Purpose of Report: To present the 2012-16 Council Strategy.

Recommended Action: To recommend the 2012-16 Council Strategy for approval at Council.

Reason for decision to be taken: The Council Strategy provides the framework around which the Council will shape its resources and efforts over the next 4 years, supporting quality of life for people in West Berkshire whilst continuing to live within our means.

Other options considered: n/a

Key background documentation:
- Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment – Stage 1
- Appendix B – Summary of feedback to the Council Strategy
- Appendix C – West Berkshire Council Strategy 2012-16

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Plan Priorities:

- CPP1 – Support our communities through the economic downturn – to alleviate the impact on different communities and individuals who find themselves out of work and/or disadvantaged
- CPP2 – Raise levels of educational achievement – improving school performance levels
- CPP3 – Reduce crime and the fear of crime

The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Plan Themes:

- CPT1 - Better Roads and Transport
- CPT2 - Thriving Town Centres
- CPT3 - Affordable Housing
- CPT4 - High Quality Planning
- CPT5 - Cleaner and Greener
- CPT6 - Vibrant Villages
- CPT7 - Safer and Stronger Communities
- CPT8 - A Healthier Life
- CPT9 - Successful Schools and Learning
- CPT10 - Promoting Independence
- CPT11 - Protecting Vulnerable People
- CPT12 - Including Everyone
- CPT13 - Value for Money
The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Plan Priorities and Themes by:
Setting the overarching strategic focus for the Council for the next 4 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portfolio Member Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name &amp; Telephone No.:</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-mail Address:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Contact Officer Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
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<td>Job Title:</td>
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<td>Tel. No.:</td>
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<td>E-mail Address:</td>
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**Implications**

**Policy:**
The strategy sets the broad framework around which the Council is able to prioritise its resources. The strategy is central to the operation and planning of the Council and as such will impact on many Council policies.

**Financial:**
In setting the broad framework around which the Council is able to prioritise its resources the MTFS is drafted to reflect the priorities and objectives set out in the strategy.

**Personnel:**
n/a

**Legal/Procurement:**
n/a

**Property:**
n/a

**Risk Management:**
Risk assessments will be carried out on appropriate elements of the plan.

**Equalities Impact Assessment:**
Equality impact assessments will be carried out on key policies and activities arising from this strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is this item subject to call-in?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
Executive Summary

1. Introduction

1.1 The Council Strategy sets out our priorities and a realistic set of objectives that we will deliver for the people of West Berkshire, whilst living within our means.

1.2 It provides the framework for future decision making: prioritising those areas seen as most critical or important and setting out our overarching approach to dealing with the reduction in our resource, whilst keeping the impact on local communities to a minimum.

1.3 The strategy lists a number of strategic objectives which set out more specifically what we are seeking to achieve. These strategic objectives form the basis for our more detailed business, service delivery and financial planning, through which our strategic objectives and outcomes are delivered.

1.4 The draft Council Strategy was published on 18th November and comments invited by Friday 20th January 2012. 23 responses from individual or organisations had been received.

2. Conclusion

2.1 The draft strategy has been amended and discussed at Management Board and is now submitted for recommendation for approval.
Executive Report

1. Introduction

1.1 The Council Strategy sets out our priorities and a realistic set of objectives that we will deliver for the people of West Berkshire, whilst living within our means.

1.2 It provides the framework for future decision making: prioritising those areas seen as most critical or important and setting out our overarching approach to dealing with the reduction in our resource whilst keeping the impact on local communities to a minimum.

1.3 Reflecting this prioritisation, the Medium Term Financial Strategy allocates our available resources focussing on those determined as most critical in supporting our priorities and statutory responsibilities. This, in turn, will determine the level of service we will realistically be able to provide in different areas, be they excellent, good or adequate.

1.4 We recognise that we cannot achieve these objectives alone and we will continue to work with partner agencies and voluntary and community partners, communities, parish councils and the business community, developing the localism agenda in West Berkshire. As such, this strategy is aligned to the wider strategic aims within the Sustainable Community Strategy.

1.5 The strategy lists a number of strategic objectives which set out more specifically what we are seeking to achieve. These strategic objectives form the basis for our more detailed business, service delivery and financial planning, through which our strategic objectives and outcomes are delivered.
2. Background

2.1 The policy, legislative and financial landscape has changed significantly since the advent of the old Council Plan in 2007.

2.2 This new Council Strategy replaces the Council Plan. It has been significantly streamlined from the old Council Plan. It defines the overarching vision and core purpose of the Council and lists 4 priority areas, where efforts and resources will be focused, underpinned by a set of clear principles which help guide how we will approach the future:
2.3 A number of strategic objectives are contained within each priority area and principle which set out more specifically what we are seeking to achieve under these broad headings. These strategic objectives form the basis for strategic and operational service planning and delivery, which will realise the ambitions laid out in the strategy.

3. Summary of external comment received

3.1 The strategy was developed over the course of the summer 2011. A draft version was published in November 2011 and comment invited from residents, businesses and partners with an interest, over an 8 week period.

3.2 The purpose of publishing the strategy and inviting comment was four fold:

(a) to disseminate the key messages about the Council’s strategic approach to service delivery and design and the strategic objectives we are seeking to achieve;

(b) to offer the opportunity to all / key partners / stakeholders to comment;

(c) to elicit broad feedback on those messages;

(d) to assure ourselves on the adequacy / efficacy of the strategic objectives.

