

The Council's Strategic Plan 2021 to 2025 and corporate plan for the next twelve months

Joint report of the Chief Executive, Director of Transformation & Business Services, Director of People & Culture, Director of Legal & Democratic Services, and Director of Finance & Public Value.

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- (a) Reaffirms its commitment to, and support for, the "Best Place" Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025.
- (b) Agrees that a report on progress to date with the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 be prepared for consideration by the Council at its meeting on 7 September 2023.
- (c) Agrees the six areas of focus for the corporate plan for the next 12 months aligned to the risks set out in section 4 of this report:
 - I. Governance and performance review.
 - II. Value for money and financial sustainability.
 - III. People strategy.
 - IV. Replacement systems (FINEST and CareFirst).
 - V. Equality, diversity and inclusion.
 - VI. Devon, Plymouth and Torbay devolution deal.
- (d) Agrees the most significant risks facing the Council and the approach to managing them as described in section 4 below and invites regular reports to future meetings on the management of those risks.
- (e) Notes that Directorate/service area plans will be developed over the next three months linked to the: Strategic Plan 2021-2025, areas of focus, key risks and People Strategy – 'People First'.

1 The "Best Place" Strategic Plan 2021-2025

The Council adopted its "Best Place" Strategic Plan at its meeting on 2 December 2021 (minute 64 refers). That Plan – <https://www.devon.gov.uk/strategic-plan/> - sets out the Council's vision, ambition, and overall priorities for 2021 to 2025.

The Plan's ambition is to help Devon to become the best place to:

- **Grow up** - a commitment to being a child friendly Devon where children / young people were safe, healthy, ambitious, and could fulfil their potential.

- **Live well** - being a fairer Devon: inclusive, compassionate, and caring, where everyone was safe, connected, and resilient.
- **Prosper** - being a greener and prosperous Devon, with opportunities to create a sustainable future for all.

The Plan's priorities are to:

- Respond to the climate emergency.
- Be ambitious for children and young people.
- Support sustainable economic recovery.
- Tackle poverty and inequality.
- Improve health and wellbeing.
- Help communities be safe, connected, and resilient.

For each of the priorities, the web pages describe the outcomes that will be achieved over the period 2021-2025. The Plan's summary is included below as appendix 1.

The Plan also explains how, over the period to 2025, the Council itself will:

- Transform, develop and improve children's services.
- Respond to demographic pressures and future workforce challenges.
- Embrace the positive benefits of a diverse workforce and create an environment that is inclusive and safe for all staff.
- Make best use of data and intelligence to help inform what we do and understand its impact on the people of Devon.
- Transform the way we work to make us more resilient and adaptable and help reduce our carbon footprint.
- Invest in digital solutions to help us work more effectively and make us more responsive.
- Enable greater financial resilience and improve financial planning.
- Increase discipline and rigour around decision making.

2 Progressing the "Best Place" Strategic Plan 2021 - 2025

Working towards the Strategic Plan's "Best Place" priorities for the period to 2025 remains vitally important to the people and communities of Devon.

All of the Council's services have a part to play in achieving the Plan's priorities. Other public service providers – particularly district, town and parish councils; the National Health Service and the Devon & Cornwall Police – also have a significant role in helping to realise the Plan's aspirations. In addition, the plethora of voluntary and community organisations, and social enterprises are integral to making Devon the best place to grown up, live well and prosper.

It is proposed that a progress report on the Plan is prepared for consideration by the Council at its meeting on 7 September 2023.

3 Corporate plan for the next twelve months

This is a time of significant change and opportunity for English local government as a whole. The year ahead will be a critical period for this Council as it needs to tackle some

long-standing problems and challenges. It is proposed that the six areas of focus described below are agreed as the corporate plan for the next 12 months in order to:

- Improve the current arrangements for decision-making and governance.
- Achieve, as far as possible, financial sustainability.
- Support and empower staff to deliver the best outcomes for the people of Devon.

