

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **REPORT TO CABINET**

**13 July 2023**

#### **REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND DIRECTOR OF FINANCE DEVELOPMENT & REGENERATION AND DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

### **CABINET DECISION**

**Portfolio Title - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Bob Cook**

**Powering Our Future – Delivering for People, Place and Economy**

#### **SUMMARY**

This report builds on existing programmes of activity, including Fairer Stockton-on-Tees and the Transformation Programme (set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan, agreed at Cabinet in February 2023). It provides further detail about how these initiatives will be achieved, as part of a comprehensive approach to strategic planning, transformation and delivery for the Council.

Following the Council elections in May and confirmation of the new administration, it is timely to set out a refreshed strategic planning process to deliver Members' ambitions for the future of the Borough.

The report sets out how we will bring together existing and planned areas of activity to 'Power our Future', improving outcomes for Our People, Our Place and Our Economy. It is proposed that delivery is based around a long-term Vision for our Borough that is developed collaboratively with communities and puts them at the heart of everything we do.

The recommendations in this report recognise that we are a high performing council. However, in order to maintain excellence and respond to growing community and service pressures, we will need to adapt and accelerate delivery. This report identifies headline Objectives to 'Power our Future', and provides detail on relevant areas of activity including:

Developing a new and ambitious long-term Vision for the future of our Borough. Led by communities and empowering them to identify the place they want to live and spend time. This will begin a new, on-going 'conversation' with residents to set shared ambitions and inform approaches to delivery.

Council Plan – developing a new Council Plan focused on People, Place and Economy. This will provide a framework to deliver the Vision developed with communities, including key deliverables and measurable outcomes. It will drive prioritisation and future service planning.

Working with partners – confirming a shared Vision and developing collaborative approaches to delivery that remove organisational boundaries to meet the needs of individuals. An inclusive and streamlined approach can ensure that we maximise the impact of our shared resources.

Fit for Future – focusing on the areas where we need to do things differently over the short, medium and longer term, including:

- Service Transformations - ensuring that the council delivers excellent and efficient services that are financially sustainable and reduce inequality
- Powered by Communities – an asset based community development approach that works with communities to shape and drive our priorities, actions and monitoring

- through understanding and acting upon: What communities can do best; What communities require help with; What communities need outside agencies to do for them
- Fairer Stockton-on-Tees – the Council’s strategic framework to reduce inequalities, address the underlying causes of poverty whilst focusing activity on our most deprived neighbourhoods
  - Powering our People through Workforce Development – ensuring we have a workforce that is fit for the future by investing in, supporting and developing our staff, attracting and retaining a talented and committed workforce empowered to deliver services and work with communities.

## **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)**

Cabinet is recommended to agree the proposed approach to ‘Power our Future’ to ensure that the Council delivers meaningful impact for communities, and achieves measurable improvements for our People, Place and Economy. This includes reviewing the way the Council operates to ensure it is fit for future.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree the overall approach to strategic planning and delivery set out in this report.
2. Agree the Powering our Future Objectives set out below.
3. Agree the Powering our Future Principles set out below.
4. Agree to a Big Conversation taking place with communities to develop a Vision for the future, from September 2023.
5. Agree a new approach to strategic planning being introduced during 2023 leading to a new Corporate Plan being approved in June 2024.
6. Agree that the Council establishes a Place Leadership Board to develop our approach to joint working with partners.
7. Note progress and agree future plans for the Transformation Programme, focused on Outcome-based Reviews, Service Reviews and delivering improvements in Children’s Services.
8. Note the alignment of Fairer Stockton-on-Tees with the Powering Our Future programme and the medium-term priority actions that will be progressed to address inequality in the Borough.
9. Asset Based Community Development - Agree an approach and programme of work is developed to embed working with our communities and partners in all that we do, based on their strengths and resources - to shape and drive our priorities, actions and monitoring of impact.
10. Agree to the development of a Workforce Strategy and Action Plan to ensure we have a workforce that can support and deliver services which are fit for the future and that a further report be presented to Cabinet.