3.3 The draft Council Strategy was published on 18th November with comments requested by Friday 20th January 2012. (This was concurrent with the exercises eliciting feedback on a number of savings proposals for the 2012/13 revenue budget.) A feedback form was provided guiding responses in relation to the key elements of the strategy.

3.4 The westberks.gov.uk/councilstrategy link was posted on the Council’s homepage and on the West Berkshire Consultation Finder database – the latter automatically notifying registered consultees by email (there are currently over 340 registered consultees on the database). An email was sent to over 950 members of the West Berkshire Community Panel and the Leader of the Council wrote to key partners, VCS organisations, parish councils and parish planning groups inviting people to view and offer comment on the strategy.

3.5 23 responses were received from individual or organisations. 10 responses were received from organisations:

- Compton Village Hall committee and Compton Elderly Day Centre
- Greenham Common Trust
- Newbury College
- Newbury Town Centre Partnership
- Newbury Town Council
- North Wessex Downs AONB
- Stroke Care for Newbury and West Berks
- Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Thatcham Town Council
- West Berkshire Liberal Democrat Group
3.6 Anonymised, verbatim responses are provided as appendix B. Below, are listed some of the key points:

- No disagreement or objection was forthcoming to the overall thrust and prioritisation of the strategy.
- However, one respondent noted the vision and purpose could be more positively and dynamically presented.
- Another noted that a useful additional purpose could be ‘helping you to help others’, developing the localism theme in a more explicit manner.
- One respondent noted that the Council should explicitly cite that resources committed are proportionate to the outcome and that it should not utilise resources unless they add value to something explicitly of value to the community.
- One partner suggested that a greater emphasis was needed on inward investment to support a vibrant district and that the post-16 education and training objectives could be broadened out beyond schools.
- A point was made that more emphasis could be explicitly given the role of the VCS and parish councils in contributing to our overarching objectives.
- Another partner suggested that it would be useful to extend scope of developing infrastructure (i.e. transport, comms and utilities) to the sub-regional level.
- The same partner also suggested that our developing skills objectives could be emphasised more at the sub-regional level.
- A respondent noted that more emphasis could be placed on older people - care centres and homes for the elderly.
- Another suggested that more emphasis should be placed on rural areas – public transport and fly-tipping.
- It was suggested that maintaining footpaths should be seen as a priority as well as roads themselves.
- An explicit objective around health should be captured under the education priority.

4. Conclusion

4.1 All substantive comments have been reviewed by officers and members. Where appropriate the draft strategy has been amended and discussed at Management Board. The 2012-16 Council Strategy is now submitted for recommendation for approval.
Appendices

Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment – Stage 1
Appendix B – Summary of Feedback to the Council Strategy
Appendix C – West Berkshire Council Strategy 2012-16

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: Local residents, businesses and partners as per process outlined above

Officers Consulted: TEB, Corporate Board, Heads of Service, Portfolio Holders, Directorate and Service SMTs, all Council Officers via Reporter.

Trade Union: As per process outlined above
Equality Impact Assessment – Stage One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of item being assessed:</th>
<th>2012-16 West Berkshire Council Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Version and release date of item (if applicable):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner of item being assessed:</td>
<td>Jason Teal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of assessor:</td>
<td>Jason Teal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of assessment:</td>
<td>24th January 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. What are the main aims of the item?

The Council Strategy sets out the purpose, ambition and strategic direction of West Berkshire Council. It focuses on 4 key priorities areas, underpinned by a set of principles, outlining how we are approaching and responding to changes in the policy, financial and legislative landscape. Each of these contains a set of strategic objectives which sets out more specifically what we are seeking to achieve. These will from the basis of our corporate business plan and service delivery plans.

2. Note which groups may be affected by the item, consider how they may be affected and what sources of information have been used to determine this. (Please demonstrate consideration of all strands – age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Affected</th>
<th>What might be the effect?</th>
<th>Information to support this.</th>
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</table>

Further comments relating to the item:

The Council Strategy contains a number of strategic objectives across the priorities and principles that the Council will be seeking to achieve over the next 4 years. The strategy does not go into the detail of how these objectives will be achieved: they are embedded into individual service delivery and cross-cutting plans, within which more particular issues of design and provision will be addressed.

Equality impact assessments will be carried out on key policies and activities arising from this Council Strategy and the impact of these different strands of work and resources will be considered individually as they come to light, for example, as part of the service planning and delivery process, budget setting and service or delivery design and tailoring.
3. **Result** (please tick by clicking on relevant box)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevance Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Relevance</td>
<td>This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Relevance</td>
<td>This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Relevance</td>
<td>This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Relevance</td>
<td>This <strong>does not</strong> need to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment</td>
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For *items requiring a Stage 2* equality impact assessment, begin the planning of this now, referring to the equality impact assessment guidance and Stage 2 template.

