



ALIGNING COUNCIL STRATEGY WITH THE 2026/27 BUDGET: WHAT, WHY, WHEN, HOW AND WHO.

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

PAPER C

24 SEPTEMBER 2025

No. DETAIL

1) WHAT & WHY (PURPOSE OF STRATEGY)

- a) **What:** The council strategy sets out our vision, priorities, and key projects for the year ahead. It guides all decisions and ensures our budget is used to deliver what matters most to our community.
 - b) **Why:** Aligning strategy and budget ensures resources are focused on agreed priorities, meets statutory duties, and demonstrates transparency and accountability to residents. It also helps us respond to changing needs and build confidence in council decision-making.
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2) WHEN (TIMINGS & KEY MILESTONES)

- a) **Ideal Timeline:** Strategic review and community engagement start in summer, with draft budget and priorities developed by autumn, and final approval by January.
 - b) **Current Position:** As we are starting in October, we will use an accelerated process to ensure statutory deadlines are met and priorities are clear.
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3) HOW (APPROACH & GOOD PRACTICE)

- a) **Rapid Strategic Review:** Hold a councillor workshop early October to review current priorities, progress, and new needs.
 - b) **Community Input:** Use existing feedback (surveys, complaints, social media) and, if possible, a short online poll or drop-in session. (Simple survey Monkey)
 - c) **Draft Budget Preparation:** Clerk/RFO drafts a budget based on statutory obligations, known pressures, and priority projects.
 - d) **Committee & Council Review:** Finance/strategy committee reviews the draft, then full council debates and amends.
 - e) **Final Approval:** Incorporate feedback, finalise budget and priorities, and approve at full council by January.
 - f) **Communication:** Publish and share the approved budget and priorities with the community.
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4) GOOD PRACTICE OPPORTUNITIES

It is proposed that members:

- a) Use the Cowes Place Plan as a model: Their clear approach to linking projects, priorities, and budget is replicable. Cllr Steph Toogood has been engaging with them since earlier this year. the Town Clerk had positive and proactive conversations with Cllr Ed Blake who also proposes they are an excellent good practice case study. Alongside any other good practice and key learning opportunities.
 - b) Keep it simple: Focus on clarity and accessibility - avoid lengthy documents.
 - c) Make Use of Informal Member Sessions to Brainstorm Ideas - explore and challenge, encourage open, creative thinking and member engagement.
 - d) Prioritise quick wins: Identify 1–2 projects that can be delivered quickly to build momentum.
 - e) Plan for next year: Use this year's accelerated process as a learning opportunity and schedule an earlier start for 2027/28.
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5) **Who (RACI)**

- a) Agree member, officer, fellow council and community approach and who is **Responsible, Accountable, Consult** and **Inform**.
- b) Ensuring working groups or members involved are representative of inclusion, diversity and accessibility.

6) **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Policy and Resources Committee agree in principle to developing a strategic plan, on the basis that this approach aligns comfortably with the Budgeting and Financial Planning Cycle 26/27, and take the proposal to the next full council meeting for approval, where members will agree next steps-for example, ensuring the approach is viable, creating a working group, defining roles and responsibilities, finalising the schedule, beginning to explore good practice, etc.
