

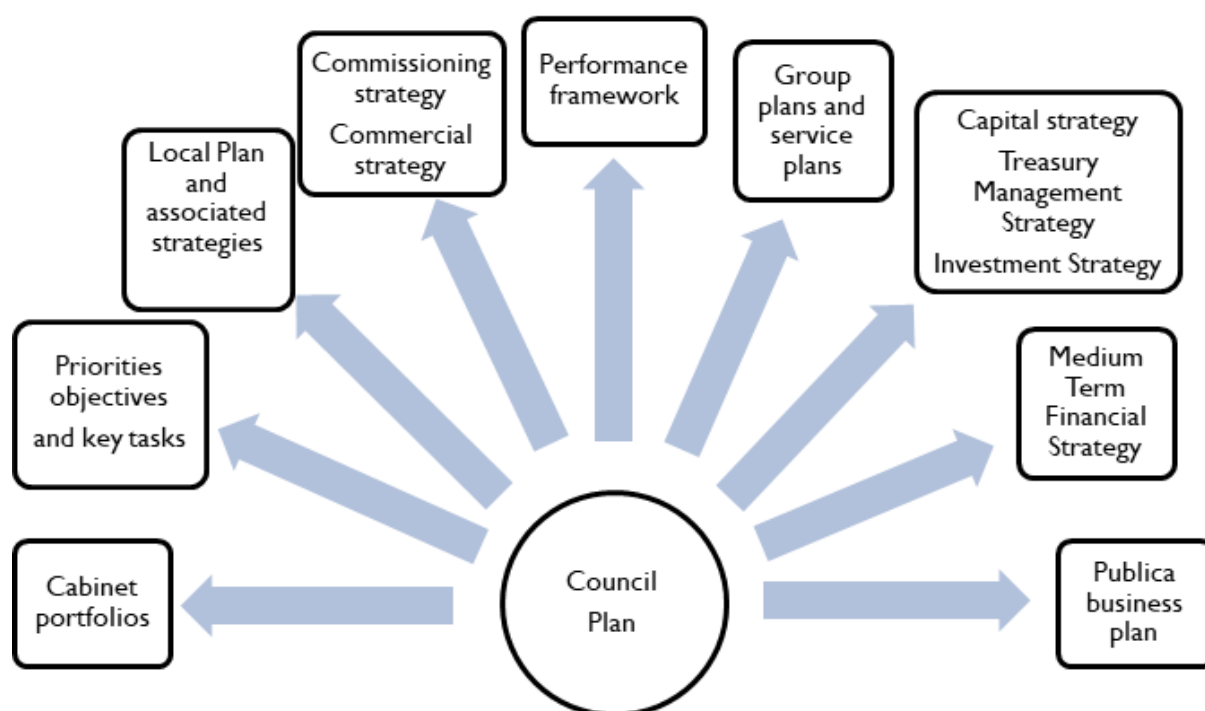
Council Plan 2019-2023

Introduction

This document sets out the Council's key priorities, areas which require particular focus, and shows how the Council intends to achieve its ambitions for supporting local communities and the delivery of local services.

We are proud of the distinctive and special place that is West Oxfordshire and want to do everything we can to ensure it continues to be a great place to live, work and visit.

It is vital that the District maintains its special character as its economy flourishes and we work to support the future growth and opportunities that lie ahead. The Council Plan sets a direction that will help with this commitment and it sits at the centre of a range of related strategies, illustrated in the diagram below.



The Local Plan is one of the key documents which support the Council Plan and its adoption (in September 2018) has been a significant step as it provides a framework to help grow a successful and sustainable economy, building much needed new homes and securing infrastructure, whilst enhancing and conserving West Oxfordshire's environment. It details the strategic objectives for the district and the geographical locations prioritised for development.

In 2018, we invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge - an external review of a Council's functioning and its ability to deliver on its plans. Its report outlines a range of positive factors in the Council's leadership and performance but it also provides some helpful pointers for improvement.

Our Peer Review found that the new Council Plan is an opportunity to:

- Align strategic objectives
- Make good use of community inputs – building on work in the Local Plan process
- Set out our economic ambitions as part of Oxfordshire's successful local economy; and
- Consider the scope to support future community development.

We are keen to take the initiative on this opportunity and this new Council Plan is a start, but to make sure we continue to develop this work, we need to work with our partner organisations and local communities, to secure their contributions to our action plan.

We will work in a variety of ways, leading by example, in support of our place-making role and advancing the future strength and sustainability of local communities. A key part of this will be our community leadership role working with partners and local areas.

Whilst taking a strategic lead to help create the future for West Oxfordshire, we plan to listen to and engage in joint work with our local communities. Our recent Town and Parish Forum (March 2019) is an example of this commitment.