4. **Identify next steps as appropriate:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage Two required</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owner of Stage Two assessment:</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Timescale for Stage Two assessment:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage Two not required:</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Name:** Jason Teal  
**Date:** 19th January 2012
APPENDIX B

Feedback on 2012-16 West Berkshire Council Strategy

Overview:
23 responses received from individuals or organisations. Specific organisations who contributed their views were:
- Compton Village Hall committee and Compton Elderly Day Centre
- Greenham Common Trust
- Newbury College
- Newbury Town Centre Partnership
- Newbury Town Council
- North Wessex Downs AONB
- Stroke Care for Newbury and West Berks
- Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Thatcham Town Council
- West Berkshire Liberal Democrat Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching vision</th>
<th>Do you have any comments specifically on our overarching vision to ‘make West Berkshire a great place to live, learn, work and do business in’?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree with vision</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We support vision statement, in particular the reference to “doing business”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We support this vision. 74 per cent. of West Berkshire lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, making highly unusual</td>
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<td>among local authorities. This is recognised as one of the UK’s finest landscapes, with the same status as a National Park. It is also recognised by the</td>
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<td>International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as a Category V Protected Landscape. Along with all responsible bodies, the council has a legal</td>
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<td>duty under the s. 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to have regard for the purposes for which AONBs are designated: to conserve and</td>
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<td>enhance their natural beauty. We therefore hope that conserving, enhancing, celebrating and promoting the North Wessex Downs AONB will form a</td>
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<td>central part of fulfilling the council’s vision.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(j) Overall we are in agreement with the vision, the purpose, the priorities and the principles, but it is in the detail of how services are delivered which is</td>
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<td>the key. (k) There is very little specific mention of Newbury, even though within the parish there are around 20% of the entire population of West</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Berkshire. (l) There is very little specific mention of parishes, and where there is it sometimes looks like an afterthought. (m) Perhaps there should be more</td>
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<td>somewhere about informed direction on Localism, as we are concerned that there is a vacuum building. There is just one mention of “promoting”</td>
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localism. (n) As always at strategy level there are conflicts – more vibrancy can mean more congestion – more revenue may mean unpopular parking charges etc...

- Good summary and I agree with the sentiment. It would read better grammatically however if it was ‘Making West Berkshire a great place in which to live, learn, work and do business’
- This suggests that West Berkshire is not already a great place to work rest and play. Should the word “keep” be used instead? Especially as in Understanding West Berkshire we state “Not, surprisingly, West Berkshire is a desirable place to live”.

- A well stated vision
- Think the aim is first rate. Its clearly been thought about and ironically almost matches one we came up with for our residents association. In effect, it means turning West Berkshire into somewhere people aspire to be. Its clearly implicit that this includes all people.
- I have no real comments. As you say, the current economic climate is extremely harsh and West Berkshire seems to be doing very well in the circumstances and has some momentum. The challenge is not to lose that momentum but to keep it moving forwards.
- The overarching vision should be expressed a little more positively and dynamically e.g. 'To grow and maintain West Berkshire as a vibrant, prosperous and caring community for all its people'.
- As would be expected.
- I have no objections to the vision. However, I feel that it is not so much a vision as a broad description of the Council’s role. It does not really give an indication of what should be different in West Berkshire compared to anywhere else. It also does little to help the process of choosing between any particular objectives or actions. I appreciate that it is very hard to come up with a vision that does that, but it would make it a much more useful document. The vision, while talking about making the place better overall, is silent on the distribution of benefits. I would like, for instance, to see the council wishing to help reduce inequalities in health and wellbeing (which is an objective of the Government and other political parties).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core purpose</th>
<th>What do you think of the core purpose of the council. Does this sufficiently capture what the point of a council should be?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Largely, the core purpose captures the point of the council although I would like to see a greater emphasis on inward investment. A vibrant community needs to be sustained by an economy which continuously encourages and promotes the area to new businesses and current business growth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Possibly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We support core purpose, in particular the reference to “employers” in the third part of the Core Purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>We see #2 as vitally important and have concerns that some of our members are already indicating that they cannot afford increased fees for our services should funding be withdrawn. If they don’t receive the benefits of our services (various rehab exercises) it is highly likely that they will plateau / decline and become an increased burden on the state / society.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We would comment that, in addition to its local responsibilities, West Berkshire Council has an important regional and national role to play. The national and international status of most of the area’s landscape and the settlements within it means that, as a leading member of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners, the Council shares with the eight other local authorities in the North Wessex Downs a duty of stewardship and care for the landscape on behalf of the entire nation.</td>
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I don't have objection to what's stated, but I do wonder if it is a little narrow. The three stated purposes are all very much people focussed. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but the council does have a function in delivering a better 'place' for people to live in, conserving the best of what we have and ensuring we develop in a sustainable manner where we build new. This appears to be reflected by the recent SMR decision to build a Departmental structure around 'people' and 'Place', but not in the Council's 'purpose'.

Overall I think it is a good, high level document, if a little inconsistent. Incidentally, although we seem to be adopting a 'people first, things second' approach, the public demand for us to build or maintain things doesn't seem to be reducing! Public expectation seems as high as ever.

I agree the three points you've chosen are a good balance between different elements of what the Council should do. Only weakness is with the categories listed in No.3, ie communities, people and employers.... 'People' obviously applies to everyone, so why is it included here – is it used to mean residents, visitors, employees, or all individuals? Or, if employers are going to be singled out as a category different from 'people' why not change this word to 'businesses' if that is what is meant.

With regards to the purpose the third emphasis “promoting and acting in the interests of communities, people and employers of the district” is not copied into the accompanying text which talks about the “promoting and acting in the interests of the district” which is a subtly different thing. The third purpose should be changed to “Promoting and acting in the interests of the district for the benefit of communities, people and employers of the district”.

