



## Cabinet

Item  
**7(i)**

2 September 2020

<b>Report of</b>	<b>Chief Operating Officer</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Rory Doyle</b> ☎ 507855
<b>Title</b>	<b>The Better Colchester Strategic Plan 2020-23</b>		
<b>Wards affected</b>	all wards		

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report concerns the draft Strategic Plan 2020-23 (attached). The Strategic Plan sets the priorities for the borough and the Council for the next three years. The current Strategic Plan was published in February 2018 and is set to run to 2021.
- 1.2 A report was taken to Cabinet in March 2020 to approve the Better Colchester Strategic Plan 2020-23. The report set out the need to update the current plan in light of the new Strategic Priorities agreed by Council and the declaration of the Climate Emergency in July 2019. The Plan set out how the Council will address the key challenges facing the borough through five strategic priority themes:
  - Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability
  - Creating safe, healthy and active communities
  - Delivering homes for people who need them
  - Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits
  - Celebrating our heritage and culture.
- 1.3 The Strategic Plan was due to be taken to Full Council with the recommendation that it be adopted and included in the Policy Framework however this was subsequently delayed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.4 The Covid-19 pandemic has presented the Council with unprecedented service and financial challenges changing some of the key financial planning assumptions, and priorities upon which the previous draft Strategic Plan presented in March 2020 was based as a result a review and reprioritisation of priorities has been undertaken as part of the Council's Covid-19 Recovery Programme.
- 1.5 This report outlines a refreshed set of 15 priorities (3 under each strategic theme), taking in to account the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and sets out the key goals by which success will be measured moving forward, together with a clear set of commitments that will be delivered in the first year of the Plan. These will form the basis for the Strategic Plan Action Plan.
- 1.6 The Strategic Plan is one of the core statutory elements of the Council's Policy framework, as set out in Article 4 of the Council's Constitution. It therefore needs to be adopted by full Council.

### 2. Recommended Decision

2.1 To agree the Strategic Plan 2020-23 and recommend to full Council that it be adopted and included in the Policy Framework.

### 3. Reason for Recommended Decision

3.1 To enable the Strategic Plan to be adopted and included in the Policy Framework.

### 4. Alternative Options

4.1 The current Strategic Plan expires at the end of 2020-21 but does not reflect significant new priorities agreed by the Council as part of setting its budget strategy and Medium-Term Financial Forecast. Crucially the current Strategic Plan does not reflect the unanimous decision by Full Council to declare a Climate Emergency or the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.2 A new plan is required and needs to be adopted by the Council. The absence of a relevant Strategic Plan would create a significant risk of the Council failing to identify and deliver on its core priorities.

### 5. Background Information

5.1 The Council's Strategic Plan describes the organisation's view of the main priorities for the borough. It covers a three-year time span, although many of the issues it addresses are long-term in nature.

5.2 In March 2020 Cabinet were presented with a draft of the Better Colchester Strategic Plan 2020-2023. Since then the global Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on our communities, our economy and the Council as an organisation. During this time the Council has been leading the recovery and adaptation of its services and operations under the Recovery Programme. Part of this programme of work included the need to prioritise what's important in the 'new normal'. Being clear about priorities going forward and reprioritising work already underway has been a key part of the budget strategy and the approach to corporate programme management. This includes prioritisation of all existing, new and emerging projects and a reshaping of the overarching Strategic Priorities presented in the plan to Cabinet in March 2020.

5.3 This work has been undertaken and the five Strategic Plan themes are still as relevant, if not more so, since they were presented in March. These themes are:

- Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability
- Creating safe, healthy, and active communities
- Delivering homes for people who need them
- Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits
- Celebrating our heritage and culture.

5.4 Within each theme, three strategic priorities are identified. These priorities have been revised in light of the impact of Covid-19 and the priority statements guide what is important to us and provide a steer on the areas we will focus on. Importantly each priority includes key goals against which success will be measured, with commitments for delivery in year 1 to provide reassurance.

