

Achievements and Progress Report - West Berkshire Council Strategy 2019-2023

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	23 March 2023
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Lynne Doherty
Report Author:	Catalin Bogos
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4342

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report highlights Council’s achievements in delivering the Council Strategy 2019 - 2023. The report articulates the progress that has been made against the Council’s core business and priorities for improvement.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 To note the achievements in delivering the Council Strategy’s core business and priorities for improvement covering the period 2019 – 2023, set out in Appendix B.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	There are no financial implication as a result of this report.
Human Resource:	There are no financial implication as a result of this report.
Legal:	None.
Risk Management:	Risks relating to the commitments included in the Council Strategy and the associated delivery plan targets are managed through the Council’s risk management framework.
Property:	None.

Policy:	The Council Strategy forms part of the Council's approved Policy Framework. The progress made since the Strategy had been approved in 2019; an assessment of change in national and local context; and the other strategies and plans approved inform the policies and plans to be delivered under the Council Strategy 2023-27.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	✓			No adverse impact is expected. The Strategy included a specific priority and commitments to support everyone to reach their potential.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	✓			The Council Strategy aimed to achieve a positive benefit to certain protected groups such as the elderly, disabled and children, particularly those from more challenging socio-economic backgrounds. The activities to deliver the strategy were provided within the existing policy framework and by the individual service areas. The services considered the measures and the impact of implementing the specific actions and conducted specific Equality Impact Assessments when required.
Environmental Impact:	✓			The Strategy is expected to have had a positive impact on the environment as it prioritises maintaining West Berkshire as a green district.

Health Impact:	✓			The Strategy included a number of commitments which aimed to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of our residents.
ICT Impact:	✓			The Strategy aimed to support access to services through ICT and digital solutions.
Digital Services Impact:	✓			The Strategy aimed to support access to services through ICT and digital solutions.
Council Strategy Priorities:	✓			The report highlights the achievements against the priorities established in 2019.
Core Business:	✓			The report highlights the achievements against the core business of the Council.
Data Impact:	✓			The Strategy included a commitment to make better use of data.
Consultation and Engagement:	<p>The Council considered, at their annual meeting on the 21st May 2019, the feedback received following public consultation on the aims and priorities for improvement that were included/maintained into the updated Council Strategy 2019 – 2023.</p> <p>The feedback received from the Covid-19 Residents’ Survey (June 2020) has informed the refresh of the Strategy.</p> <p>As the delivery of the Council Strategy has progressed, a number of more specific strategies were produced and approved, following consultation and engagement with our residents. This informed the refresh of the Council Strategy.</p>			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 In May 2019, the Council approved a new four year Council Strategy, which set specific priorities for improvement for a four year period. These priorities have been defined following an analysis of the social, economic and environmental statistics and engagement with the residents through public consultations.
- 4.2 Halfway through the lifecycle of the Council Strategy, a refresh was conducted to ensure that the priorities and commitments remained relevant given changes in the national and local context. In May 2021, the Council approved the refreshed strategy.