## DETAIL

1. This report builds on existing programmes of activity, including Fairer Stockton on Tees and the Transformation Programme (set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan, agreed at Cabinet in February 2023). It provides further detail about how these initiatives will be achieved, as part of a comprehensive approach to strategic planning, transformation and delivery for the Council. A programme management approach will ensure that interdependencies between areas of activity are managed effectively, overseen by the Director of Finance, Development & Regeneration and Deputy Chief Executive.
2. The recommendations in this report recognise that we are a high performing council. However, in order to maintain excellence and respond to growing pressures for communities and public services, we will need to adapt and accelerate delivery.

### Evidence of need

3. The cost of living continues to place significant pressures on households, largely attributed to higher food, electricity and fuel costs. Nine of our 26 wards are in the 10% most deprived in the country, and costs will be more acute for these residents, who will typically spend a higher proportion of their income on food and housing.
4. Health inequalities persist in the Borough, and there is an average male life expectancy gap of 21 years between our most and least deprived areas. More of our communities are spending more of their lives in poor health, with all the societal and economic impacts this brings. Rising costs combined with existing disadvantage and vulnerability leave households at risk of hardship and poor wellbeing in the short-term, and reduced opportunity in the long-term. This reinforces the need for our revised and comprehensive approach.
5. The Council has confirmed a balanced budget in 2023/24. However, the financial position over the medium term continues to be extremely uncertain in the context of a one-year financial settlement for local government and inflation. Current projections indicate a budget gap in 2025, although given the uncertainties this position could become even more challenging.
6. The Council has a strong history of forward planning and delivering transformation. This has resulted in financial resilience, which we need to continue if we are to stay ahead of the curve and improve outcomes.

### **Objectives and Principles**

7. Draft headline Objectives for this work are Sustainability, Equality and Excellence. Through our approaches to delivery, we will:
  - Build sustainable communities - economically, environmentally and socially, with equality of opportunity for all
  - Reduce Inequalities: undo, prevent and mitigate the fundamental causes and impacts of inequality
  - Deliver excellent and efficient services that all communities can access
  - Achieve financial sustainability for the Council through delivery of a balanced budget aligned to the MTFP.
8. It is recommended that Cabinet agree these Objectives, which also align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
9. A set of key Principles will underpin activity and should be evident in everything we do. Draft Principles, for Cabinet approval are:

- Empowering communities - understanding our communities and helping them to thrive in the way they choose, focusing on their strengths
- Collaborating with communities – having a new, ongoing conversation to describe what we want the Borough to be like in future and understanding impact
- People centric - removing organisational boundaries to ensure we meet the needs of individuals
- Being Brave and Bold - doing things differently and identifying creative and original ways to make a difference
- Stronger Together - understanding what we can do collaboratively to have the biggest impact.

## **Powering our Future**

10. Powering our Future comprises the following strands of activity:

- A new Vision for the future of our Borough, developed with communities
- Council Plan – a framework to deliver Powering our Future Vision, including key deliverables and measurable outcomes
- Partnership working – a collaborative approach to meet the needs of individuals and maximising shared resource
- Fit for Future – doing things differently over the short, medium and longer term, including:
  - Service Transformations - to deliver excellent and efficient services that are financially sustainable and reduce inequality
  - Communities: Powering Our Future – embedding working with our communities in all that we do (asset-based community development)
  - Fairer Stockton-on-Tees – the Borough’s strategic framework for reducing inequality
  - Workforce Development – ensuring that we have the right people empowered to support and deliver transformation and future services.

11. The following sections of this report provide detailed proposals and updates for individual areas of activity.

## **Communities: Powering our Future - The Big Conversation**

12. It is proposed to start a Big Conversation with communities and stakeholders from September 2023 to develop a Vision for the future of our Borough. This will be a two-way dialogue that enables the Council and its partners to understand what matters most to communities now and in the future.

13. Through the Big Conversation, we will ask communities to tell us about the strengths of their community; some of the challenges facing their community; what they would like to see in their community’s future; what changes they think will need to happen to achieve their vision; and what should stay the same.

14. The Big Conversation will not be a one off – it will be ongoing throughout the development and delivery of our Vision as part of our asset-based community development approach. It will ensure that we set a bold ambition and deliver meaningful impact for our People, Place and

Economy. We will develop a detailed Engagement Plan that will identify key opportunities to engage with communities, along with feedback loops to communicate progress and celebrate success.

