

Committee: Council
Title: Blueprint Uttlesford
Report Author: Peter Holt, Chief Executive
pholt@uttlesford.gov.uk
01799 510400

Date:
Tuesday, 21st
March 2023

Summary

1. This report updates Council on the authority's change programme, named Blueprint Uttlesford

Recommendations

2. That Council notes this report.

Financial Implications

3. Although the change programme is built to facilitate the delivery of the Council's objectives and ambitions within the context of funding available, this particular report is a periodic progress update *for information* and is not advancing anything *for decision* with any financial implications.

Background Papers

4. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.
 - Notes of the discussion on Blueprint Uttlesford from the June 2022 Scrutiny Committee Meeting
 - Slides used at the February 2022 Blueprint Uttlesford Member briefing

Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	The production of this report is in itself a part of the ongoing communication efforts around the programme and its elements
Community Safety	This report itself has no specific community safety implications
Equalities	The change programme contains a specific strand of activity addressing diversity and inclusion, and the impact on both the public and staff. This report itself has no specific

	equalities implications
Health and Safety	This report itself has no specific health and safety implications
Human Rights/Legal Implications	The change programme has already and will continue to have key legal implications at various points. This report itself has no specific legal implications, as it is merely a <i>for information</i> periodic update.
Sustainability	This report itself has no specific sustainability implications
Ward-specific impacts	All wards
Workforce/Workplace	The change programme has already and will continue to have key staffing implications at various points. This report itself has no specific staffing implications, as it is merely a <i>for information</i> periodic update.

Situation

6. Uttlesford District Council, like councils generally around the country, continues to face a wide range of challenges to the way it operates, driven by national and international factors, as well as local issues. The Council, again like all others, in particular faces significant financial challenges, effectively operating in an ongoing climate of austerity, as well as facing the impacts of the cost of living crisis and scale of inflation; the international energy situation; and the hangovers of the Coronavirus pandemic and Brexit. The Council also encounters positive opportunities, such as funding regimes to bid for to gain extra resource, such as under the Government's *Levelling Up* agenda.
7. These issues notwithstanding, the Council has an ambitious vision to improve the lives and opportunities of local people, and has accordingly set stretching objectives, all to be delivered within a firm set of values.
8. It is common for councils (and organisations generally of Uttlesford's scale and complexity) to have an overarching change programme to draw together and coordinate efforts to deliver such ambitions within such a context. Uttlesford's change programme is called Blueprint Uttlesford, and it has been in operation since late 2021.
9. Blueprint Uttlesford's job is to answer the question: how does the Council need to change to be able to deliver its bold ambitions but in a complex world and with substantially less money?
10. Blueprint Uttlesford draws together both existing and recurrent activities – such as the annual budget preparation, the annual refresh of the five-year

Medium Term Financial Strategy, the annual Corporate Plan and so on – as well as new initiatives, projects and pieces of work, such as the Workforce Plan which is being considered at Cabinet in March 2023.

11. Blueprint Uttlesford also draws in other major initiatives underway in the authority, such as development of the Local Plan and the Climate Crisis Action Plan. This ensures that there is proper alignment of broader Member ambitions with the allocation of scarce resources, and so as to avoid silo thinking, fragmentation, or unintended consequences for example by future delivery capacity being built in isolation from discussions about future operational structures. Again, it is worthy of noting that various of these broader pieces of work have ongoing Member engagement, so those Members part of the Local Plan Leadership Group and/or of the Energy and Climate Change Working Group have been directly engaged in Blueprint Uttlesford work for well over a year.
12. Those elements of the Blueprint Uttlesford Programme that, in line with the Council's Constitution, properly require the authority of elected members are duly presented for consideration through the usual governance channels. Just last month, for example, full Council approved an annual budget for 2023/24, a five year Medium Term Financial Strategy, and a Corporate Plan.
13. That these major pieces of work – the budget itself running to over 200 pages – are not prominently billed or badged as Blueprint Uttlesford elements does not detract from the fact that they are precisely that. The Chief Executive determined that the least important characteristic of the Blueprint Uttlesford programme is its own brand or image, so no resource has been applied to it – not even the design of a logo, as he determined that this would be a wasteful use of public funds, and of scarce time and effort.
14. Other elements of work falling under the Blueprint Uttlesford change programme are, in line with the Council's Constitution, matters that fall within the delegated authority of officers. For example, the development and then the delivery of the Workforce Plan, falls properly to the Chief Executive under delegated powers in his statutory role of Head of Paid Service. Nonetheless, because of the importance of this Workforce Plan, the Chief Executive determined that it should be reported to Members *for information* in the Constitutionally-proper fashion, hence it appearing on the March Cabinet agenda.
15. As well as all of the ongoing Member engagement sketched out above in Blueprint Uttlesford work, there have also been periodic briefings for Members on the matter, such as the extensive discussion at the Scrutiny Committee in June 2022, and also the Member briefing on Blueprint Uttlesford in February 2022. The Member briefings on the budget situation in November 2022 and January 2023 were also intrinsically reflective of the ongoing Blueprint Uttlesford change programme work.
16. The following diagram – first shared with Members in the Blueprint Uttlesford briefing in February 2022 – is worth resharing now, in that it shows how all these elements fit together.