3.1 Governance and performance review

At its meeting on 25 May 2023, the Council resolved to establish a cross-party member working group to undertake a governance review to ensure that the Council's processes, decision-making arrangements and procedures are fit for purpose. The work encompassed by the review will include:

- Committee structure.
- Decision making and financial thresholds.
- Communications with, and support for, members.
- Contract procedure rules.
- Council procedure rules.
- Financial regulations.
- Scheme of delegation.
- Modernisation of the Council chamber.
- DCC membership of external boards, partnerships and committees.

The complete governance review programme, which will take place over the next twelve months is available as part of the report to the 25 April 2023 report to Procedures Committee -

<https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/documents/s45362/Governance%20Review%20Final.pdf>

3.2 Value for money and financial sustainability

The Council has a general statutory duty of Best Value to "to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness". The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy defines "value for money" as encompassing:

- Economy - 'Spending less'.
- Efficiency - 'Spending well'.
- Effectiveness - 'Spending wisely'.
- Equity - 'Spending fairly'.

The Council's revenue budget for 2024/25 and beyond will have to accommodate continuing price rises and increases in the need for critical services across integrated adult social care and children's social care. The impacts of those price rises and demand pressures were included in the 2023/24 budget. Looking ahead to 2024/25 and subsequent years, ensuring that the Council remains financial sustainability will continue to be an ongoing challenge and our highest priority.

The approach taken to setting to 2024/25 budget and strengthening the medium-term financial strategy will therefore be to achieve better value for money within the financial envelope so as to avoid, as far as possible, the need to make annual reductions or cuts in services. This approach will require some radical changes over the next twelve months:

- **Staffing** – the total number of full-time equivalent staff employed in 2017/18 was 3,845 and the figure for 2023/24 is 5,277. There is a need to reduce staffing costs over the next twelve months in order to make significant savings. There will be more opportunities for staff to use their skills, train to re-skill to create an agile workforce, responsive to areas of priority. The employment of people to roles on an interim, agency and consultancy basis currently imposes significant additional costs. The number of interims, agency staff and consultants will need to be substantially reduced to a level comparable with similar county area local authorities.
- **Contract management** – the council has about 330 contracts with a wide variety of suppliers and providers. Opportunities will be taken to cease contracts where services are no longer needed or can be secured in a more effective way and where termination costs can be avoided. All contracts are being reviewed, managed and monitored to secure the best possible value for money.
- **Efficiency of services** –enabling people to use and access services digitally improves value for money. The work to make more services available in ways that best suit customers’ needs will continue and develop as part of the Council’s transformation of customer engagement. Using technical and digital solutions to connect service areas and will reduce failure demand, ease pressures on services and offer more choice to service users. The performance of services will be benchmarked with those of comparable local authorities to ensure that the council is learning from good practice elsewhere. Compliance with some policies and processes within some service areas is inconsistent. There will be a rigorous approach to ensuring that processes are adhered to.
- **Income generation and full cost recovery** – there are potential opportunities for the council to generate more income through commercial activities and fees/charges. For projects and activities are externally funded, eg through grants, that the council recovers all the costs of administering, delivering and running the project. The costs-effectiveness of income collection will be reviewed.
- **Use of assets and buildings** – the use of office spaces, including County Hall, is being reviewed to assess the needs of the organisation and ensure that spaces are suitable for different ways of working. It is anticipated that this will lead to a reduced requirement for office space and lower running costs. The estate review will create opportunities both to generate income and increase community benefits.

3.3 People strategy

The People First strategy was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 14 June 2023. Members will recall that its aim is to put “people and relationships at the heart of everything we do. We aim to unlock the potential in every individual and to collectively support teams and service areas to deliver the best outcomes for the people of Devon. We are ambitious for our people and will empower and enable them to use their skills and knowledge to shape Devon County Council's future”.

Through this strategy the Council’s workforce will be able to address the Council’s priorities, so that Devon is the best place to live and work. The strategy is structured around the six key themes of: voice, resourcing, wellbeing, belonging, learning and reward.