15. The Big Conversation will:

- Be collaborative, inclusive and fully representative of our communities
- Proactively target priority stakeholders and groups (including young people to build enthusiasm about their future in Stockton on Tees and celebrating the unique identity of our towns and villages)
- Work with communities to explore alternative and creative methods of engagement – to ensure diverse reach and ownership
- Co-ordinate cross-council and partner approaches to engagement and collaboration as part of our asset-based community development approach – maximising our collective reach, bringing together intelligence and avoiding consultation fatigue
- Empower our staff to be advocates and part of the Big Conversation, using their existing relationships with communities
- Build in methods of benchmarking to track progress.

16. It is proposed that Councillors, as community champions, are advocates for the Big Conversation and lead engagement with residents. Following the production of a detailed Engagement Plan, Members Briefings will take place to confirm the approach over the Summer.

### **Communities: Powering our Future – Asset-Based Community Development**

17. Asset-based community development (ABCD) is a way of working with communities and individuals to build healthier, safer, prosperous and more inclusive communities from the ground up, with citizens in the lead.

18. The ABCD approach challenges a deficit-based approach that tries to solve development problems (development, health and wellbeing, etc.) by focusing on the needs and deficiencies of individuals, neighbourhoods and towns. Instead, it starts from the point of identifying and building on the assets that communities already have (relationships and networks, culture, knowledge, buildings, green space, etc.). ABCD is an approach across partners and communities, rather than a 'project' or 'intervention'. It helps to determine:

19. What is it that communities can do best?

- What do communities require help with?
- What do communities need outside agencies to do for them?

20. There is evidence ABCD works. It aims to help effectively build capacity and resilience in communities, meet need (therefore help manage demand), maximise resource, support a focus on prevention, strengthen partnerships and improve outcomes including from the community's perspective. The approach has been employed in many areas nationally and internationally. It is not a panacea but is proposed as a key tool in collective work to achieve our aims for the borough.

21. Alongside the need and inequality in our borough, we have many strengths as building blocks – such as vibrant, diverse communities; many good quality services and assets; strong partnerships and a vibrant VCSE sector. We also already demonstrate examples (building blocks) of an ABCD approach locally e.g. strengths-based approaches in social care, place development work such as the ‘Healthy Streets’ pilot.
  
22. The Council’s role in ABCD would be working alongside communities to develop our collective approach and the programme of interventions / actions that would fall out of this. As place lead and place-shaper, and convenor across key partners, SBC is well-placed, leading by example to demonstrate the approach for partners. Elected Members and Councillors would be key given their democratic role and insight into local communities.
  
23. The proposal is to adopt the ABCD approach across all that we do as a Council and shaping our work with partners. This will mean embedding how we work with our communities into defining our vision for the borough, developing our strategies and approaches / models of support, right through to procurement and how we measure impact. The approach and programme of work will be developed in a phased way and build on the range of existing good practice locally, as well as being married with the other aspects of the Powering our Future programme.

### **Strategic Planning – Council Plan**

24. It is proposed to implement a new approach to strategic planning during 2023 leading to a new corporate plan being approved in June 2024. This includes:
  - A new strategic planning function in place with the capacity and capability to embed a new intelligence and insight driven strategic planning approach
  - A long term vision for the borough, developed using a new approach to engagement and co-production (as part of asset based community development) and adopted by key stakeholders
  - An underpinning set of principles to enable the Council and key stakeholders to work together towards achieving the vision
  - A new Corporate Plan approved at Cabinet/Council in June 2024, with new vision, priorities, actions and measures (including a new approach to our existing partnership strategies)
  - A new approach to reviewing and monitoring progress against the new Corporate Plan.

### **Partnerships: Powering our Future – Place Leadership Board**

25. It is proposed to establish a Place Leadership Board to develop a Borough-wide approach to systems change and delivery. This group would seek to remove organisational boundaries to meet the needs of our People and our Place.

Senior leaders from stakeholder organisations and groups would:

- Have shared ownership and responsibility to identify a Vision for Stockton-on-Tees – developed with communities
- Understand and jointly respond to the needs of communities
- Develop a shared narrative and speak with one-voice to promote Stockton-on-Tees
  - Empower Communities - building confidence and Pride in Place
  - Attract new investment and talent
- Provide delivery-focused leadership for Fairer Stockton-on-Tees and drive our approach to reduce inequalities

- Drive approaches delivery and collaborate on areas of interest - removing organisational and sector boundaries to meet the needs of individuals and place.

