

Report to	County Council
Date of meeting	Tuesday, February 27, 2024
Lead Member / Officer	Cllr Julie Matthews, Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities
Head of Service	Helen Vaughan-Evans, Corporate Support Services: Performance, Digital and Assets
Report author	Iolo McGregor, Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader
Title	Review of Corporate Plan Objectives

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. The scale of budget cuts required over next 3 years and the reduced service capacity across the organisation points us to the need to rationalise and focus our efforts. This report presents a proposal to reduce the size of the Corporate Plan (Themes and Pledges) and how that can be achieved.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1. Following a review of our existing Well-being, Equality and improvement objectives, a decision is required on the revised Corporate Plan proposed within this report, which sets the Council's continuing strategic vision for the remainder of the present term (2024 to 2027).

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1 That Council confirms that it has read, understood, and taken account of the Wellbeing Impact Assessment (appendix 4) as part of its consideration.

- 3.2 It is recommended that, subject to any agreed changes, Members approve the revised Corporate Plan (appendix 1b) to enable the document to be published.

4 Report details

- 4.1 It must be acknowledged at the start of this report that what Council is being asked to consider here is not what anyone wanted for this Corporate Plan; however, this situation is not unusual or unique within Wales. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act requires public bodies to review the appropriateness their Well-being Objectives annually, and likewise the Equality Act 2010 (Wales) Regulations 2011 has a mechanism for revising Equality Objectives. In light of the significant financial challenge faced by the council, it is appropriate that we now take this opportunity to review where we are, what is important to us going forward, and make appropriate course-corrections to support our long-term sustainability.
- 4.2 The current size of the Corporate Plan creates an administrative burden and drain on management capacity across the organisation at a time when head-space and time is needed to address the pressing budget challenge. The reporting obligation expands and contracts depending on how many themes and pledges there are within the Corporate Plan, and the present Corporate Plan, which moved from five themes to nine, represents a 240% increase in size when compared with the previous Plan. At the same time, the Local Government & Elections Act has placed additional statutory duties on us with regards to performance management. Practically, this has meant that not only did the number of themes and pledges for which there was work to do increase, but also the level of work required for each theme.
- 4.3 A budget saving is expected in the Strategic Planning Team, with the proposal to permanently delete a post (currently vacant) – a post that was originally approved to reflect the additional reporting burden and governance support required for an enlarged Corporate Plan. Additionally, the scale of budget cuts required over the next 3 years and the reduced service capacity across the organisation also points us to the need to rationalise and focus our efforts. Furthermore, the needs of the organisation around having a capacity to deliver insight and facilitate service transformation are becoming evident, which would represent an additional draw on the capacity of the Strategic Planning Team.

- 4.4 The recommendation of this paper is to reduce the size of the Corporate Plan by dispersing 3 Themes and de-escalating or amending 22 Pledges to release the required capacity. It will also potentially slow any future financial commitments. However, it must be stressed that the removal of pledges does not mean that these things stop. They will continue at Service Plan level for as long as resources allow. The changes proposed in this paper are strictly about how we report.
- 4.5 Crucially, adopting these changes at this time will also help release capacity within the Strategic Planning Team in 2025 to 2026. This would be when the council would need to prepare its next Strategic Equality Plan, which unfortunately runs on a four-year statutory cycle, instead of five-years like the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Ordinarily we produce an interim one-year Plan, with considerable effort, to bridge the gap between these requirements and the start of our next integrated Plan; but reviewing our objectives now in 2024 means that we can align the business planning cycles of both. This revision, therefore, combined with the supporting information and addendum (which will be updated) that explains how we developed our Corporate Plan Objectives (published on our [Equality, Diversity and Human Rights](#) webpage), constitutes our Strategic Equality Plan for 2024 to 2028. We have also met the requirements of the Act's Engagement Provisions through our annual Stakeholder Survey (most recently between September 2023 and February 2024) where we have consulted widely with stakeholders in our communities on the content and relevance of our Corporate Plan objectives, particularly around the issue of equality and fairness.
- 4.6 Appendix 1a gives some additional context to this report, while 1b provides an outline as to what the new Corporate Plan would look like. It is felt that what is outlined here represents the simplest operational way for Council to reduce the reporting burden currently being experienced by the organisation, and produce the capacity that we would like to see for business transformation work. It is also felt that these changes will strengthen our monitoring of Equality and Welsh Language issues, removing them from siloed themes, and instead having these as principles that underline all of our themes and work as a council (see pgs.13-14, appendix 1b). Appendix 2 gives a detailed account of the changes that we have made, while appendix 3 provides an update to our governance arrangements (with changes highlighted).
- 4.7 Taken together, Themes and Pledges, this results in approximately a 20% decrease in the size of the Plan, which would still be 170% larger than its predecessor and still

hold the authority to account. A further piece of work will need to be undertaken to lighten the Performance Framework in response to changes. These changes would be reported through our usual Performance Update Reports to committees.

5 How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

- 5.1 This decision will narrow the number of themes and pledges in the Corporate Plan. As a result, the amount of activity being monitored corporately will reduce. This should, however, allow the authority to focus its resources where the greatest impact can be made within financial constraints.

6 What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1 Costs could be avoided where some pledges require additional investment. Costs for delivering this change will be absorbed by the service.

7 What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1 The Well-being Impact Assessment (appendix 4) has been revisited to reflect changes to the Plan. More current information can now be found within it, and overall there are no negative impacts arising as a result of these changes, with the impact of the Plan remaining positive.
- 7.2 We should continue to revisit the impact assessment on a regular basis and review our findings. Engagement with seldom heard groups across the region should continue. The opportunities highlighted at the end of each sustainable development principle and each of the seven well-being goals should be noted. Individual projects or activities identified within the Corporate Plan should be individually impact assessed as they are developed. It is also important to note that our level of influence and control varies across some of the Themes, and this will affect our ability to bring about positive impacts in some areas.

8 What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1 The sustainability of the Corporate Plan was questioned by councillors during Performance Scrutiny in November. This proposal has been discussed with CET,

SLT, Cabinet and Group Leaders prior to input from County Council. The present proposal has been put forward by the Strategic Planning and Performance Team with their knowledge of the existing Corporate Plan and how it is working.

9 Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 Given the considerable financial pressure and constraints the council will operate under during the remainder of the life of this iteration of the Corporate Plan it is appropriate to review and make changes to it. The proposal to reduce the size of the Corporate Plan by dispersing Themes and de-escalated Pledges to Service Plan level will free-up additional capacity across all services and enable the Strategic Planning Team to realise a £31k saving.

10 What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 There will be some political considerations in altering the Corporate Plan. Assurance can be given that the change must be made to protect staff well-being whilst the revised Corporate Plan still holds the authority to account as to things that it will deliver to improve the well-being of our residents. The recommendations of this paper are consistent with the wider budget narrative that we cannot deliver everything we have been with less money. It also presents the opportunity to release capacity to do the transformation work for Council services to be delivered in a different way.

10.2 There will be some operational considerations in altering the Corporate Plan. The chance to collaborate on the changes and ensure alignment during the 2024 to 2025 Service Planning process (undertaken January to March) should not be missed.

10.3 To make this change in time for April 2024, which is when work would begin on our annual reporting requirements, definitive action is needed by Members and officers to meet the challenges we are facing.

11 Power to make the decision

11.1 The Corporate Plan and its reporting arrangements are governed by the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015; the Equality Act 2010 (Wales) Regulations 2011; and the Local Government & Elections Act (Wales) 2021.