4.5 The plan is written as a strategic-level document, showing the aims and objectives of the Council at a high level, to steer both the organisation's decision making, Covid Recovery Plan and day-to-day management of services. All five themes are connected; they are overarching principles for the way in which the authority will work as a whole – rather than

being seen in isolation, the plan aims to present the themes and priorities as the ethos under which decisions will be made and the direction the authority will travel over the next three years including recovery and adaptation post Covid-19. For example, whilst tackling the climate challenge is a strategic theme on its own, action taken under the strategic themes of 'Creating safe, healthy, and active communities', 'Delivering homes for people who need them', 'Growing a fair economy' etc. will also ensure we are delivering on our climate challenge strategic priority.

4.6 Being a strategic level document means that the detail, 'how' it will be delivered, sits below the Strategic Plan within the Strategic Plan Action Plan, and Covid Recovery Plan.

## 6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

6.1 The Strategic Plan 2020-23 will continue to support the importance of equality and diversity in all aspects of borough life.

6.2 The Equality Act requires councils to have an equality objective, and the new Plan does that throughout its themes and priorities. An Equality Impact Assessment is available to view on the website [here](#), or by following this pathway from the homepage – Our Council>How the Council works>Equality and Diversity>Equality Impact Assessments>Corporate and Improvement>Strategic Plan 2020-23

## 7. Strategic Plan References

7.1 The themes and priorities of the Strategic Plan 2020-23 will be reflected in officer reports to councillors following its adoption by full Council.

## 8. Publicity Considerations

8.1 The Strategic Plan is a key element of the Council's continued external engagement activity. The Council will continue to ensure promotion of strategic activity via new and existing communications channels including direct, in person, in the media, on social media platforms and on its website.

8.2 The Council will communicate at key milestones of strategic projects to promote a strong positive reputation for the borough, with half-year updates on the website.

## 9. Financial implications

9.1 £500k was allocated from reserves in 2019/20 to meet the cost of feasibility and scoping of New Strategic Priorities. In order to protect resources to address the Covid-19 crisis the cost of feasibility and scoping has been contained at £250k.

9.2 July 2020 Cabinet received a finance update on Covid-19 including the allocations set out below.

Revised MTFF (£m)	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
New Strategic Priorities	0.216	0.200	0.333	0.333
Covid Recovery	0.333	0.333	0.333	0.000

9.3 The July Cabinet 2020 report identified a significant budget gap to be addressed in 2021/22 and later years



9.4 The allocation of resources to the Strategic Plan will need to be considered in setting the 2021/22 budget and 2021-25 MTF. It may be necessary to vary the previously agreed allocation for new strategic priorities and recovery in order to balance the 2021/22 budget. Progress on addressing the budget gap will be reported to October 2020 Cabinet.

## 10. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

10.1 Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety remains a key component in this Strategic Plan. This is clearly identified in the 'Creating safe, healthy and active communities' strategic theme, however action on the wider determinants of health, the diverse range of social, economic and environmental factors which impact on people's wellbeing is embedded throughout the Plan.

## 11. Health and Safety Implications

11.1 No health and safety implications have been identified.

## 12. Risk Management Implications

12.1 As action plans to deliver the Strategic Plan 2020-23 are developed, risks will be identified and addressed.

12.2 The absence of a Strategic Plan, or the retention of a Strategic Plan that is no longer fit for purpose, would create risks for the Council failing to deliver on its core priorities and use of resources.

12.3 The introduction of a new strategic plan, one year early, is a direct response to the key risks in the Strategic Risk Register and will ensure that the whole organisation is focused on a clearly understood, single set of priorities.

## 13. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

13.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. This is one of the key reasons why the Strategic Plan needs to be replaced a year earlier than anticipated, to ensure that the Council's Strategic Plan reflects the urgency of this commitment.

13.2 This is clearly identified in the 'Tackling the climate challenge and leading Sustainability' strategic theme, and the priorities and goals within that.

13.3 It is expected that setting out such a clear commitment to the environment and sustainability, agreeing measurable goals and year 1 commitments will enable the Council to deliver real improvement and be held to account.

## **Appendices**

The Better Colchester Strategic Plan 2020-23

New Strategic Priorities – Policy and Research