Nothing wrong with the purpose just the execution

Not sure that the emphasis is quite right. Why would I pay council tax so that you can help me help myself? Perhaps 1 Providing essential services required by all stakeholders in the community 2. Helping you to help yourself 3. Helping you when you cannot help yourself

I can see nothing wrong with the strategies, they are about right and someone has clearly thought them through. So I can’t add any other relevant comments.

A useful addition to the three points would be: ‘helping you to help each other’. There is a lot we can all do, as friends, neighbours and citizens, to help the local community (whether by helping neighbours, volunteering or not dropping litter), but it often needs a catalyst, facilitation or other support to make it happen and keep it sustainable. This would be a way in which the council could help make ‘The Big Society’ a reality. Another important way in which the Council can achieve its objectives is through co-production. It is not just a matter of ‘helping you to help yourself’ or ‘helping you when you cannot help yourself’, but of working together. This is partly a way of doing things (building ‘self-help’ into services) but also an attitude of mind: seeing clients/beneficiaries and the council as equal partners. (This is covered to some extent under ‘principles’ but perhaps should be here as well.)

The core purpose of the council should be to spend the money that it has available to it for the maximum benefit of the people who live in West Berkshire. The maximum benefit is defined as those things that best help the most deserving and vulnerable in the area, children, the elderly and the disadvantaged, as well as providing core services such as refuse collection. If the Council can achieve this, it has succeeded in its role as the servant of the people. This could also be more positive and I suggest: ‘To guide and assist the people of West Berkshire to achieve their legitimate goals by 1 -, 2-, & 3 -, (as given)’.

Yes I would agree
The strategy identifies 4 priority areas, within which are a set of strategic objectives which we will seek to achieve over the next 4 years. Are there any additional objectives which you consider we should include, under any of the 4 broad priority headings?

- Promoting and acting in the interests of local employers is a key to promote inward investment.
- We support the four priority areas identified. We have a particular interest in the sections headed “Promoting a vibrant district” and “Improving education” and “Protecting the environment”. We particularly support the objective of working with parishes to delivering broadband in the Infrastructure section, and the references to economic development and work with regional partners in the supporting business section.
- We think the Protection of the Environment is essential and very welcome. We support the emphasis on focussing development to conserve the countryside. Nonetheless we think that the approach outlined in the Strategy is more passive and reactive than it should be. West Berkshire should aspire to be more positive and ambitious about its fabulous environment. We suggest extending Protection of the Environment to embrace the dynamic objectives of environmental restoration and enhancement, both of which the Council has long supported through a number of local activities. This could yield great benefits for the prosperity and well being of the local community as well as better enabling the Council to fulfil its s.85 duty toward the AONB.
- Caring for and protecting the vulnerable: (o) - no mention of play ground facilities – e.g. 14 of NTC’s 15 provisions have been renewed in the last 8 years. There should be more emphasis on the parish role.. (q) - should there be more mention of recreational facilities – e.g. football / tennis etc – something else that parishes are involved in (or are parishes still seen as a competitor – rather than a partner - in that field?)
- Promoting a vibrant district: (r) - more recognition of the role of parishes is needed – Newbury already does a lot for business promotion, even though all its revenue comes from the community, and none from business. The bullet referring to “regional partners” should say “local and regional partners” (s) - there should be more trust in the community – e.g. there should be greater parish or community involvement in the Newbury Town Centre Task Group, rather than the current 100% secrecy policy (t) - the bullet on the Newbury Vision would be better written as “Completely review the Newbury 2025 Vision in conjunction with the whole community to ensure a community-wide agreed vision”. As it stands, it suggests it is entirely owned by the district council. (u) - we strongly support the “balance” requirement defined in the planning section. (w) - may not be the right section – but there is no mention of air quality – perhaps should be added to the “Healthy Lives” item (perhaps there should be a separate health item in the “vulnerable” section) (x) - there should be more emphasis on tourism – the BID may help in Newbury – but there is nothing about the District Council taking an overall lead / co-ordination role? (y) - there isn’t enough follow-up on the Active Travel / Smarter Choices aspects of the Local Transport Plan – the car is still seen as king.
- Improving education: (z) - The town council is particularly interested in building and maintaining relationships with local schools, one way of which is the nomination of “link members” on Governing Bodies. (aa) - There seems to be no recognition of impending rising of the participation age
- Protecting the Environment: (cc) – historic environment and heritage item should particularly mention Conservation Area Appraisals and Local Listing
- I believe that the 4 identified priorities do capture the key areas that we should be focussed on.
- Transport gets a mention in the 'Promoting a vibrant district' section. Shouldn’t we mention our transport aspirations as set out in LTP3 ? These include public transport support. Of the 6 bullet points under Infrastructure, housing is mentioned 4 times, broadband once and roads once, yet the road network is the largest asset the Council has. The reference to roads is fine but there is no mention of how street lighting supports community safety or how a well maintained road network supports the local economy. Similarly our cycle training and walk to school programmes support a healthy lifestyle.
- No, I think the balance of these 4 is about right
- There is a lot about children, quite rightly, but not very much about old people. The mark of a civilised society is how it treats its elderly and I wouldn’t...
argue with anything that you say. However, it is not possible for all old people to be looked after in the community, by carers, so I feel there should be a bit more emphasis on care centres and homes for the elderly. A Vibrant District: The only mention of rural areas is to help provide broadband. I feel that there is more that could be done such as improving rural bus services and a more proactive approach to preventing fly tipping. Improving Education: Fine

Protecting the Environment: I refer you back to my earlier comment about fly tipping, which seems to be on the increase.