In addition to the People First strategy, the council’s agreed principles and behaviours create a shared understanding across the organisation about what is expected from staff

and their interactions. The “core principles and behaviours” are included below as appendix 2, they provide a framework for staff and members in terms of:

- Working with everyone in Devon.
- Working with each other.
- Our expectations for ourselves and each other.

3.4 Replacement of key systems (FINEST and CareFirst)

The council's existing finance system, called FINEST, is, in accordance with Cabinet's decision in June 2022, being replaced. The new system will simplify financial management, improve access to financial information, enable better budget management, and ensure consistency. The adult social care case management system (CareFirst) is also due to be replaced and it is anticipated that a contract will be awarded by within the next nine months. The new system will start to come online in 2025 and be complete by 2026. Both of these projects are very complex, and the significant risks associated with them will require careful oversight and management.

3.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Council is committed to challenging inequality and celebrating diversity. Equality, diversity and inclusion is a priority for the Council and this was made evident by the Race Audit in 2021. In February 2023, the Cabinet approved the setting up of an Equality Commission to drive improvement through a refreshed equality action plan and provide political direction and accountability. The Commission will promote the advancement of equality and challenge discrimination in all its forms. The Commission reports to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive and is supported by the Director for Legal and Democratic Services and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team. The Commission will be in place over the period to April 2025.

3.6 Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Devolution Deal

The Government has agreed to conclude a devolution deal covering Devon, Plymouth and Torbay this year. The deal will, subject to consultation, see the establishment of a Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Combined County Authority. It will not require a directly-elected Mayor nor costly reorganisation of existing councils. Devon's District Councils will have representation on the CCA as will representatives from the business and education sectors. The CCA will have new powers and additional funding from Government to tackle priorities such housing, public transport, jobs, training and skills. Functions and resources of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership will be folded into the CCA.

4. Risks

4.1 Background to risk management

Risk management focuses on understanding and evaluating opportunities and threats and making informed decisions about how these are to be managed in order to maximise the efficiency of services in preventing, responding and dealing with risk and opportunity. The authority has a well-established process for identifying and assessing risks.

Internal audit helps provide independent assurance that risks are known, understood and addressed, and that systems and procedures are sound, effective and free (as far as can

be) from waste, error or fraud. The Council's "Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Plan 2023/24" identifies the key corporate and service risks and areas identified as of greatest audit need.

4.2 The most significant risks to the council and its services

The most significant risks identified in the Council's risk register include:

- Successful cyber-attack.
- Failure to prepare a robust budget.
- Failure to deliver priority services as a result of significantly reduced finances.
- Failure to adhere to the statutory SEND code of practice: 0-25 years.

The Audit Committee, which meets quarterly, has responsibility for monitoring the authority's risk management systems. Devon Audit Partnership continues to support and facilitate the development of the council's risk management framework and processes. It is suggested that Cabinet invites regular reports to enable it to maintain an overview of changes in risks and overall risk profile for the council.

In addition, there are four areas that Cabinet may wish to focus on in its consideration of risks: children's social care services, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), highway maintenance, and integrated care & system leadership.

4.2.1 Children's social care services

The January 2020 Ofsted inspection of children's social care services found serious failures in the services provided to children and young people in Devon. The authority continues to work with the commissioner appointed by the DfE and partners to improve services that children, young people and families need. The Improvement Board, which comprises members and officers together with representatives from the Department for Education, schools, the NHS and police oversees the implementation of the "Devon Children's Services Improvement Plan April 2023 - March 2024" which focuses on:

- Change
- Leadership
- Engagement
- Workforce

Ofsted carries out regular monitoring visits to review the quality and impact of services. Its 22 May 2023 summary of its April 2023 stated that:

- The quality of social work practice across Devon remains inconsistent. Most children in care experience delays in securing permanent homes.
- New performance management arrangements, more routine oversight of permanence options and a more open learning culture have resulted in some positive changes and an increased sense of urgency in achieving progress.
- Corporate and political leaders have added weight to the improvement programme financially and by strengthening their own governance arrangements. Crucially, they are engaging partners outside the county council to support the improvement plan, including neighbouring local authorities.

