

## REPORT OF THE CABINET

### A. LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2022 - 2026

#### Introduction

1. This report concerns the County Council's Strategic Plan for the period 2022-26. A copy of the Plan is attached as Appendix A to this report.

#### Background

2. The Strategic Plan is part of the Authority's Policy Framework (as defined in the Constitution) and as such needs approval by the County Council. The Strategic Plan sets out the Council's long-term vision for Leicestershire and its priorities over a four-year period. It is a key strategy which shapes how the Council plans and delivers services.
3. The Strategic Plan is complemented by the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which sets out a financial plan supporting the priorities in the Strategic Plan, as well as by the Strategic Change Portfolio which outlines how the Council will transform local services in response to national and local drivers for change whilst seeking to maintain or improve outcomes. The Plan is also underpinned by departmental business plans and strategies which provide further detail on how the Council will deliver the aims and actions in the Plan. This includes, for example, the Council's Communities Strategy 'Our Communities Approach' (which is also on the agenda for today's meeting) which sets out in detail the Council's approach to collaborating and working in partnership with communities.
4. The Plan summarises the Council's vision for Leicestershire through five strategic outcomes and a single line vision statement. The outcomes represent long-term aspirations for Leicestershire which may not be achieved in full during the four-year course of the Strategic Plan. Therefore, the Plan also includes specific aims for the Council to achieve by 2026 in order to progress towards each outcome. It also sets out some of the key actions which the Council will deliver to achieve these aims.
5. The five outcomes are:
  - **Clean, green future:** The environment is protected and enhanced, and we tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and unsustainable resource usage
  - **Great communities:** Leicestershire has thriving, inclusive communities in which people support each other and participate in service design and delivery
  - **Improving opportunities:** Every child gets the best start for life with access to a good quality education and everyone has the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential.
  - **Strong economy, transport and infrastructure:** Leicestershire has a productive, inclusive and sustainable economy and infrastructure which meets the demands of a growing population and economy.

- **Keeping people safe and well:** The people of Leicestershire are safe and protected from harm and have the opportunities and support they need to take control of their health and wellbeing.

### Public Consultation

6. The Cabinet, at its meeting on 26 October 2021, approved a 12-week public consultation on the draft Strategic Plan to run from 1 November 2021 to 21 January 2022. The consultation period was subsequently extended to 18 February 2022 to enable further direct engagement with County Council officers and members.
7. The consultation sought the views of a wide variety of stakeholders including residents, community groups and partners. It consisted of a public survey which received 259 responses, in addition to direct engagement of the Council's Scrutiny Committees, the Scrutiny Commission and key partnership boards including the Health and Wellbeing Board, Children and Families Partnership Board and Educational Excellence Partnership Strategic Board. There was also engagement with community groups and partners including Leicestershire Equality Challenge Group, the Council's Youth CYCLe groups and town and parish councils (via two briefing sessions facilitated by Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils). Additionally, there was engagement of Council staff groups such as the BAME Network and LGBT Network in addition to three staff briefings which used an interactive presentation to obtain the views of a further 200 officers.
8. A detailed report on the consultation responses and changes made to the Plan as a result is attached as Appendix B and a summary is provided below.

### Format and Structure

9. During consultation, there was a view that the Plan was too long and that detail about the Council's actions could be set out separately. Some also commented that whilst the Plan identified what success would look like, it did not adequately quantify this or set a benchmark against which performance could be measured.
10. In addition, some stated that the Plan included aspirations which were outside the Council's control. Recognising that the Council often has a broader role as a partner, enabler and facilitator, it was suggested that the Plan should more clearly differentiate between those aspirations for which the Council would have lead responsibility, and those where it would have a contributing/partnership role; specifying which partners it would work with to deliver the actions in the Plan. Some also challenged the lack of reference to district councils.

### Vision

11. There was a high level of support for the Council's vision (79% of public survey respondents agreed with the outcomes and only 10% disagreed). The outcome with the least, albeit still substantial, support was the 'Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure' outcome (68% survey respondents agreed and 17% disagreed). The reasons for this are set out in paragraph 22 of this report.