26. The Board will deliver on the strategic direction set by Councillors with a focus on operations and systems change. It will support democratic accountability through governance links to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Cabinet, thematic and regional delivery groups (including: Health and Wellbeing Board, ICB, ICP, Place Committee, TVCA Cabinet).

27. It is proposed that an initial meeting of the Place Leadership Board takes place over the Summer, enabling it to inform approaches to community engagement and develop a vision for the future of the Borough.

28. Membership would include, but not be limited to:

- Public Sector Leaders (including Health, Community Safety and Housing)
- Learning and Skills Leaders
- Tees Valley Business Board representative
- VCSE representative.

### **Change: Powering our Future - Transformation Programme**

29. The Transformation Programme is the central part of our new approach to public service integration, efficiency and innovation. The Service Transformation programme looks to address four main strategic priorities, which will need careful consideration over the next two years up to 2025-2026. These are:

- The Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and future saving requirements
- Addressing demands on services and the resulting pressures
- Understanding and improving performance levels in service delivery
- Addressing workforce capacity in terms of skills, recruitment and retention, and wellbeing.

30. To ensure focus is kept on the four main strategic priorities of this programme, five key aims have been developed to ensure the programme remains within scope and focused on key priorities. It is proposed these are:

- Ensure we are providing the optimum services aligned to the priorities in the Council Plan
- Ensure the services we deliver to residents are done so in the most efficient and effective way to meet need
- To identify financial savings and improve efficiency and performance of service delivery
- Improve outcomes for our community in line with the Fairer Stockton-on-Tees strategic framework for tackling inequalities in the Borough
- Develop a culture whereby transformation is understood, embraced and owned by everyone.

31. The Transformation Programme will consider a range of other factors, including existing strategies and plans, alongside the need to maintain business as usual by providing quality services to the public throughout. The reviews undertaken in this programme of change will need to consider:

- The priorities, aims and objectives of the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Plan
- The existing strategic plans and frameworks already in place, including the commitments made within them

- This includes the principles of the Fairer Stockton-on-Tees strategic framework and an uncompromisable focus on supporting the most vulnerable in our community and addressing inequality
  - The role of a wide range of our strategic and local partners including working alongside our communities
  - In line with our Environment Strategy, reviews will also need to consider the CO2 impact and carefully explore the potential for designing services in a way that benefits the environment.
32. The Transformation Programme by its design, will be cross cutting throughout the entire Council. It will capture all transformation and change work currently on going across the authority, whilst also delivering a range of reviews that are linked to the Medium-Term Financial Plan. To manage the scale of this undertaking, the work programme will be further broken down into distinct sections, each with its own governance, oversight and reporting arrangements with additional support provided in the form of a central programme office.
33. **Outcome-based Reviews** – These reviews cover areas and functions where an outcome based review approach and transformative change is possible. These reviews will consider and challenge the established approach, including operating models, and explore opportunities to do things entirely differently. These reviews will cover areas that are more likely to be cross-directorate and will by their nature be thematic reviews with clear outcomes identified. As such, the focus will be on outcomes delivered, now how Services are organised. Some of these reviews will also align closely with a Fairer Stockton-on-Tees.
34. **Service Reviews** – There will be some areas where there is less opportunity for transformation and these reviews are likely to focus on efficiency in Services.
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35. Members will be aware of the improvement journey in **Children’s Services** and the financial challenges facing the Service. There are numerous initiatives already underway and these will be incorporated into the Transformation and Change Programme to unlock additional support, ensure consistency in governance arrangements and benefits realisation. This will include responding to the findings of the recent Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) and continuing improvement to good and beyond.

## A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees

36. As members will recall, a Fairer Stockton-on-Tees is the Council’s long-term (10 year) ambitious programme for tackling inequalities. Whilst the remit of the programme is wider than poverty, activity over recent months has focused on how the Council can best support its residents facing the challenges of the current cost of living crisis. Examples of initiatives implemented have included:
- Establishing the Cost-of-Living on-line information HUB (<https://www.stockton.gov.uk/cost-of-living-hub>)
  - Establishing an extensive network of Warm Spaces
  - Working with our VCSE partners to support food initiatives, specifically targeted at those in need (over the winter period)
  - Bringing local businesses and VCSE organisations together via a Social Corporate Responsibility (SCR) networking event aimed at maximising the role businesses can play through SCR (volunteering time, services or money) to address inequality.