We recognise that sometimes it will be a town or parish that takes a lead on a particular issue and the District Council and other partners will need to act in support of this initiative and enable improvements where possible. An example of this might be town partnership work that seeks to enhance the vitality of a market town.

Alongside our community leadership role, we will continue to ensure that we provide efficient value for money services. Our financial strategy is positioned to plan for and stay ahead of future challenges, such as changes to Government funding, service demand and other emerging risks. We are developing a Commissioning Strategy and Commercial Strategy which aim to ensure the Council retains its current healthy financial position whilst becoming less reliant upon volatile central government funding. Our planned Commissioning Strategy will cover everything we do and is focussed on meeting local needs and delivering excellent and efficient services in support of the Council Plan.

Vision

Our vision is to support West Oxfordshire to be fit for the future by:

1. Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity.
2. Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone.
3. Realising the unique opportunities that we offer to businesses of all shapes and sizes.
4. Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities.
5. Creating both high quality market and affordable housing for the wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire.
6. Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.

Key Priority: Climate and Ecological Emergency

We will develop our strategic approach to securing a low carbon future, take steps to mitigate and adapt to climate change and plan for a net gain in biodiversity.

- Develop and implement a climate change action plan for West Oxfordshire with key actions to include:
 - Identifying initiatives towards preparing for and adapting to climate change, including enabling residents to adapt to extreme weather events, informed through engagement with local communities and partners.
 - Piloting initiatives through the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village and consider wider applicability.
 - Increasing residential and commercial reuse and recycling and encourage composting.
 - Producing an action plan to reduce the Council's impact upon the environment through the services we deliver.
- Enhance our natural environment and boost biodiversity.

Overarching goal to establish robust, resilient, well-functioning ecological networks which will require:

- Ongoing support for key local projects and initiatives e.g. Lower Windrush Valley Project and the Wychwood Project.
- Management of WODC's land holdings for biodiversity conservation and enhancement, including development of a tree planting programme on this.
- Seek to implement and maintain recommendations contained in the 'Windrush in Witney' Landscape Management Strategy.
- Continuing to support Oxfordshire's Conservation Target Areas and Local Wildlife Sites Project.
- Using the Council's planning powers to ensure that new developments deliver a net gain in biodiversity.

Measures of Success:

- District Council services to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- Installation of XX number of Electric Vehicle Charging Points in XX locations (for internal use and in public locations on Council-owned car parks).
- Increase residential recycling and composting rates to 70%.
- Establish a residents' panel to inform key actions towards our ambitions on climate change - identification of quick wins as well as longer term projects.
- Utilisation of Natural England's 'Eco-metric' to demonstrate biodiversity net gain in new developments, including 25% net gain at the Garden Village.
- Use of 'Building for Nature' standards for Green Infrastructure at the Garden Village to measure the achievement of environmental and biodiversity enhancement.

Key Priority: Working Towards Healthier Communities

We will pursue a place-based approach, working collaboratively with the health sector, voluntary sector partners and local communities to secure enhanced health and well-being for West Oxfordshire's residents. Key actions to include:

- Work with the health sector (especially the Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health) and other partners to establish a comprehensive network of healthcare facilities
- Adopt a 'healthy place-shaping' approach in new and existing developments, ensuring that the necessary green and blue infrastructure, and the public realm, is provided to encourage healthy lifestyles; and that these link with established communities so that both new and existing residents benefit
- Work closely and creatively with residents to understand needs and co-produce sustainable community-led solutions to tackle health and wellbeing challenges
- Review and deliver the Council's grants programme to ensure that it facilitates the enhancement of community facilities and the provision of activities which promote healthy lifestyles
- Work proactively and in partnership to ensure residents benefit from effective large scale countywide or national health and wellbeing programmes.
- Deliver improvements to Carterton Leisure Centre and plan for a replacement Windrush Leisure Centre
- Amplify the voice of residents especially those who have been heard less
- Identify opportunities to enhance the use of country parks and other open spaces for a variety of activities which provide benefits for both physical and mental health
- Challenge the stigma around mental health and help to improve services especially for young people
- Work with communities on healthy living initiatives in partnership with our leisure contractor, GLL
- Create 'friendly communities' which support people with varying needs
- Pilot and learn creative interventions to tackle health inequalities

Measures of Success:

- Number of projects funded through the Council's grants programme.
- Submission of a Health Impact Assessment with all major planning applications and implementation of its findings through the development scheme to which it relates.
- Consider change shown in contextual indicators (a periodic look at how the District scores against the Thriving Places Index).