Are there any strategic objectives within each of the 4 broad priority headings that should not be considered as key?

- In respect of “Older people and vulnerable adults” we are concerned that we still seem to be in a “review” status - time is critical to forward planning for any charity and there is a need to know where we stand on funding. Any change to funding needs to be giving a good extended period of notice.

Within each of the objectives, are there any implications that you think we should be / or think we may not be aware of?

- The Council should consider the importance of working with post-16 education and training providers and not just schools. From 2013 young people will stay in education, training or work with training up to 17 years and from 2015, this will be up to 18 years.

- We see the development of infrastructure for transport, communications, and utilities as an issue that is best addressed through partnerships at sub-regional and regional level. We welcome your reference to local enterprise and inward investment being developed in regional partnership and suggest that this scope should be widened to include these infrastructure matters. In a similar vein, we welcome the reference to the development of skills for key business sectors in the section on Higher and Adult education, and our experience is that success in this area will be most easily achieved by working in partnership at sub-regional or regional scale, and suggest a similar amendment. We support the identification of protecting the environment as a key objective, as the quality of the environment is a key attribute of the Thames Valley Berkshire area.

- Having a vibrant district also depends on supporting the vulnerable – perhaps education also has a part to play in supporting the vulnerable.

- Caring for and protecting the vulnerable: (p) - we are not convinced that outsourcing youth service provision is the right route

- There is concern in respect of the strategy’s section on the provision of supported care within sheltered schemes and the protection afforded to vulnerable people. it is understood that within the consultation process there is the proposal to not support people who at present require level 1 or level 2 support. The Town Council would like to express concern that a way needs to be found to make sure that these residents have a way of being monitored so that care needs can be assessed.

- Whilst I welcome the commitment to ‘provide a responsive planning service with a clear policy framework that balances protection of the environment, economic development and the housing needs of local residents’ I’m surprised there isn’t a little more here about empowering local communities to play a full role in the Planning system (reflecting the new requirements of the Localism Bill). I welcome the commitment to ‘ensure the protection and promotion of our historic environment and heritage’. Despite the current economic situation we must not lose sight of our responsibility to hand on a natural and historic environment that has been appropriately protected and enhanced to future generations, so that they can they too can enjoy and learn from our world.

- Promoting a vibrant district does’t mention cultural life which I believe is an important element of the area’s quality of life. The Council should continue to provide Cultural Services, albeit with the still greater involvement of local communities and volunteers than already occurs - and this objective is the right place to flag up our critical civic and professional role in overseeing, advising and managing.

- Promoting a vibrant district – Work with our “regional partners”, this seems slightly strange given the Governments aversion to “regional” and the fact that SEEDA is being wound up. The continued work on the “visions,” and links to the existing parish planning might be confused with the “neighbourhood
planning” promoted under the Localism Act 2011 and the two are not the same thing. Also, the Vision work is more than just supporting business. Community Safety contains no mention of continuing to reduce traffic accidents etc... **Protecting the Environment** – “If we want to pass West Berkshire onto our children and grandchildren, we need to do all we can to protect and enhance our environment......” this statement could easily be turned against the Council in relation to the need to provide housing in the district. The recent high level public objection to the Council’s proposals for development at Sandleford Park is a good example. Under the environmental protection suggest the following changes are made: (a) Continue to protect sites of high conservation (biodiversity and geodiversity) value. (b) Develop and enhance the District’s green infrastructure. (c) Work with partners to ensure that the wildlife of the District is able to meet the demands of a changing environment driven by climate change. Under Energy efficiency suggest the following is included: Encourage renewable, low and zero carbon energy generation on major development proposals.

- Continue to reduce the emphasis on traditional day centres. This is inconsistent with the strategic objective and situation appraisal about increasing elderly etc.
- In the Protecting the Environment section, I’m just a bit concerned about the costs involved in reducing carbon emissions. I’m all for doing it but only if the benefits outweigh the costs. So I hope that a full cost-benefit analysis has been, or will be, done before projects on this are implemented. In times of economic hardship, we shouldn’t be spending money on things like this unless there is a positive financial benefit in terms of lower energy bills.
- No, although they should be kept under review as events develop.
- ‘Healthy Lives’ under ‘Promoting a vibrant district’ provides a rather limited view of health and how it could be improved. I would like to see the inclusion of the objective of ‘reducing health inequalities’ (on which I believe there is a cross-party consensus nationally). This should also recognise that health prevention is not just down to individuals, but that there are important ‘social determinants of health’ (see particularly the Marmot report: [http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/](http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/)).