### Clean, Green Future

12. The 'Clean, Green Future' outcome aims for the environment to be protected and to address climate change, biodiversity loss and unsustainable resource usage. There was a high level of support for this outcome, as well as for the specific aims which the Council intended to achieve by 2026 to progress towards it. Over 90% of survey respondents rated each of the aims as either 'fairly important' or 'very important'.
13. There were, however, concerns that the outcome may not be compatible with the Council's aims to support housing and infrastructure development. Some also requested that the Plan include further detail on how the Council would enable and promote sustainable transport and attract environmentally friendly businesses.

### Great Communities

14. The 'Great Communities' outcome aims for inclusive communities in which people support each other and participate in service design and delivery. Whilst most agreed with the outcome, there was varied support for the Council's aims by 2026.
15. The following aims were considered to be very important:
  - Ensure Council services are accessible and inclusive
  - Support the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector
  - Increase community cohesion and tackling hate crime
  - Increase the percentage of residents who feel they can influence Council decisions
16. However, the following aims were considered to be less important:
  - Increase engagement in cultural and heritage activities
  - Sustain the increase in volunteering seen during the pandemic
  - Increase the number of Neighbourhood Plans adopted
  - Increase the number of active Community Response Plans
17. The aim to sustain a high rate of volunteering was perceived by some to indicate the Council attempting to shift its responsibilities onto volunteers. There was also a view that the action under sub-outcome 5.2 (public participation) to support town and parish councils indicated insufficient acknowledgement of 'non-parished' areas.

### Improving Opportunities

18. The 'Improving Opportunities' outcome aims for every child to get the best start for life with access to a good quality education and for everyone to have the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential. It was the most popular outcome, with each of the Council's aims to deliver it rated as either fairly or very important by over 90% of survey respondents, and over 60% rating each aim as 'very important'.
19. However, some suggested that the outcome may not be achievable due to reductions in youth and education services. There was also a view that to deliver the outcome mainstream schools would need more resources to support children with special educational needs who have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

20. Although the emphasis on children and families was welcomed, there was a view that the outcome should also focus on supporting young people and adults to access education and employment opportunities. Some also suggested that the aims under sub-outcome 6.4 (post-16 outcomes) were insufficiently ambitious. Finally, there was a view that the outcome title should be revised to 'Improved Opportunities' so it is consistent with the other outcomes and represents an 'end state' rather than a journey.

### Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure

21. The 'Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure' outcome aspires for Leicestershire to have a productive, inclusive and sustainable economy and infrastructure which meets the demands of a growing population and economy.
22. As outlined previously, it was the least popular of the five outcomes. During both the public survey and the three County Council staff briefings on the Plan, the aim around housing was considered to be the least important of all aims in the Plan. This seemed to be due to concerns that housing development in greenfield areas would undermine delivery of a 'Clean and Green' future in Leicestershire. Some requested clarification on which is a greater priority to the Council between 'green' and 'growth'. There were also concerns that new houses may not be supported by necessary infrastructure (for example, schools, health facilities and public transport).
23. There was also relatively low support for the aims to support Research and Development (R&D), increase the number of businesses in Leicestershire and ensure there are sufficient employment sites for growth. However, there was a high level of support for increasing labour market opportunities for young people, addressing skills shortages, supporting inclusive economic growth, and ensuring infrastructure supports growth and net zero emissions.
24. There was also a frequent theme around the need to better enable and promote sustainable transport, such as cycling and walking as well as affordable and frequent buses and trains. It was suggested that achieving the aims for this outcome would require investment in this area to avoid excessive congestion.

