

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE
5th SEPTEMBER 2023**

TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN - REVIEW

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide opportunity for Council to agree arrangements to proceed in relation to an update and review of the Tavistock Town Council Strategic Plan 2019–2023 for a new plan period 2023-27.

2. CORPORATE POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The Tavistock Town Council Strategic Plan sets out the strategic framework and organisational goals and objectives which provide the basis for the delivery of Council services within the plan period. It is underpinned by an expectation that Council will operate with a commitment to economy, efficiency, effectiveness and continuous improvement. Accordingly, all elements of the current Strategic Plan are engaged.

3. LEGAL & RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

There is no legal obligation for the Council to have in place a Strategic Plan. Legal and risk management issues include, but are not limited to, statutory compliance, acting consistent with resources/capacity, reputation/expectation management, partner availability/capacity, potential for Government to legislate to extend (for example enabling application for Government funding streams – currently precluded), or to limit the activities of the sector (for example precept capping). As such the Strategic Plan also sits alongside and shapes aspects of the ongoing assessment of organisational risk.

4. RESOURCE ISSUES

By clearly articulating organisational goals and objectives such a plan provides clarity of purpose and enables the effective allocation and prioritisation of available resources and associated assessments of relative and absolute risk and reward, and to programme work within capacity. Furthermore, it affords the opportunity to set near

and long term goals with clear linkages to organisational performance and risk management processes.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

There are no issues arising directly in connection with this report beyond such themes as may be considered appropriate for reference. However, where projects, workstreams or initiatives are agreed in due course the relevant reports/delivery framework will address these in connection with sustainability/the environment.

6. COMMUNICATION ISSUES

The Strategic Plan provides the means to develop, identify and disseminate the key priorities and purpose of the Council. It is the high level 'business plan' of the Council and the arrangements proposed afford all Members the opportunity to shape and inform content.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Tavistock Town Council, at its meeting on 19th September, 2023:-

- a) agree the review of the Tavistock Town Council Strategic Plan for a further Plan period 2023-27;
- b) endorse and progress the approach as set out in para 3.1 below with a view to completion in the current financial year.

1. BACKGROUND

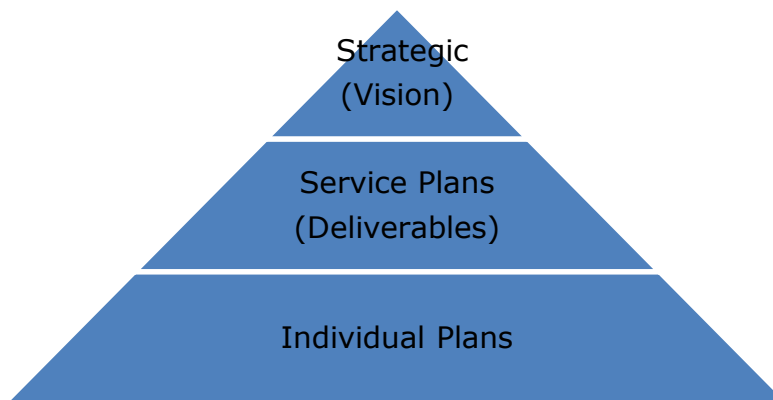
1.1 The Council Strategic Plan (a hard copy has previously been circulated to all Town Councillors) - see also <https://www.tavistock.gov.uk/your-council/council-information/strategic-plan> was last set for the period 2017-21. This identified the four priorities of Democracy, Community, Economy and Environment and established a range of high level objectives for the organisation.

1.2 It was then extended (to 2023) as a result of Covid, reflecting the electoral cycle and, in particular, uncertainty appertaining to income streams arising (see para 1.3 below). Whilst it is

normal to review such a plan on a light touch basis and, more particularly, to undertake a more fundamental review as it approaches its term, it is submitted that it is now timely for the new Council to revisit the document in the round.

