

Building Harlow's Future



Report to: Full Council

Date: 15 May 2025

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Dan Swords, Leader of the Council

Lead Officers: James Gardner, Managing Director

Contributing Officers: Executive Management Team

Executive Summary

- A** This report provides a summary of the council's Building Harlow's Future Plan and requests approval for the plan to be adopted as the council's main corporate policy framework. This plan provides clarity to the next steps that will be taken to deliver the potential of the town and provides detail of the support and assurance that will provide a platform to focus the organisation on delivery and outcomes.

Recommended that Council:

- A** Approves the Building Harlow's Future plan, as set out in Appendix A, as the council's main corporate policy framework for 2025/26.
- B** Delegates to the Managing Director, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to further review and amend the plan as required.

Reason for decision

- A** To ensure that the council has a robust corporate policy framework. This is a matter reserved to Full Council.

Other Options

- A** The full range of options has been considered resulting in the proposed Building Harlow's Future plan which articulates and provides a framework to ensure delivery of the council's missions.

Background

1. Harlow Council is embarking on a bold and transformative journey to become the most impactful local authority in the UK. Over the past year, much has been achieved to commence the transformation of the council and improve service delivery.
2. On Thursday 17 October 2024, the Leader of the Council presented a report to Full Council setting out the case for going further and faster to realise the potential of the council and town. The initial steps of that as set out in that report have been delivered.
3. With a new Executive Management Team in place and a new municipal year ahead, it is now right that Council sets the corporate policy framework it wishes the council to deliver.

Issues/Proposals

4. The Building Harlow's Future plan outlines a comprehensive, mission-driven approach to revitalising the town, improving services, and delivering meaningful outcomes for residents. This is not a traditional council plan - it is a movement grounded in ambition, innovation, and delivery.
5. The plan is structured around six core missions; each designed to address key challenges and unlock Harlow's full potential:
 - **Transform our council:** Modernising operations, embedding innovation, and delivering value for money through a comprehensive transformation programme.
 - **Rebuild our town:** Delivering a once-in-a-generation regeneration of the town centre and surrounding neighbourhoods, creating a vibrant, inclusive, and economically thriving community.
 - **Invest in our housing:** Committing over £136 million to improve housing quality, compliance, and services, ensuring every resident has a safe, decent home.
 - **Renew our neighbourhoods:** Restoring pride in public spaces through targeted investment in cleanliness, infrastructure, and community-led initiatives.
 - **Secure our future:** Driving sustainable growth through strategic investment, innovation, and partnerships, positioning Harlow as a national leader in inclusive prosperity.
 - **Protect our communities:** Enhancing safety and resilience through coordinated enforcement, expanded CCTV, and stronger partnerships with police and community organisations.
6. To ensure the successful delivery of these missions, Harlow Council is implementing a robust assurance framework that will include:

- **Performance framework:** A data-driven system to monitor financial and programme performance in real time, supporting transparency and accountability.
- **Project Management Office (PMO):** A dedicated unit to standardise project delivery, ensure alignment with strategic goals, and provide oversight.
- **Governance reform:** Introduction of a new constitution and governance model to streamline decision-making and embed accountability.
- **Cultural transformation:** A renewed focus on collaboration, efficiency, and staff empowerment, linking individual performance to mission outcomes.
- **Delivery cascade:** A new approach to performance management will include a cascade of mission delivery objectives through the council, capturing the contribution of delivery from all officers and Cabinet Members.

7. Delivery is at the heart of this plan and to support and drive outcomes, the council is committed to:

- **Fully funding every mission:** A 41% increase in the council's budget ensures all initiatives are resourced without raising council tax.
- **Modernising systems and processes:** Leveraging technology to improve responsiveness, automate workflows, and eliminate inefficiencies.
- **Empowering staff:** Investing in talent, fostering innovation, and creating dynamic workspaces to drive productivity and impact.
- **Engaging communities:** Ensuring residents are active participants in shaping their neighbourhoods and the town's future.

8. Building Harlow's Future is a decisive move toward a brighter, more ambitious future for the town. With clear missions, strong values, and a delivery-focused approach, Harlow Council is not just planning change - it is delivering it. This plan represents a turning point, a commitment to excellence, and a belief that the best is yet to come.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

There are no direct implications flowing from the adoption of the plan, however through its delivery of all the missions it will ensure full regard is had to its public sector equality duty.

Finance

Building's Harlow Future is fully funded within the medium-term financial plan and will be regularly reported within the performance, finance and risk report to cabinet as part of the council's robust budget monitoring cycle which gives members assurance on its progress.
Author: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Assistant Director – Finance and Section 151 Officer

Governance

Adoption a corporate policy framework is a Council function under the relevant legislation. Implementation of the plan is principally a matter for Cabinet either collectively or through delegations to Cabinet members and Officers.

A clear corporate policy framework which acts as a golden thread running through all the authority's operations is a critical component of sound corporate governance. It ensures focus and direction in the use of resources to deliver clearly understood outcomes. It is an essential part of the framework that enables compliance with duty all councils are under to secure continuous improvement in the way in which their functions are exercised.

Author: Daniel Dickinson, Assistant Director – Legal and Democratic Services (Interim) and Monitoring Officer

Appendices

Appendix A – Building Harlow's Future

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.