**Within each of the objectives within each priority area, are there issues which you / your organisation could usefully contribute to?**

- We can contribute to the vibrancy of the district through our work with employers. We can improve the educational attainment of the district by being recognised for our high quality post-16 education and we can help protect the environment through our role in educating young people and promoting innovation.
- We recognise the significant, positive contribution the Council has made to maintaining and improving the economic vitality of Newbury Town Centre. We equally recognise the support given in the transition from the loose partnership of the TCP to, a more private sector accountable, BID Team delivering the aspirations of the Town Centre Businesses to further improve and promote Newbury as the place to visit live and visit. We also recognise the contribution made by the Council in the continuing discussion on Destination Management, widening the dialogue to be beneficial to the whole of the District. We look forward to continuing exchanges with you as the BID is delivered and the project progresses.
- Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership is the premier sub-regional partnership promoting growth in the local economy. We are recognised by central government, and are used by government to channel funds into the area. We have identified Skills and Infrastructure as our key priorities, and look forward to continuing our close working relationship with West Berkshire Council in these and other areas of our shared agenda.
- We believe that our group is already playing a major part in supporting the vulnerable and also operating as a partner to WBC
- Yes, we are keen to contribute in any way we can, both directly through the AONB Unit and through the AONB partnership. partners. Clearly, protection and enhancement of the natural and historic environment is central to all we do, but we could also play a unique and important role in education, particularly about the natural and historic environment and rural careers, and in nurturing and promoting a vibrant district. Our current work includes a
major regional initiative on marketing sustainable rural tourism; hosting and supporting the North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme; and supporting a huge range of local action through our Sustainable Development Fund.

- **Promoting a Vibrant District:** (v) - we suspect that rural parish councils may be in a good position to also help re empty homes, rather than just the owners, particularly in early identification. **Protecting the Environment:** (bb) - this is an area where parishes already take a strong lead (parks, trees, cemeteries, allotments etc), but parishes don’t get a mention

- More formal discussion needs to take place with eg advice agencies

- I could be involved - mainly passive, because I've very little free time. However, I think 'we' should be more encouraged to become involved - even if its talking up for the area and what is, after all, our council. That means it would be useful to have some tangible things to do this. Difficult to explain, but for instance, I'm very impressed with the architectural design of Park Way. It so fits the look and feel of the Georgian town and even naturally 'sucks in' Northbrook Street. Yet is a vibrant and exciting shopping area - which makes us very different from the general run of the mill towns.

- I believe CPRE Berkshire Branch should be invited to be involved in measures to protect the environment through its two district groups in West Berkshire, namely Bradfield and Newbury-Hungerford District Groups.

- To maintain the local environment and encourage the use of footpaths please maintain them as a priority, especially those that are most likely to be used for commuting, by children, pushchairs, less abled and adults. Often the paths are so over grown that people are moved very close to fast moving traffic and where surface water often collects making the walk rather off putting, nothing worse than arriving at your destination splashed and dirty. You must encourage walking and leaving the car at home, then make it extremely difficult to walk or cycle anywhere. so you have a conflict with caring for and protecting the vulnerable and not maintaining paths.

### Strategic objectives within each overarching principle

The strategy identifies 5 clear principles which capture our approach to developing, redesigning and providing public services. Under each of these principles we have listed a set of key objectives which details how we intend to work. Are there any additional objectives that should also be included, under any of the 5 broad themes?

- See overleaf re promotion of inward investment and the role of education and training post 16.

- These are not specific enough to be able to comment on. All are open ended with changes possible in the overall policy which can alter due to public opinion and elections.

- **Empowering People and Communities:** (dd) - more detail on how empowerment will happen would be useful (ee) - the resources required to facilitate the development of Neighbourhood Development Plans across all parishes will be significant (ff) - in the past, parishes have been seen as a threat by officers – if they take on more, then officers think they may lose jobs...is it now seen as an opportunity?

- I agree with the 5 Principles identified.

- The overall strategic theme reads a little like WBDC is being bullied by central govt. to roll over and opt out. Absolutely agree with the concept that things can often be better delivered at a local level, and not constrained by central government targets and regulations. To make this happen, there needs to be a substantial rebalancing of revenue towards LAs and away from central govt. This would = higher responsiveness to local needs and more effective targeted spend

- In the first principle, Putting People First, it may be that you can do something more about encouraging people to attend council meetings. I should know where meetings are publicised, but I’m afraid I don’t. You could make it easier for people to know where to look and also to advertise them in places
where you don't now.

- No, these are full enough for now but should be kept under review.
- I would like to see 'healthy lifestyles' introduced into education. Children love playing games with adults, health and safety has intervened, can parents not have a say as to whether they are happy for their children to play physical games, like skipping, hopscotch, ball games in the playground? Just a thought, otherwise I feel we will lose our children to electronic games permanently. Cycling should be introduced into the curriculum as a sport, children who do not necessarily like running an jumping may prefer this to swimming for instance.

Are there any objectives within each of the 5 broad themes that should not be considered as key?

- These are not specific enough to be able to comment on. All are open ended with changes possible in the overall policy which can alter due to public opinion and elections.

Within each of the objectives, are there any implications that you think we should be / or think we may not be aware of?