- 1.3 Members of the previous Council will recall that the last (interim) review was undertaken in April 2021 when the Council (<https://www.tavistock.gov.uk/meetings/full-council-meeting-26th-april-2021-virtual-meeting>) revisited the Plan in light of extension to 2023 and identified various core areas to progress through to the current year. These additional elements are now in the main well advanced – Neighbourhood Development Plan, averting the closure of Guildhall Public Conveniences, supporting the community in/immediately post Covid, supporting BID Co Ltd re-election, and working with principal authority partners where possible. That report and this document should therefore be read together.
- 1.4 In undertaking a review the Council will no doubt wish to consider matters such as purpose, format and content. That will include linkages to the service planning process. For example, the current Plan is principally targeted at themes and strategic goals. Individual strands or subsets (deliverables) being properly addressed within the service plans which are reviewed against risk, resource and performance on an annual basis representing the Council 'work programme'. In particular please refer to the Corporate Services Plan of the Town Council (see current version available at <https://www.tavistock.gov.uk/meetings/budget-policy-committee-23rd-may-2023>).
- 1.5 The overall approach is thereby configured as a longer term strategic plan supported by the more dynamic annual operational/delivery plan in support of the higher level goals. This model is consistent with that used by larger principal authorities, adopting a holistic approach to enable the integration and identification of the long term and high level (strategic plan) with nearer term operation and delivery consistent with the higher level framework (service plans).

- 1.6 This both reflects and respects the role of service planning and performance arrangements. In the round these afford opportunity for Council to follow a graduated and evidence/plan led approach to organisational performance management. Necessarily these documents (both Strategic and Service plans) can and should be read together as the organisational vision and delivery frameworks.
- 1.7 In diagrammatic terms the Strategic Plan sits at the apex of the organisational performance management system, incorporating (most usually) a mission statement and/or vision, high level priorities/objectives. These then both drive and inform the content of operational service plans and individual staff performance plans. In simple terms:



- 1.8 This recognises that the strategic plan and linking performance management system are not a single system or process in themselves. Rather they consist of a collection of systems, ideas and attitudes which enable the organisation to plan, delegate, assess and review its business effectively. The distinguishing feature is to link the high-level goals and aspirations of the organisation (embodied in the strategic plan), through a series of levels, to the aspirations and work-place objectives of its employees. The 'golden thread'.

2. COMMENTARY

- 2.1 As with other management systems, strategic planning processes have both potential benefits and draw-backs. Benefits can include:-

- Clarification of organisational objectives, enabling a focus on key contributing corporate, service, departmental and team goals. The prioritisation of objectives, clear allocation of accountability for standards, quality and results.
- A means of identifying, developing and conveying collective values about the organisation – something which clearly describes “the business we are in” to customers/community, Councillors, staff and other stakeholders.
- Improved performance through a focus on measures, standards, effectiveness, efficiency and cost, the planning and monitoring of work, objectives and achievement, and the removal of barriers.
- Improved communication for politicians, staff and stakeholders regarding what is wanted, the priority attached and how best to achieve those goals.

2.2 There are, of course, potential draw-backs, not least the need for careful planning and resourcing, and a realistic approach to what the organisation could/should set out to do within environmental constraints. Factors to take into account include:-

- Clarity of political direction – there is a need for accepted and agreed political objectives, clear strategy, organisational direction and continuity of purpose. In particular, the development of a Plan needs to recognise the ‘opportunity costs’ associated with any particular course of action (i.e. ‘if we do this, we may not be able to do that’). Difficult choices may be required.
- Collective values regarding the role and relevance of the Strategic Plan to the performance management system may be weak.
- Corporate planning may be inadequate – broad strategy may need clarifying and political direction may not be embedded.
- Objectives may be vague, unachievable, irrelevant or inequitable
- If associated performance measures and standards do not operate effectively, if monitoring is inadequate or

the organisational capacity (or discipline) to deliver does not exist, time and costs may outweigh benefits.