17. The green hexagons ranked across the top represent existing or new pieces of work drawn together under the Blueprint Uttlesford banner, so as to make sure that everything is joined up. Various of these pieces of work already have extensive Member involvement; others of them will be reported through to Members in the Constitutionally-proper format in due course as appropriate.
18. The grey hexagons along the bottom represent key stakeholder groups, to ensure that different perspectives and the impacts on different groups remain at the forefront of Blueprint Uttlesford thinking.
19. The blue hexagons along the right hand side represent current or future Blueprint Uttlesford workstreams from a financial or operational perspective. Work on *sustainable income maximisation*, for example, has been quietly proceeding behind the scenes, with the initial focus being on issues such as letting out spare council space – with successes in the last year such as securing tenants for three quarters of the new Walpole Meadow building, for the rest of the space at the Little Canfield depot not needed for environmental services or other council functions; or securing new tenants for underused space at the London Road offices or the now-vacated Shire Hill former waste depot. Initiatives under the *cost control* workstream include the Procurement Strategy (presented formally to the Governance, Audit and Performance Committee), as well as the introduction of a new Performance and Contracts team (of three officers) which kicked off work in February 2023.
20. The brown hexagons along the left hand side represent cross-cutting pieces of work. The *People* Blueprint Uttlesford workstream for example has generated the Workforce Plan reported publicly to Cabinet in March 2023.

21. Blueprint Uttlesford as a change programme has clear initial objectives but is also sufficiently flexible and dynamic to respond to changing circumstances, unexpected issues, and to be able to seize opportunities that arise unexpectedly too. For example, when the change programme was launched, the international fuel situation, the cost of living crisis and double-digit inflation were not on anyone's radar.
22. As such, the specific financial envelope that Blueprint Uttlesford has needed to deliver within, over the coming several years, has flexed, often for reasons entirely outside of local control – sometimes coping with tighter financial constraints, sometimes benefitting. All such major financial changes are properly reported to elected Members through the usual governance channels, and are reflected in the two budgets and the two Medium Term Financial Strategies agreed by Members in February 2022 and February 2023.
23. When Blueprint Uttlesford launched, the working assumptions were at one level, but as circumstances changed, those financial targets changed to match. Any such major shifts have been reported to Members over time – below, for example, an extract from the notes of the discussion with Members at Scrutiny Committee in June 2022:

Previous savings required and agreed in February:

- 2022/23 – nil
- 2023/24 - £1 million
- 2024/25 - £1 million
- 2025/26 - £800,000
- 2026/27 - £800,000

Revised figures announced today:

- 2022/23 – nil
- 2023/24 - £400,000
- 2024/25 - £1 million
- 2025/26 - £1 million
- 2026/27 - £800,000

June 22 briefing extract

24. That showed a positive improvement in the financial situation anticipated at the time, though that too has changed since, as reported to Members in budget briefings. The 2023/24 budget and revised Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed by Members in February 2023 sets a balanced budget for 2023/24 that does not require an in-year saving of £1 million (as originally anticipated in February 2022) nor of £400,000 (as anticipated and reported above in June 2022).
25. As such, of course, individual service reviews have not been completed in the 2022/23 year (so that they could be in place by April 2023, and thus have the necessary full-year effect).