- 4.3 The two most significant changes in context had been the Council declaring a Climate emergency in July 2019 and the Coronavirus Pandemic. The former was a natural evolution from the continuous needs assessment processes and following work to detail our response to climate challenges into the more detailed Environment Strategy and associated delivery plans. The latter has impacted the entire world including over 200 residents in West Berkshire who tragically lost their lives, whilst others were presented with new health and wellbeing challenges. The Council worked with residents, community groups and partners to respond and minimise the effects of the Covid-19 crisis and to recover to pre-pandemic levels (see Council Strategy Appendix 2. Covid-19: Supporting Our Communities). The refreshed Recovery and Renewal Strategy, which addressed in more detail the response to Covid-19, has informed the refresh of the Council Strategy in May 2021.
- 4.4 In terms of the broader economic, social and environmental context, West Berkshire remains in a relatively stronger position compared to other areas in the country and because of this, the District has been more resilient in response to the pandemic.
- 4.5 Council's employees and members, working together with residents, our communities and partner organisations, have ensured strong performance in delivering the core business areas (whilst responding to Covid-19 had to be prioritised and resourced):
- Protecting our children
 - Supporting education
 - Ensuring the wellbeing of older people and vulnerable adults
 - Maintaining our roads
 - Collecting your bins and keeping the streets clean
 - Providing benefits
 - Collecting Council Tax and Business rates
 - Planning and housing
 - Culture, leisure and libraries
 - Economic Development
- 4.6 In addition to supporting our residents impacted by Covid-19 and to focusing on findings ways and deliver the essential (core) services valued and needed by everyone in the District, work continued and good progress has been made in delivering the Strategy's priorities for improvement (and the associated commitments).
- Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes
 - Support everyone to reach their full potential
 - Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire
 - Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy
 - Maintain a green district
 - Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships
- 4.7 This report highlights the good results achieved against every single commitment. Only a small number of actions have been impacted by the pandemic and its longer term effect, but in most cases this impact means some delays in completing some pieces of work.

- 4.8 Appendix B provides the details about the achievements and progress made to deliver the core business and the priorities for improvement of the 2019 – 2023 Council Strategy.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 Since the approval of the Council Strategy in 2019, the Council had to adapt to respond to a number of significant challenges with impact at local level, including the Covid pandemic, the climate emergency and the economic and social consequences of the conflicts in Ukraine, Afghanistan and Syria. The Council has prioritised the response to such crisis but continued to deliver the core services and the commitments in the Council Strategy 2019-2023.

5.2 Core Business Achievements and Progress:

- 5.3 The Council provides over 700 mandatory functions. The ones that are most important to West Berkshire residents have been grouped under Core Business areas in the Council Strategy 2019-2023.
- 5.4 Under normal circumstances, the delivery of the mandatory function is 'business as usual' for the Council and these areas strong performance is achieved, including when benchmarking with other local authorities in the country. However, the challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and from displacement of people due to conflicts in other parts of the world, meant that the delivery of such services had to be prioritised. The Council services, on which residents relied on, remained operational whilst additional support was delivered to residents during the Covid-19 national lockdowns and post-Covid restrictions as part of the Recovery and Renewal Strategy.
- 5.5 Despite these challenging circumstances, ambitious targets have been maintained for core business areas and good performance has been maintained over the period of the Strategy:

5.5.1 CORE BUSINESS: Protecting our children – our Children and Family Services have maintained effective services for children who need help and protection, children in care and care leavers and strong leadership retaining the 'Good' Ofsted inspection rating. Procedures have been adapted to continue timely visits, assessments and support to social care cases, including using the technology. Post pandemic the services are managing an increased level of demand. During the last 9 months there are challenges to visit increasing numbers of children with a child protection plan.

5.5.2 CORE BUSINESS: Supporting education – a higher proportion of the schools in the district are rated good or outstanding at Ofsted inspections. Investment in schools continued which contributes to ensuring that children get a school place to one of their top preferences when starting both primary and secondary schooling. A high proportion of young people are in education or training.

5.5.3 CORE BUSINESS: Ensuring the wellbeing of older people and vulnerable adults – on the background of increasing demand on adult social care services, people get timely assessments and benefit of our services which are rated at least Good by the regulator with the exception of a care home which has made improvements in order to reach a similar standard when next inspected. The proportions of residents with

physical and learning disabilities in suitable accommodation and the ones in employment is in line with Regional and National results.

5.5.4 CORE BUSINESS: Maintaining our roads – orders for repairing our roads are completed in a timely manner. Investments in roads continued ensuring these are in a better state of repairs compared to the average for other areas in the country, even if just under the ambitious locally set target.

5.5.5 CORE BUSINESS: Countryside and open spaces – residents continue to have access to well managed parks and open spaces. Work has progressed as planned for the wildlife verges project. The Rights of Way Improvement plan review had a number of responses to consultation and will be completed a few months later than planned.