- 2.3 It is therefore important to recognise that the principle benefit of a Strategic Plan is the clarity of direction it gives to work activity arising from well selected objectives which genuinely advance the policies of the Council. As such the key role is played by elected members in identifying and defining corporate/organisational goals. These are then articulated through the golden thread leading from the strategic to the operational as indicated in the above illustration.
- 2.4 In addition, and wherever possible, objectives (note under current arrangements most often at delivery level these are articulated through the service plans) should be 'SMART' ie



- 2.5 It is also important to recognise that the Council's Strategic (or business) Plan, may or may not be the only high-level plan adopted by the Council (although it should always be the highest). For example there is also the facility for the Council to progress, most typically through working with the community:
- a) A Neighbourhood Development Plan which sets out land use provisions compliant with the local development plan and national planning policy framework (in progress);
 - b) A Town (or parish) Community Plan.

2.6 Simplistically one could describe these three plans, which can serve overlapping but distinct purposes, as:

- Council Strategic Plan - the business the Council is in – what it sets out to do and when (a Council led plan of which the other two can form sub-sets (ie they themselves arise from strategic plan commitments)).
- Neighbourhood Plan - managing and contributing to control of the built environment (can be Council or community led, but the adoption process requires the support of the Council and it is required to be compliant with the higher level planning framework).
- Town, Community or Parish Plan - a long term plan which sets out the aspirations, needs and issues of the community and provides a prospective evidence base to public sector, community and other service providers and decision makers (most usually community led with Council support).

2.7 Whilst such plans are potentially distinct in nature and purpose it is helpful to think about how any review of the Council's Strategic Plan recognises the linkages which could/should be made in the event that it proceeds with one, other or both of the other tools.

2.8 Furthermore the position of the Council has been materially affected since the last full review of the Strategic Plan, not least by:

- Delivery and completion of the Townscape Heritage Initiative Third Party Grant Scheme;
- Delivery and completion of the Guildhall Gateway Centre Scheme (and now prospective 'next steps' regarding delivery);
- The dramatic short-term adverse impact of Covid on Council income streams, and the consequential residual impact on the long term reserve position as well as delays in remobilising;
- Unanticipated emergency capital works – Market Road and the Museum, cost impacts of the Town Hall;

- The potential impact of continuing changes to or withdrawal of services from the town, both by other public authorities and commercial operators (such as banking);
- Wider economic trends with potential to impact on the commercial operating base of the Council eg increased trends to e-purchasing, out of town shopping, cost of living etc;
- Arising from the foregoing item, the potential that past commercial performance of the Council may not necessarily be a guide to the future.

2.9 The final point above reflects that the Town Council, unlike the typical authority in its national peer group, is in terms of income a commercial 'business' first and a precepting authority second (as well as being the single largest custodian of both heritage and commercial assets in the Town). Whilst these roles often align they can come into conflict with one another. Consequently any strategic planning document requires both the flexibility and the rigour to ensure that competing (and sometimes conflicting) interests can be balanced in the public interest.

3. NEXT STEPS

3.1 In order to best support an informed review of the Strategic Plan a three stage process is therefore suggested:

- i) Stage 1, (environment analysis) – a workshop for all Councillors to review the environment as it is now and as it is expected to be. A longstanding model is the PESTLE analysis looking at political, environmental, social, technological, legal and environmental factors that could/should be taken into account. This then feeds into a SWOT analysis looking at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- ii) Stage 2, (formulation) – a workshop for all Councillors, informed by the outcome of Stage 1, to explore and identify achievable priorities for the Council. Depending on levels of consensus one or more workshop activities may be needed.
- iii) Stage 3, (implementation) - amendment of the Strategic Plan to reflect the agreed new Strategic Priorities. Also

Service Plans (when reviewed in April 2024) to include/reflect operational goals/delivery arrangements.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 This report is brought forward to enable consideration of how to take forward the Council's Strategic Plan and, in so doing, whether by way of review/refresh or a more fundamental exercise.
- 4.2 The suggestion being that, as the policy forum of the Council, this Committee recommend the approach set out above to be adopted for the review of the Strategic Plan (being open to all members of Council to attend and contribute) and then reporting back to Council in the usual way.
- 4.3 The instructions of Committee and Council are sought.

**CARL HEARN
TOWN CLERK
TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
SEPTEMBER 2023**