4.2.2 Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Significant improvement is needed in the provision of appropriate support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The SEND Improvement Plan, which is being monitored by the Department for Education, sets out how delivery will be improved and spending brought under control so that the existing financial deficit will be eradicated over an agreed period with DfE financial support. A critical element of that work involves supporting SEND teams and working with schools, academies and the NHS to reduce costly independent sector placements by ensuring there is appropriate local provision for children with special needs in their schools and communities to meet their needs and restore confidence with their parents and carers.

4.2.3 Highway maintenance and management

The highway network is the most valuable physical asset that the council manages and maintains. The council takes a risk-based approach to the management of highway maintenance, including setting policy and strategy, establishment of inspection and condition assessment regimes, determining priorities and programmes, procuring the service and the management of all associated data and information. The council recognises that due to the current level of investment into highway assets, the decline of some roads is unavoidable. The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan and its associated annexes set out the agreed maintenance strategies ranging from “improved condition” through to “safety only”.

4.2.4 Integrated care and system leadership

Responsibility for a range of services for adults and children is shared between the Council and the NHS. The Devon system needs to make significant improvements in reducing waiting times for care and achieve its budget plans. It is making difficult decisions, including fundamentally restructuring and NHS Devon is reducing in size. The work requires detailed joint planning and risk management across the system and delivery of system-wide strategic schemes. It will be vital that work is done collaboratively by building trusted relationships. With the system under great pressure, there is a risk that organisations retrench to an inward focus and that risks decisions being made that simply pass costs and workload to another part of the system or leaves people who depend on services stuck in a circular loop trying to find support. Working together and building good relationships within and across organisations is core to improving services.

5. Directorate/service area plans and ‘People First’ Strategy

The Strategic Plan 2021 to 2025 coupled with the six corporate plan areas of focus, risks and People Strategy will together provide the basis of updated Directorate/service area plans that will be developed over the next three months. Each Directorate/service area plan will be a short document which will cover:

- Vision.
- Priorities.
- Areas of focus.

- Deliverables, outcomes and targets

Legal Considerations

The Strategic Plan and strategy specify how the council will prioritise delivery of its functions and encompasses the council's range of statutory powers and duties. The proposed priorities and activities are capable of being carried out lawfully and it will be for officers to ensure that this is the case.

The Council's Best Value Duty and the requirement set out in the Local Government Act 1999 to "secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness must be adhered to. Poor decision making leads to potential challenge.

The development of a Strategic Plan, together with its delivery and subsequent monitoring will contribute to the way in which the best value duty can be fulfilled. Monitoring reports to members and actions arising from those reports will help to demonstrate that the council has undertaken activity to satisfy the statutory duty.

The plan has the potential to impact people who have a protected characteristic for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, the activities that contribute to achieving the plan will be equality assessed in accordance with the council's procedures and where necessary consultation will occur to gain a proper understanding of the impact. If necessary this will be undertaken whilst decisions relating to the activities are still at a formative stage.

The Council has specific Public sector Equality Duties in relation to equalities legislation and these will be addressed and adhered to.

The Council will adhere to its responsibilities in respect of consultation and follow current employment law legislation in relation to the People Strategy.

Impact Considerations

Where relevant, in coming to a decision the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding in relation to the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (for employment), pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation).

A decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage. Climate emergency as one of the priorities in the Strategic Plan underlines the council's commitment to addressing climate change and

to becoming carbon neutral as an organisation. The council's priorities for 2021 – 2025 will have a positive impact on everyone living and working in Devon. The extent of the impact on each protected characteristic are set out in Equality Impact Assessments for each area of work. The exact nature of the anticipated impact will be assessed as part of future plans and on a case-by-case basis.