Key Priority: Vibrant Economy

We will work to secure the future economic success of West Oxfordshire as a key part of the wider Oxfordshire economy. Key actions to include:

- Working with business groups and partners including the Oxfordshire LEP to ensure there is a comprehensive range of support available for businesses
- Working with business groups to keep abreast of key business issues and work to help identify solutions
- Creating an environment where businesses can grow through ample land/ sites for employment purposes, including key hubs at Carterton, Witney, Chipping Norton and the new Garden Village
- Working with partners to secure new and upgraded infrastructure, including enhancements to the A40 and the Cotswold railway line
- Identifying and pursuing creative solutions for the provision of housing for key workers (in partnership with main employers in the district)
- Developing an action plan to secure the future vitality and viability of our town centres (key actions need to include the promotion of towns as destinations)
- Promoting the development of successful tourism enterprises in appropriate, sustainable locations in accordance with Local Plan Policy
- The development of public realm improvement projects, electric vehicle charging points and policies to allow town centres to evolve to meet changing shopping and leisure habits
- Work with the LEP to expand opportunities to engage and inspire young people and create pathways into vocational work and skills in the local economy

- Measures of Success:
 - Employment / unemployment
 - Town centre occupancy rates
 - Town centre footfall
 - Business land / premises availability
 - Productivity (measurement to be considered)
 - Key worker housing / recruitment issues

Key Priority: Stronger Local Communities

We will work with partners to strengthen the local communities across West Oxfordshire in order to enhance residents' quality of life. Key actions to include:

- Developing our relationship with Town Councils, Parish Councils and Parish Meetings through regular Parish Forums
- Working with local businesses in the villages and countryside in order to raise awareness of the opportunities for diversification (eg community hubs; pub walks and railway station opportunities)
- Working with partners to promote West Oxfordshire as a visitor destination whilst protecting its essential character
- Help build resilience in communities with more effective multi-agency working and intelligence sharing
- Encouraging towns and parishes to engage with their residents in order to articulate local priorities and support them to address these

Measures of Success:

- Better communication and engagement with Towns and Parishes
- Reporting of pilot project activity of tourism work with local pubs. Assessment of possible candidate local areas for further development in 2020
- Various community safety data and contextual indicators in Strategic Intelligence Assessment
- Achievement of actions as directed through the Community Safety Partnership Plan

Key Priority: Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Communities

We will secure the range of housing that is needed by our local communities. Key actions to include:

- Measures to increase the number of affordable housing units delivered annually, including the promotion of innovative housing solutions, so that we can reduce the housing waiting list
- The promotion of self-build and custom build plots
- Investigating a new West Oxfordshire living rent to ensure that affordable homes are truly affordable for local people and key workers
- Using the planning system to ensure that new developments provide a range of housing products, including low-cost home ownership models, and the right size of properties to meet the needs of our residents
- Increasing the rate of delivery on larger strategic sites through proactive planning and the use of appropriate mechanisms (planning performance agreements, planning conditions etc), work with infrastructure providers, and sustainable methods of construction where appropriate

Measures of Success:

- Numbers of new affordable housing units constructed annually
- Total numbers of new dwellings constructed annually
- *Need to include some actual targets here*
- Waiting list numbers (a percentage reduction to aim for?)
- Number of new pitches and plots to meet the needs of the travelling community

Key Priority: Council Services and Finance

We will continue to ensure that we provide efficient, value for money services whilst modernising Council services to ensure that they meet the evolving needs of customers and the area.

The Council is developing a Commissioning Strategy and Commercial Strategy which aim to ensure our financial position remains healthy whilst becoming less reliant upon volatile central government funding.

Key actions to include:

- Work with Publica, Ubico and other partners, to improve services by maximising accessibility, simplicity and quality
- Engaging with service users to inform future service redesign
- Introducing a new Council website that enables improved service access
- Developing a property strategy/ asset management plan to outline how the Council can use its own property to deliver Council Plan objectives
- Refreshing the Medium Term Financial Strategy to incorporate financial targets from the Commissioning Strategy, Commercial Strategy and the property strategy which set out how the Council plans to respond to changes to funding from central government and maintain financial sustainability
- In light of the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy to set a policy on the level of Council Tax which facilitates the Council's financial sustainability
- Looking for opportunities through the One Public Estate programme to ensure that the public estate meets local needs and provides efficiencies
- Identifying, targeting and securing appropriate funding opportunities with external agencies

Measures of Success:

- Improvements in measures of customer satisfaction
- An updated Medium Term Financial Strategy which includes the impact of changes to central government funding, incorporates realistic and achievable actions to mitigate reductions in government funding, and plans to achieve a balanced budget within the next five years.
- An unqualified Value for Money opinion from the external auditor.
- Council tax level within lowest five shire districts in the country
- A financial strategy which facilitates the delivery of the priorities set out in this Plan.