- These are not specific enough to be able to comment on. All are open ended with changes possible in the overall policy which can alter due to public opinion and elections.
- Empowering people and communities requires dialogue to cement partnerships
- The acknowledgement that volunteers already make a significant contribution to the quality of our communities and our environment is welcomed. I think that it would be inappropriate in a situation where we are asking volunteers to take on more work and more responsibility not to acknowledge the enormous contribution that they already make.
- I think it is important to bear in mind when considering reshaping Cultural Services (Principle - empowering people and communities) and exploring ways of working with partners, etc (Principle - transforming our services to remain affordable) that a strong enabling steer from the Council is essential in making local liaison work. Although current policies may wish that local groups and volunteers get involved (something the heritage community has put into practice for decades), support is needed. In the public interest, this should be full-time, skilled, experienced and professional – and this is often where the officers of the Council are needed and indeed valued. Furthermore there may be situations where local residents do not want (or are unable) to undertake necessary duties, or heritage organisations need core funding in order to act. Some of these questions have been explored in research recently published by English Heritage, Strengthening Civil Society: the Role of Heritage.
- Caution needs to be exercised with regards to the “expanding access to our services online, adopting the digital by default principle and placing a greater emphasis on self-service”. A lot of residents complain that they are not on broadband – hence the requirement for broadband access elsewhere in the Council Plan do we really want to discriminate against our rural communities? As the cost of implementing Neighbourhood Development Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders are still unknown and clarification is needed as to where the burden of cost lies the parish council or the district council, caution needs to be exercised. Under the Live within our means Implement a self funded Development Control service, should central government proposed Planning policy Framework changes be adopted
- In Empowering People and Communities, you talk about transferring services and assets to local voluntary and community organisations. I hope that, by assets, that you mean, ‘finance’. The statement could be seen as merely a way of saving money. If it's beneficial for services to be transferred to local groups, there should also be sufficient funding provided to enable them to carry out their role and providing those services.
- 'Doing what's important well' implies that not everything is being done well at present and how is importance determined? There is always room for
improvement but should not everything be done well?

**Within each of the objectives within each priority area, are there issues which you / your organisation could usefully contribute to?**

- We support the reference to the development of joint-funded solutions to infrastructure investment challenges. We look forward to coordinating investment through the Growing Places Fund, and to mounting successful campaigns for further infrastructure investment in the roads, railways, and utilities. We can also offer to: (a) supply economic statistics where possible, (b) work together to build business engagement in local and sub-regional issues and (c) work together on the economic development evidence base and projects.

- **Making Sure we Deliver** - the diagram doesn’t mention the role of partners in any way – there should surely be at least a dotted line to a separate bubble?

**Anything else to add**

- Is there anything else you would like to comment on that have not had the opportunity to above.

- I would have liked to have seen an acknowledgement of the role of skills in underpinning growth and innovation in the district.

- I have read the document and there is nothing in it that I would strongly disagree with. That is possibly largely because it is at such an abstract level with little that is specific enough to be able to make any constructive criticism.

  There are however a couple of general points that might be worked in. One is proportionality – a commitment that the council will make sure the resources employed are always proportionate to the result to be achieved or the harm to be avoided. Another that the council will not utilize resources unless they are clearly adding value to some interest of importance acknowledged as such by the community.

  One point that comes out is the fact that the things that the public have indicated they think should be cut less are the things that cost most. This makes it very difficult for the council to achieve the savings it needs to make. I believe part of the problem is that the questions have been asked at a very abstract level. It would be instructive to produce a more detailed breakdown of where the money actually goes to see if that produced a different result to the consultation. For example instead of just talking about adult social care in general set out how many people are receiving the support and what the cost is per person by band of cost say £0 - 5k per year and then upwards in £5k stages. Obviously the individuals should remain entirely anonymous. That sort of approach across the different budget heads will provide the public with a much better basis for making constructive and well informed comments. I am sure that this information exists or should exist. If it doesn’t then it should be produced as a matter of urgency so that the council has the information it needs to make properly informed decisions.

  This point ties in to some extent with the strategy aim of focusing on people rather than services. Sometimes the compartmentalisation of services and budgets makes it difficult to get an accurate picture of what is being spent on who which surely must be the starting point for any organization aiming to focus on people rather than instances of service delivery.

- You haven’t stated specifically who, what, where, when or how you propose to make cuts to be able to comment All are open ended with changes possible in the overall policy which can alter due to public opinion and elections.

- We welcome the Council’s draft Strategy. We value the support and active participation of West Berkshire Council as a leading member of the North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership. We look forward to working closely with the Council and the communities of West Berkshire in support of the Council’s vision and objectives.

- We have considered the Council Strategy carefully, and would not disagree with the overarching themes of protecting people, protecting the environment and developing a vibrant district. We take issue however, with many of the statements as to how this would be achieved and there is evidence which
shows that the council is not prioritising this vision as well as it might. The West Berkshire Council Liberal Democrat Group will articulate our views, supported by the evidence referred to, through the normal Council channels including scrutiny, budget setting, Executive and Full Council. We have been alarmed at cuts being proposed that will detrimentally effect vulnerable people in our district and we will be opposing many of these.

- (a) We are pleased that there seems to be recognition of the Localism Act and the need to engage with other partners more effectively in delivering services to the community in the most efficient manner possible.
- (b) We are concerned that many previous offers of help and support from Parish Councils such as ourselves have been ignored or rejected, sometimes with no feedback, but hope we are now at a turning point.
- (c) We emphasise that if we are to be engaged as partners, there has to be plenty of notice; and acceptance that as a small organisation, there may be times when we cannot help. The capacity building that may be required could also take some time.
- (d) Partnership working means that there has to be mechanisms for suggestions in improvement to processes, and feedback to the suggestor as those suggestions are processed.
- (e) The Town Council supports the voluntary sector, but the key difference between the voluntary sector and parish councils must be recognised – i.e. that the voluntary sector have particular interests/agendas (and are very useful in assisting in those areas), while town and parish councils, as elected bodies, cannot pick and chose what to progress – they must progress what the community wants.
- (f) We do have concerns that one purpose of the document is to try and soften the impact of bad news to come – there needs to be even greater realisation of the seriousness of the situation that has been allowed to develop.
- (g) It is far more effective to continually review costs than to suddenly have to make dramatic cuts, e.g. cutting pet projects and spare capacity more quickly – and as an ongoing process.
- (h) We are pleased to see the continued appropriate merging of expertise across the Berkshire Unitaries as that is a potential area of significant saving that does not impact negatively on services.
- (i) There seems to be some confusion on the definition of “place-based”, with the document both suggesting promoting and diminishing in separate sections.