5.5.6 CORE BUSINESS: Collecting your bins and keeping the streets clean – service continuity was ensured throughout lockdown periods. There is less waste landfilled and more recycling. The cleanliness of our streets declined slightly post lockdowns (as resources have been diverted to waste management) after maintaining a good standard for the first half of the strategy period.

5.5.7 CORE BUSINESS: Providing benefits – strong performance maintained for timely assessment of housing benefits, on top of a significant and effective effort to distribute financial support during and post-Covid.

5.5.8 CORE BUSINESS: Collecting Council Tax and Business rates – the service has continued high performance. During the peak of Covid-19 crisis, measures have been taken to help residents and businesses.

5.4.9 CORE BUSINESS: Planning and housing – more timely decision on planning application have been made over the first three years of the period of the strategy with notable improvements, but in the last few months there are some staff recruitment challenges. Strong performance has been achieved in relation to homelessness prevention.

5.5.10 CORE BUSINESS: Culture, leisure and libraries – there is good recovery of the visits to our libraries exceeding the agreed targets.

5.5.11 CORE BUSINESS: Economic Development – this is an area which has expanded during the last four years, supporting new and existing businesses during Covid crisis but also to start and grow in the district.

5.5.12 CORE BUSINESS: Covid-19 response – the council prioritised the Covid response to ensure that together with individuals and communities in the district contributed to save lives and livelihoods. It showed a West Berkshire more resilient compared to other places in the country, achieving better testing, tracing and vaccination rates and more importantly, less people becoming seriously ill and less deaths.

5.6 Priorities for Improvement Achievements and Progress:

5.6.1 Priority for Improvement: Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes

(i) **Prevention** - We have strengthened the preventive approach to support vulnerable children, young people and adults.

(ii) **Outcomes for vulnerable people and improved satisfaction** - Children in care have achieved good outcomes in terms of stable placements, preventing repeat referrals and repeat child protection plans. Good outcomes through Supporting (Troubled) Families programme. Where necessary young people engage well with the drug diversion scheme and re-offending remains low. Adult Social Care service users provided positive feedback about the outcomes they continued to achieve.

(iii) **Safeguarding against new/emerging risks** - Keeping safe vulnerable children and adults is another outcome delivered by closer working with our partner organisations and ensuring safeguarding enquiries achieve service users' expectations. Our safeguarding teams have adapted their approach to ensure service continuity despite the challenges presented by Covid-19.

(iv) **Employment of vulnerable people** – Achieved good levels of our care leavers (19-24) in employment and education. Our work to enrol disadvantaged young people onto apprenticeship training within the Council and participation in work experience programmes has been hindered by the pandemic but post-peak of pandemic numbers are improving

5.6.2 Priority for Improvement: Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes

(i) **Support everyone in their learning journey** - Good education attainment results have been achieved at the end of secondary school (including for disadvantaged pupils). Top quartile results have been achieved for 2022 at secondary stage. A continuation of investment in education (incl the opening of new schools - Highwood Copse School and the Theale Primary School) ensured that pupils got a place in their preferred school. Our rate of young people in education, employment and training is best (lowest) quartile in the country.

(ii) **Improve Health and Wellbeing:** West Berkshire is among the top councils in the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Health Index, in terms of the overall health of the population. All decisions made by the council consider the implications on our residents' health. Some Public Health and community resilience activities have been rescheduled due to having to prioritise, together with our health partners, the response to Covid crisis.

(iii) **Improve mental health:** Improved arrangements have been agreed with partner organisations for preventing and addressing mental health issues. All decisions made by the council consider the implications on our residents' health. Some Public Health and community resilience activities have been rescheduled.

(iv) **Help people to help themselves** – The work with individuals and groups of volunteers in response to Covid-19, built on existing strong working relationships with our communities, took the partnership working approach to a completely new level. The Council, together with Volunteer Centre West Berkshire and Greenham Trust, worked with 90 community and volunteer groups, involving 3,000 volunteers, supporting vulnerable residents to access food and medicines and organise activities

to support mental health and wellbeing in the wider community. At the same time some of the strategic improvement actions continued (e.g. community wellbeing, communication and engagement with residents and communities, devolution deals with Town and Parish Councils).