### Keeping People Safe and Well

25. The 'Keeping People Safe and Well' outcome aims for the people of Leicestershire to be safe and protected from harm and to have the opportunities and support they need to take control of their health and wellbeing.
26. There was a high level of support for this outcome and for all the Council's aims to progress towards it by 2026, with over 90% public survey respondents agreeing with each aim and the majority 'strongly agreeing'. There was significant support for each aim, particularly those focused on community safety, vulnerable people, mental wellbeing, unpaid carers and care experiences. The aim with the least support was for more residents to be a healthy weight.
27. Some questioned the level of influence which the County Council has over areas such as crime levels, preventing young people from engaging in criminal activity and increasing the proportion of residents with a healthy weight. It was highlighted

that achieving these aims would require partnership-working with other public agencies such as the NHS, Police and district councils and that the aim around healthy weight would rely on individuals taking responsibility for their own wellbeing.

28. There was also a view that the Plan should outline how the Council is intending to support road safety, such as through education and highway design. Further, some requested clarification on how the Council would address substance misuse. Additionally, there was a request to highlight how the Council would promote access to green space in order to support its aims around wellbeing. Finally, there was a view that the outcome title should be revised to 'Safe and Well' so that it too represents an 'end state' and is consistent with the other outcomes.

### Strategic Change Portfolio

29. The Strategic Plan includes a section on the Council's internal transformation programme, the Strategic Change Portfolio, which outlines the purpose, aims and actions of the 'four pillars' of this programme: Sustainable Finances, Carbon Reduction, Customer and Digital and Ways of Working.
30. During the consultation, there was a concern that increased adoption of digital services through the Customer and Digital Programme may lead to 'digital exclusion' whereby some people are unable to access services due to lack of digital technology and/or digital skills. It was suggested that this could exacerbate social and economic inequalities. There was a request to reflect how the Council will support digital participation for all and to include actions to ensure everyone can access reliable broadband and learn how to use digital technology.

### Comments of the Scrutiny Commission

31. The level of support for the vision/outcomes was welcomed. Members were pleased to see its previously made comments and those of the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees had been considered and largely addressed in the revised draft. Members supported the shortening of the Plan, which was now more focused and reader friendly and agreed that this was a much improved document.
32. The Commission noted that the response rate, whilst higher than usual, was not vast. Members acknowledged that consultations on strategic documents often generated less feedback as residents could find it difficult to relate their purpose to their own circumstances and day to day lives. A Member challenged whether the number and style of questions asked in such consultations struck the right balance to encourage residents to respond. The Commission was reassured that the questions and those targeted were carefully considered by the Council's specialist consultations team to ensure these were appropriate and followed best practice. However, it was acknowledged that lessons could always be learnt and the potential for further improvements would be considered.
33. The reference to Neighbourhood Plans was queried. It was noted that the language in the Plan now made clear that the County Council had a supporting role in this area, and that district councils were ultimately responsible for their development. A Member commented, however, that a Neighbourhood Plan might not be suitable for all areas and questioned therefore the Council's action to support communities to

develop these Plans. It was suggested that support should be targeted to those areas where such a Plan was considered locally to be appropriate and beneficial.

### **The Revised Strategic Plan (2022-26)**

34. Following the consultation process, a number of changes have been made to the Plan which are summarised below and detailed in full at Appendix B.
35. Changes have been made to the outcome titles in order to ensure they are consistent with each other and represent an 'end state':
  - 'Improving Opportunities' revised to 'Improved Opportunities'
  - 'Keeping People Safe and Well' revised to 'Safe and Well'
  - 'Clean, Green Future' revised to 'Clean and Green'
36. The length of the Plan has been reduced by removing unnecessary text (wordcount reduced by 25%) and images have been added to enhance the visual appeal of the document.
37. Specific, quantitative targets tend to be set through annual departmental business plans and strategies as this allows for the targets to reflect current service capacity and pressures. However, where quantitative targets exist, these have now been added to the Plan, such as for the aims around CO2 emissions and the Supporting Families Programme. Further, to help clarify what the Council is aiming to achieve by 2026, each sub-outcome now includes, under 'how we will measure success', the performance indicators which will be monitored to identify if each aim is being achieved. Each sub-outcome also includes a summary of current performance which provides a benchmark against which to measure future progress.
38. The Plan reflects that in order to deliver its vision for Leicestershire, the Council will need to use both its own direct service delivery and its significant capacity to influence and support others. It differentiates between areas over which the Council has lead responsibility and those where it has a contributing/partnership role by highlighting where the Council will need to 'work with partners' to deliver specific aims and actions. The Glossary also now includes a definition of 'partners'.
39. The Plan also now refers to specific partners which the Council will need to work with to deliver certain actions – for example work with bus operators and Midlands Connect to improve passenger transport and work with district councils through the Environment Group to coordinate environmental programmes. Additionally, the Plan highlights examples of effective collaboration which the Council intends to build on, such as work with district councils during the Covid-19 pandemic to establish community hubs to support the most vulnerable people.
40. The sub-outcome around housing has been removed, with the Council's actions to support housing development shown instead to support the sub-outcome around infrastructure (7.2). This reflects the low popularity of the aim around housing development, as well as that the planning of housing is a responsibility of district councils rather than the County Council. Further, listing the Council's actions to support housing delivery in sub-outcome 7.2 highlights that the Council considers the wider infrastructure requirements of housing developments.