West Berkshire Council’s draft strategy was considered by the Town Council and generally accepted. However, there was a concern in respect of the strategy’s section on the provision of supported care within sheltered schemes and the protection afforded to vulnerable people, details of which are given above.

The Foreword is a very useful statement and is the only place where the four priorities are cross referenced with the overall objective, illustrating how these things are mutually supportive. This actually need to be stressed a little more clearly in my opinion to show that the priorities are not just a random snapshot of activities/issues, but actually work together to deliver the broader plan. I’d also suggest a minor change (see below), to reflect the fact that the districts ‘environment’ is not just the green stuff; our built environment is equally important and has many special qualities. This is a more accurate reflection of what comes later in ‘Protecting our environment.’ - ‘Our vision is to make West Berkshire a great place to live, learn, work and do business in. We want the vulnerable in our communities to be protected and supported. We want to promote a vibrant district and our economy to prosper. We want our young people to fulfil their potential. We want people to be able to treasure and enjoy the special qualities of our towns, villages and countryside.’

It seems to me that in these times of restraint, the vast and wasteful effort you plan to extend on “Equality Monitoring” is most definitely not a productive use of funds. It seems from reading through the "Including Everyone" document that there is to be further, wholesale monitoring of employees and members of the public over race, sex, sexual orientation, religion etc. etc, EXTENDING the scope beyond the already ridiculously wasteful levels in place. This seems to be nothing more than keeping a lot of staff busy and ticking boxes for no real reason other than spending money, as well as spending disproportionate sums on trendy or vociferous minority interests. In the meantime, you have closed down various facilities used by the elderly and disabled, look to take away support grants for home care and so on. This fixation that the entire public sector has on extending the remit of "equality" is a complete waste of money under the current climate as well as downright intrusive.

The Council seems to be hell bent on destroying the living environment for residents. The decision to allow 1500 houses plus hotel etc without any consideration of the impact upon those who already live there will be chaos on the roads and the rest of the infrastructure, which is not being improved will not be able to cope with the increased demand. The decision to allow the showground to build a huge cattle shed in direct defiance of the regulations
covering AONBs and the Council’s own planning officers, and there are other examples of poor planning Parkway Sandleford developments just for two

- Well done on producing a readable strategy document.
- The strategy is thoughtful and achievable even in these straightened times. Whilst some of the decisions will need to be hard, because of spending cuts etc. I suspect the Council might emerge stronger and better respected. Particularly if it properly takes a lead and keeps us informed even when decisions are unpopular. For instance, we had to shut the Museum, its taken a fair time to sort. Must admit, I would have like to have seen a quick fix, however, the permanent solution looks as if it will give us a far better and much more attractive facility.
- Nothing else. The strategy looks very comprehensive and an extremely good basis for the future. As always, the hard bit is implementing the strategy for the benefit of everyone who lives in West Berkshire. I wish you success in that.
- This is a very worthy document and I am grateful for the opportunity to comment on it. The authors are to be congratulated. I have little to add and my remarks simply apply to the wording in some places. My only other points in this vein are: 1. The statement ‘West Berkshire is a great place to be’ in the section ‘Understanding West Berkshire’ might be difficult to understand by those in the ‘pockets of relatively high deprivation’. 2. I struggle to see from the graph how £56m is spent on adult and children’s social care.
- Focus on carrying out essential highways maintenance…. I realise the budget is very small compared to other areas of expenditure, but if this just means filling potholes…perhaps asking if any one item would ease any traffic flow, for instance a footbridge to the college / Park House / rugby club and doctors surgery over the A339, would be more appeasing?
- There is little that is objectionable in the strategy. However, neither does it give any sense of what is different about this area, about how it would like to see the area in, say, five years time, and what is going to be done to achieve that vision. There is little or no elucidation of the options and choices for achieving future objectives. There is no sense of the alternatives for use of resources (or what the resources are, except for the budget). Although there is an objective to increase income, there is no indication of any new ways of doing this. The strategy does not therefore seem to show how choices are being made to lead towards a particular future. A particularly significant omission is discussion of working with local partner agencies or any reference to the sustainable community strategy. Many of the issues which West Berkshire, like others, faces (health, crime, economic development, etc.) can best be tackled by working with other relevant agencies such as health, police and the voluntary sector. The sustainable community strategy was an ideal vehicle for a longer term strategy around which a strong partnership could focus. The Council strategy could then be seen to play a role in achieving that broader strategy, as well as in achieving those things for which it alone was responsible. The Government’s proposal to remove the statutory requirement to produce a sustainable community strategy, does not mean it could not be used locally. Given the current financial pressures, this is no time to be retreating into narrow silos. Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment on the strategy.