken place in the form of online training sessions, remote briefings and peer review/support programmes (as carried out by the CfPS and the LGA). Members have also had greater access to a range of webinars provided by the LGA and DCN.

3. Be responsible with your money and mitigate the impact of government cuts

<i>a. Be a self-sufficient Council that generates its own resources from local taxation (Business Rates and Council Tax) and commercial investments thereby removing the reliance on Central Government grants.</i>	To actively source commercial investments to support the council revenue streams	5 new investments generating £2.4 million in 2020/21	Within existing resources	Portfolio holder for the Economy and Investment/ Director of Finance and Corporate Services/Assistant Director of IT, Facilities and Assets	No further changes identified subject to general caveat
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Progress Update: Four investments completed to date with a further two completions planned before 31 March 2021. 2020/21 income from the new investments is forecasted to be £2.599m. When the loan interest from Aspire (CRP) Limited is included the total is forecast to be £5.183m.

<i>b. Deliver cost-effective and efficient services that live within the Council's means</i>	Achieve a balanced outturn in light of the reduced revenue and additional costs	Budget monitoring and performance indicators reports presented on a quarterly basis	Within existing resources	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Budget/Assistant Director of Resources	No further changes identified subject to general caveat
Progress Update: The monitoring of all income and expenditure is ongoing and quarterly reports are presented to Members with the quarter 3 forecast outturn position scheduled for Cabinet in March. The Covid-19 emergency has had significant impacts on the finances and the delivery of services. The additional funding provided by Government has mitigated the direct financial impact on the council and there has been no requirement to reduce services due to financial shortfalls. Performance indicators are being maintained with only a small downturn in collection rates for Business Rates and Council Tax during the current emergency, this is supported by the additional reliefs and grants provided to businesses and organisations, plus hardship grant support for residents on reduced incomes.					
<i>c. Constantly seek to improve the quality of contracted out services</i>			BAU: Contract monitoring is used to assure service quality, within existing resources	Portfolio Holder for Council and Public Services/CMT	
Progress Update: Contracts continue to be monitored through Performance Indicators and regular contract meetings.					
<i>d. Apply for all relevant grants</i>			BAU: grant applications are made regularly subject to the criteria, work required and likelihood of success, within existing resources	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Budget/Assistant Director of Resources	
Progress Update: The emergency situation has generated an unprecedented amount of available grants and the council has administered these on behalf of the Government and applied for additional grants to support the community. Many smaller grant support schemes have been established in association with Essex County Council, where they received funds and this has been distributed to local areas/districts. The administration and criteria for these grants has been mixed, with some having specific criteria attached and others allowing some discretion to meet the needs of our local area. The emergency situation has meant that 'normal grant activity' has diminished significantly.					
<i>e. Set a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to fund council services by a prudent</i>	Produce a revised MTFS to reflect the in-year investments	Revised MTFS presented to Council in Autumn 2020	Within existing resources and utilising new	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Budget/Assistant Director of Resources	No further changes identified subject to general caveat

<p><i>mix of investment, services and tax income, while maintaining adequate reserves</i></p>		<p>Medium Term Financial Strategy, Commercial Strategy and Reserves Strategy set and approved in February 2021</p> <p>New reserves established reflecting the in-year changes in financial position</p>	<p>investment income for 20/21</p>		
<p>Progress Update: The MTFS and all associated budget papers and strategies have been finalised and submitted to Scrutiny for review and Cabinet have recommended for approval by Council on the 23 February. The budget reflects the impacts of the Covid-19 emergency.</p>					
<p><i>f. Follow best-practices for investment risk management and board composition</i></p>			<p>BAU: Improved governance is embedded, within existing resources</p>	<p>Portfolio holder for the Economy and Investment /Director of Finance and Corporate Services/Assistant Director of ICT and Facilities</p>	
<p>Progress Update: The governance model enables investment options to be fully evaluated and debated at three separate stages, Investment Board, Cabinet and Council.</p>					