26. As has been reported to Members, and as is reflected in the Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed by Councillors in February 2023, substantial net savings will be required for the 2024/25 year and subsequent years. Work will therefore take place during the 2023/24 year developing options, bringing them to Members in due course as Constitutionally-required for decision, so that they can be in place in time for April 2024 to have full-year effect in that financial year.
27. Officers have throughout stressed that the initiatives they will focus on up front will be in the areas of sustainable income maximisation ahead of considering whether net direct spend on individual services needs to reduce. This, quite properly, makes service reductions and reduction in the number of posts in the Council the last things to look at.
28. Officers have though been transparent with both Councillors and with staff in anticipating that by the end of the next five years, the Council will employ fewer staff and deliver fewer services and/or at lower levels.
29. As a result, as has again been discussed repeatedly with staff and with Councillors over the last year or more, officers have introduced a vacancy control process, where every casual vacancy is carefully considered before it is filled. Where possible, teams have shrunk to be slightly smaller and manage their workload differently to take advantage of the casual turnover whilst avoiding any disproportionately negative impacts on service standards. Most casually vacant posts considered have been filled though, but on the default basis that they are filled with fixed-term appointments, so that as and when that service area is reviewed, if at that time it is decided that it needs to reduce its spending and potentially afford fewer staff, that long-serving staff would not need to compete for their own jobs against temporary staff. This is a sector-standard approach; was insisted on by our Trade Union colleagues in Uttlesford; and is quite simply the right thing to do. Operation of this vacancy control system is properly Constitutionally a matter delegated to officers and the Chief Executive has been quietly doing so for over a year, meeting weekly with officer colleagues to promptly consider any casual vacancies.
30. Officers have also been transparent with Councillors, particularly in the round of budget discussions leading to the February 2023 budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy, that their focus in the *sustainable income maximisation* workstream will extend beyond relatively painless initiatives such as finding more paying tenants for unused/under-used council building space, and into areas such as considering whether to increase public car parking fees at the authority's various public car parks for the first time in many years. As the chief executive made clear on this very point in the February 2023 Scrutiny Committee discussion on the budget, there were as of that date (and are as of the date this Council report is written) no specific such proposals so much as an intention to explore them over coming months, ahead of bringing back any proposals that result in the summer of 2023. This development work will include user consultation, market research, benchmarking etc., as well as consideration of knock-on impacts on individual parkers and on local businesses.

31. In convening this extraordinary full Council meeting to receive an update on Blueprint Uttlesford, those Councillors requisitioning the meeting indicated that they have five questions. Although the bulk of the answers to those questions can be gleaned from reading this report, for ease of reference, those questions are repeated and answered directly as below. It is first however worth noting that the common premise of these five questions is somewhat faulty, in that the Blueprint Uttlesford change programme is not a 'reorganisation', which implies a one-off change of an organisational structure from A to B, so much as a series of strategies, and initiatives which rely as much (if not more) on cultural and behavioural changes as they do to mere organisational structures. In fact, the Chief Executive has deliberately sought to minimise organisational restructures, as the disruption caused by them typically lasts several months as Council HR policies and procedures play out, all the while causing instability to all the staff involved, often bleeding through to the experience received by service users. Instead, the programme has focused on going with the grain, working with people to make constructive and lasting changes.

1. The specific goals and objectives of the reorganisation?
 - To make the Council fit for purpose in its culture, behaviours, partnerships and structures to deliver the bold programme of ambitions set out in the Corporate Plan, whilst living within its means as set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
2. The timeline for completion of the reorganisation?
 - This is an ongoing process not a finite one with an end date, flexing as necessary, and updating to reflect each year's budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy as agreed by Councillors, in delivery of each year's Corporate Plan refresh (and the anticipated fundamental Corporate Plan rewriting post all-out elections in May 2023).
3. The budget allocated for the reorganisation and how it will be spent?
 - Blueprint Uttlesford has no dedicated budget – it is delivered within existing resources. Any elements of Blueprint Uttlesford that require dedicated spend either have that spend already allocated within existing budgets or if new funding were required, would be subject to an individual business case and approval in the usual Constitutionally-proper way.
4. The impact of the reorganisation on Council staff and services?
 - The overall impact of the change programme on Council staff and services over coming years will be substantial, in that it will equip staff with the right tools, the right training, the right leadership, the right staffing structures, and the right organisational cultures, behaviours and values to deliver Members' bold ambitions within the resources available. This is likely by the end of the current five year Medium Term Financial Strategy to mean that the Council employs fewer staff.
5. The consultation process with staff, residents, and other stakeholders?

- Blueprint Uttlesford itself requires no such consultation, as it is an umbrella change programme, not a specific set of proposals on which to consult. Specific proposals that emerge under the Blueprint Uttlesford umbrella will themselves be subject to consultation and engagement as appropriate, and as required under the Council's Constitution.

Risk Analysis

32.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
There are no inherent risks in the sharing of this periodic update <i>for information</i> . Risks relating to the subject matter of the programme or elements thereof are assessed and managed in the usual fashion.	n/a	n/a	n/a

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.