Name: Director of Transformation and Business Services

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Members for: Policy, Corporate and Asset Management (Leader of the Council); Finance; Organisational Development, Workforce & Digital Transformation.

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Background Paper: Nil

Date

File Reference

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Appendix 1

Devon County Council Plan 2021-2025

Best place

Recovering from the pandemic, and building on the resilience of local people and communities to create a fairer, healthier and more caring place, and grasping the opportunity to create a greener and more prosperous and inclusive future for all

The best place to...

grow up

We are committed to being a child friendly Devon where all children and young people are safe, healthy, ambitious, and can fulfil their potential

live well

We are committed to being a fairer Devon: inclusive, compassionate and caring, where everyone is safe, connected and resilient

prosper together

We are committed to being a greener and more prosperous Devon, with opportunities to create a sustainable future for all

Our priorities

Be ambitious for child and young people



Respond to the climate emergency



Tackling poverty and inequality



Support sustainable economic recovery



Improve health and wellbeing



Help communities be safe, connected and resilient



How we will work...

with each other, our partners, citizens and communities:

We are committed to being:

a trusted council...

that leads and collaborates well, makes good decisions, uses resources effectively and is financially resilient

an inclusive council...

that is intolerant to prejudice and discrimination, invests in, develops and nurtures our workforce, and hears the voices of all our communities

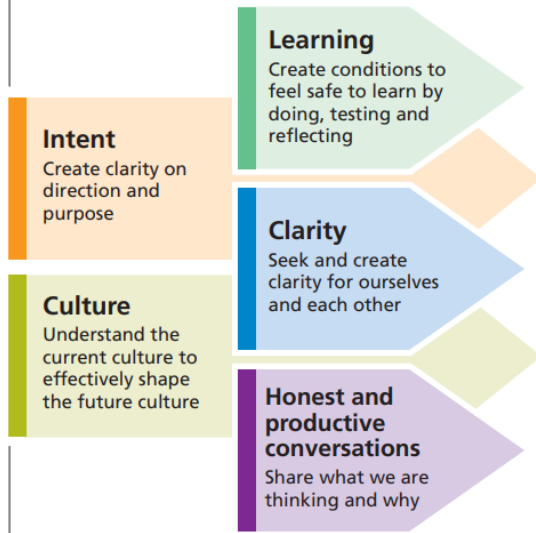
an innovative council...

that listens and learns, uses data well and transforms the way we work in order to improve our services to the people of Devon

Our Core Principles

What we focus on

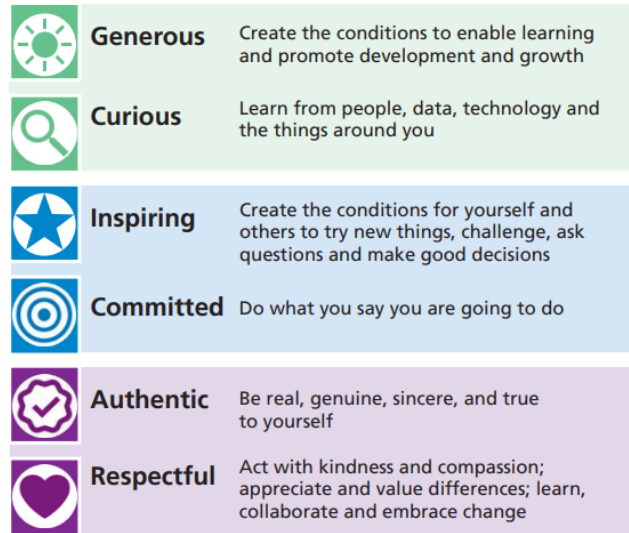
Our core principles outline what we expect from our organisation and the way we work. They lead to clarity on purpose and direction and help us to create a culture of learning.



Our Core Behaviours

Who we are

Our core behaviours outline how we should act and behave in our work and in our interactions with others. They are described in terms of expectations and impact.



Professional skills

Our professional knowledge and skills are the qualifications, experience and expertise we have acquired; they inform our thinking, approach and decisions.