

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-31



Report Reference C-20-09
Meeting Date 1st March 2021
Agenda Item 13
Prepared by Town Clerk

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In June 2019, the council established a working group to lead on production of a new strategic plan to last to 2031. The early stage of the plan production was to undertake community workshops to identify the issues the community feels the town will face, its suggestions on how to tackle them and to identify areas the community feels need attention.

The initial project timeline was amended in November 2019 due to a delay caused by staff absence. The working group planned to undertake community workshops in early 2020 but these were delayed by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic when the workstream was placed on hold.

1.2 IMPORTANT POINTS TO CONSIDER

A strategic plan is one of the most important policy documents an organisation has and a vital part of ensuring its success. Whilst an organisation can operate without a plan its efficiency is maximised if it has one.

The effectiveness of a strategic plan relies on the buy-in of all key stakeholders: members, officers and the public.

A strategic plan is a tool in managing the council's performance by providing direction to members, officers and partners. Ensuring the successful delivery of the council's strategic aims is a key duty of the Town Clerk and the strategic plan forms a key part of his performance management.

A fundamental tenet of creating an engaged and empowered community is providing opportunity to influence decisions at an early stage, for this reason the current proposal for developing a new plan is to hold early engagement workshops and not to present the community with a written plan.

2.0 PROGRESSION OF NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

The working group met in February to discuss the progression of the new strategic plan and discussed the idea of holding the community workshops virtually on Zoom. Whilst Zoom would enable the majority of the workshop format through use of breakout rooms for 'table' discussions, it would not allow attendees to complete an exercise where they score the council's existing services in terms of importance.

The working group expressed some concern over digital inclusivity of an online workshops, although it was also noted that traditional engagement events, such as those held for the Town Centre Masterplan engagement in early 2020, are not always the most diverse. The working group also discussed whether the community would be readily engaged during the current circumstances. It was agreed that the community meeting held to discuss St John's Wood presented an opportunity to test how successful workshops may be.

The workshops are an early-stage community engagement exercise; following these the council would develop a draft plan which would then be subject to a formal consultation prior to being finalised and adopted.

Four options are presented for consideration; they are not exhaustive nor are they set in stone and members may have variations/alternative routes forward which can be discussed at the meeting.

2.1 PROGRESSION - ONLINE WORKSHOPS

Under this option, four online workshops would be held in May 2021. As per the original plans, two would be 'general' workshops, one would be facilitated with the Knutsford Academy aimed at under 18s and a fourth would be targeted for the Longridge at Shaw Heath community.

The workshops would be promoted in the traditional way with the workshops for Longridge and Shaw Heath supported by posters to encourage attendance and direct engagement with The Welcome.

Alongside the workshops would be an open engagement opportunity for any resident to provide input via the council website or by post/email.

Under this option, the council would adopt a new plan at the start of November 2021.

2.2 PROGRESSION – PHYSICAL WORKSHOPS

Under this option, four workshops would be held in July 2021 when, according to the roadmap set out by the prime minister on 22nd February, such events would be permissible. This is subject to any change to the easing of coronavirus restrictions and may be delayed.

Four workshops would be held as originally planned; two general workshops in the Town Centre, one at The Welcome and one at the Knutsford Academy. This is subject to the venues reopening for external use at this point. Alongside the workshops would be an open engagement opportunity for any resident to provide input via the council website or by post/email.

Under this option, the council would, subject to any delay in the ability to hold the workshops, adopt a new plan at the start of January 2022.

2.3 CHANGE OF APPROACH

Under this option, the council would abandon the early engagement workshops and instead develop a plan for a shorter period, covering 2021-2023. The new council in 2023 would then review the programme and consider the development of the longer-term plan for 2023-2031.

The council would not hold community workshops and would instead develop the plan using established data and internal workshops. The plan would still be put to formal public consultation as

a draft document before adoption.

Under this option the council would adopt a new plan at the start of July 2021.

2.4 POSTPONE

Under this option the council would postpone development of a new strategic plan until the new council term in 2023.

3.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED

Council should determine how/whether to progress with the development of a new strategic plan.