5.6.3 Priority for Improvement: Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire

(i) Improve help and guidance for start-ups and business growth - We have ensured that business start-ups and small and medium companies wanting to expand, received support from Berkshire Business Support Hub. We promoted the district's economic priorities by expanding business links at events and through projects. The Council has promptly distributed a range of grants to over 1,100 businesses to ease the financial pressure during the pandemic. This includes grants to support nurseries, childminders and other early-years providers, to ensure they were still in business once demand for places, suppressed by Covid-19, reverted to the usual levels. In addition, advice and support has been provided on how to operate safely as the economy opened up post lockdowns.

(ii) Local Plan, strengthen policies to support economic development – arrangements have been made to ensure that the needs of business are given full consideration in the non-residential planning process.

(iii) Incentives and opportunities to enable businesses to grow – produced an Economic Development Strategy which details the approach to support business growth in the district. Events have taken place to support businesses to attract the talent and skills that they require. Over 70 apprenticeship placements have been achieved through the Kick Start scheme. Some initiatives to support the rural businesses and a careers fair were suspended due to Covid-19 but are now back on track to be delivered.

(iv) Support town centres to recover from the Covid-19 – plans for our urban centres have been initiated to address the aftermaths of Covid restrictions and to deal with people's other ways of working (remotely) and interaction with their local environment.

(v) Implement a Social Value Policy – the new procurement social value policy focuses on generating greater positive economic, environmental and social outcomes for West Berkshire from the public contracts the Council commissions.

5.6.4 Priority for Improvement: Develop local infrastructure including housing to support and grow the local economy

(i) Integrated Infrastructure Plan – infrastructure development progressed well, both, in terms of the production of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan but also in specific areas, such as intelligent systems for traffic management, approval of planning applications and completions of over 1,700 housing units, including 341 affordable units. Planning was approved for over 900 (affordable units but the actual completions is slightly below target.

(ii) Develop Digital infrastructure – enhanced access to digital communications (Superfast Broadband) to over 97% of premises in West Berkshire, and initiated activities to support the emerging ‘Internet of Things’ services

(iii) Enhance the arts, culture and leisure offering of the district – we have developed culture and leisure strategies by engaging with key partners and with residents in the district, and set out in more detail our plans for offering access to a broader range of leisure facilities (some refurbished) and services, and to increase accessibility to cultural activities for residents that otherwise would not be able to participate.

5.6.5 Priority for Improvement: Maintain a green district

(i) Sustainable transport solutions - Progress has been made by strengthening the strategic framework, installing infrastructure to monitor air quality and manage traffic, and moving to ultra-low emission vehicles.

(ii) Infrastructure to encourage active travel - improvements have been made in extending the cycle ways in the District and ensure schools have covered and secure cycle storage.

(iii) Production, storage and utilisation of green energy – generating energy from renewable sources (e.g. solar panels installed across the council’s estate) and progressing plans for a 2 megawatts solar farm.

(iv) Minimise the impact on the environment in delivering services – successes in this area include the uptake of telecare in Adult Social Care and localising the delivery of care services to minimise travel. In addition, better waste management arrangements and assessment of environmental impact before decisions are made contribute to this commitment.

5.6.6 Priority for Improvement: Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships

(i) Expand partnership working – Transformed the ways in which residents access health and social care services by formalising plans of working in partnership at regional level (Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy) or at local level (through the 14 Primary Care Networks). Developed new approaches and implemented new solutions for working with our communities and for connecting residents to statutory or community services which can help them.

(ii) Increase sustainability by expanding on the initiatives to generate income – the Council detailed its approach to generate income in a Strategic Position Statement on Commercialisation, and is assessing the future use of assets. Income is generated from a range of initiatives such as Community Municipal Investment Bonds. A Corporate Landlord Strategy is being progressed but its approval is delayed by three months.