37. Looking ahead, a number of priority projects have been identified to maintain our momentum in addressing the Borough's inequalities. Given that the current cost of living challenges are unlikely to diminish, a focused area of activity will be an Anti-Poverty Action Plan, which will be co-developed with our partners and those with lived experience (aligning with the Council's 'Powered by Communities' principles detailed above). The Anti-Poverty Plan will focus on how the Council can help both prevent and mitigate the impact of poverty, whilst also building on initiatives recently implemented (for example, enhancing our Warm Spaces). This will be supported by the development and implementation of an Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment Toolkit, which is intended to ensure that all future decisions and policies (taken at all levels of the Council) are 'poverty proofed'. A programme of activity aimed at embedding the ethos of a Fairer Stockton-on-Tees will be undertaken with council service teams to ensure that all colleagues (in their day-to-day roles) understand the role they play in addressing inequality and poverty. This programme will align with the Workforce Development Programme detailed below and will include for example roll out in the corporate employee induction programme and upskilling (where appropriate).
38. One of the key focuses of the Council's approach to addressing inequalities is prioritising deprived neighbourhoods. A local, neighbourhood management model of service delivery will be piloted in the Central Stockton area. This will allow for targeted area work with our partners and local residents. Further updates will be reported back to Cabinet in terms of roll out, lessons learnt and impact.
39. A further focus of activity is reducing inequality faced by identified disadvantages for communities (for example those experiencing acute need or those with additional vulnerabilities). This area of activity is likely to be cross cutting (across multiple Council service teams) and will be progressed through the Transformation Programme. This approach will allow the council to explore and challenge how we operate (as a council and with our partners) to break the cycle of inequality faced by disadvantaged communities and achieve improved outcomes through the potential introduction of new operating models.

### **People: Powering our Future - Workforce Development**

40. Despite a reduction in our workforce of over 20% in the last 12 years, the Council still has a workforce committed to delivering excellent services for Stockton on Tees residents. We are however facing further challenges in terms of workforce capacity and the ability to recruit and retain the skills we need, which is a regional and national issue. It is therefore essential that we now look to invest and develop our workforce to ensure we have a workforce that can deliver the programme of transformation and is fit for the future.
41. It is therefore proposed that we develop a Workforce Strategy to deliver our future plans and ensure that we are putting 'Power in our People'. This will address key workforce issues regarding capacity, recruitment and retention, skills gaps, and ensure our workforce has the resilience and ability to work differently.

### **COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS**

42. Improving outcomes for communities and reducing inequality is at the heart of proposals set out in this report. Delivery approaches will consistently:
- Empower communities - helping them to thrive in the way they choose, focusing on the

- strengths of communities
- Collaborate with communities – ensuring communities shape Borough-wide ambitions and approaches to delivery
- Be people centric - removing organisational boundaries to ensure we meet the needs of individuals
- Identify creative and original ways to make a difference for communities.

43. A Community Impact Assessment will be undertaken for individual areas of work as required.

## **CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS**

44. There are no direct Corporate Parenting Implications as a result of this report. Where this is relevant to individual areas of activity, a separate Cabinet report will be brought as appropriate.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

45. The transformation and change programme is required to deliver savings outlined in the medium term financial plan. The costs associated with the strands outlined in the report are yet to be determined but will be within existing resources.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

46. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

47. This report sets out the long-term approach to strategic planning to deliver improved outcomes for the residents of the Borough and to meet the financial challenges faced by the Council. The report includes recommendations to implement several supporting and enabling programmes that will reduce the risk of not achieving improved outcomes and the financial challenges from MEDIUM to LOW.

48. Regular monitoring of the content and delivery of the programmes will be undertaken to ensure risk remains LOW.

## **WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS**

49. A Communications Plan is being developed as part of Powering our Future delivery. This will include:

- Cabinet briefings
- Members Seminars (all wards)
- Policy Workshops
- Councillors shaping Community Engagement approach.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

50. A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees: A strategic framework for reducing inequalities in the borough: Report to Cabinet 15 July 2021.

51. A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees: A strategic framework for reducing inequalities in the borough – post engagement final draft: Report to Cabinet 14 October 2021  
A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees (FSOT) Next Steps: Report to Cabinet 21 April 2022.

52. Medium Term Financial Plan Update and Strategy: Report to Cabinet February 2023.

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