41. The Introduction / Foreword now acknowledges the challenges involved in supporting economic growth whilst achieving a 'Clean and Green' future for Leicestershire and highlights how the Council intends to achieve this. Additionally, further actions have been added to the Plan to show how the Council intends to work with partners to enable and promote sustainable transport and encourage and support environmentally friendly businesses and the development and adoption of low-carbon technologies.
42. Sub-section 9.2 of the Plan (the Customer and Digital Programme) includes an action to understand and mitigate the impact of digitalisation and channel development on groups with protected characteristics. A new action has been added to ensure services are accessible through multiple channels (for example mediated digital access, telephone support and face-to-face channels) so that no groups are excluded. A further action has been added to develop a community-based programme to support residents to learn how to use digital technology.

### **Delivery of the Strategic Plan (2022-26)**

43. Council departments will be responsible for implementing the actions set out in the Strategic Plan. Additionally, through their annual service plans, departments will identify further actions for each forthcoming year to help achieve the aims set out in the Plan. To embed the Plan in Council decision-making processes, officers will be required to set out, in reports to Council bodies, the potential impact of their proposals on delivery of the Strategic Plan. Further, Council strategies will be required to contribute to delivery of the outcomes in the Plan, where possible.
44. The Council's progress and performance in delivering the Plan will be monitored by officer Outcome Boards, which will provide six-monthly highlight reports to senior management outlining key achievements and challenges in the delivery of the Plan as well as priorities for the following six months. Overview and Scrutiny Committees will receive quarterly updates on performance for the areas they cover. The Scrutiny Commission will receive the Annual Performance Report which will summarise overall progress each year in delivering the Strategic Plan. Outcome Boards will also ensure that all Council strategies align with and support their outcomes.

### **Consideration by the Cabinet**

45. The Cabinet at its meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022 noted the outcome of the consultation including the comments and views of the Scrutiny Commission and approved the Strategic Plan.

**(Motion to be moved: -**

**That the Strategic Plan for 2022 to 2026 as set out in the Appendix A to this report be approved.)**

**Mr N. J. Rushton  
Leader of the Council**

## **Background Papers**

Report to the Cabinet – Draft Strategic Plan (2022-26) – 26 October 2021

<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s164242/Strategic%20Plan%202022-26.pdf>

Report to the Scrutiny Commission – Engagement on the Draft Strategic Plan (2022-26) – 17 November 2021

<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s164629/Engagement%20on%20the%20Councils%20Strategic%20Plan%20-%20Final.pdf>

Report to the Scrutiny Commission – Outcome of Consultation on the Draft Strategic Plan (2022-26) – 9 March 2022

<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s167002/Outcome%20of%20Consultation%20on%20the%20Strategic%20Plan%20final.pdf>

## **Appendices**

**Appendix A** - Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan (2022-26)

**Appendix B** – Consultation Responses and Revisions to the draft Strategic Plan (2022-26)