(iii) Staff engagement, Leadership development, recruitment and retention and employee wellbeing – solutions to support the employees’ wellbeing have been

brought forward and implemented to address challenges presented by Covid-19. The development of a leadership programme for managers is being progressed.

(iv) Better understand our services' beneficiaries to ensure improved services

– Strategic action has been taken to ensure a coordinated approach on how the Council communicates, consults and engages with local communities. A review of Council's services identified new ways of working which are being progressed through the Transformation Programme.

6 Other options considered

None.

7 Conclusion

On the background of successfully prioritising and responding to a number of crisis, which emerged after the Council 2019 – 2023 has been produced, the Council has maintained a strong performance for core services and ensured the delivery of the commitments linked to the six priorities of the strategy.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment

8.2 Appendix B – Detailed Achievements and Progress Report - Council Strategy 2019 – 2023

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months	<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Officer details:

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Appendix A

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) - Stage One

What is the proposed decision that you are asking the Executive to make:	Note the achievements and progress in deriving the Council Strategy 2019 - 2023
Summary of relevant legislation:	n/a
Does the proposed decision conflict with any of the Council’s priorities for improvement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes • Support everyone to reach their full potential • Support businesses to start develop and thrive in West Berkshire • Develop local infrastructure including housing to support and grow the local economy Maintain a green district • Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships 	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Name of Budget Holder:	Catalin Bogos
Name of Service/Directorate:	Strategy and Governance Department
Name of assessor:	Catalin Bogos
Date of assessment:	02 March 2023
Version and release date (if applicable):	

Is this a ?		Is this policy, strategy, function or service ... ?	
Policy	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	New or proposed	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Strategy	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Already exists and is being reviewed	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Function	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is changing	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Service	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

(1) What are the main aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the proposed decision and who is likely to benefit from it?	
Aims:	The aim of the report is to highlight the achievements and the progress made in delivering the Council Strategy 2019-2023.

Objectives:	To inform the Executive about the results achieved at the end of the 2019 -2023 strategy period.
Outcomes:	<p>The report details the outcomes achieved against the strategy's priorities for improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes • Support everyone to reach their full potential • Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire • Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy • Maintain a green district • Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships <p>It also details the outcomes against the core business areas.</p>
Benefits:	<p>The primary beneficiaries are the residents and businesses in West Berkshire by being informed of the outcomes achieved over the last four years against the priorities and plans set in the Council Strategy.</p> <p>Council officers and partner organisations will be able to celebrate successes and inform further plans and strategies.</p>

(2) Which groups might be affected and how? Is it positively or negatively and what sources of information have been used to determine this?

Group Affected	What might be the effect?	Information to support this
Age	The expected effect is that areas that results are noted in relation to the areas which required the most improvement.	Council Strategy 2015-2019 Quarterly Corporate Performance Reports Covid-19 Residents Survey and other consultations on strategies developed since 2019. The representative Residents Survey 2021.
Disability		
Gender Reassignment		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		
Pregnancy and Maternity		
Race		
Religion or Belief		
Sex		
Sexual Orientation		

Further Comments:
The result show positive benefits to certain protected groups such as the elderly, disabled, children particularly those from more challenging socio economic backgrounds. The activities to deliver the strategy have been provided within the existing policy framework by the individual service areas.

(3) Result	
Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could contribute to inequality?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The Strategy is specifically focused on addressing inequality not contributing to it.	
Will the proposed decision have an adverse impact upon the lives of people, including employees and service users?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No adverse impact is expected.	

(4) Identify next steps as appropriate:	
EqlA Stage 2 required	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Owner of EqlA Stage Two:	
Timescale for EqlA Stage Two:	

Name: Catalin Bogos

Date: 02/03/2023

Please now forward this completed form to Pamela Voss, Equality and Diversity Officer (pamela.voss@westberks.gov.uk), for publication on the WBC website.