

Report title	Service Area Plan for Environmental Services for delivery in 2025/26
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Department	Environmental Services
Exempt?	No

Purpose of report:

- To resolve

Synopsis of report:
 This report provides an update on the delivery of the 2024/25 Environmental Services Service Area Plan and a summary of the Service Area Plan to be delivered during 2025/26 for approval.

 The full proposed Service Area Plan 2025/26 can be found in Appendix A

Recommendation(s):
 i) Members approve the 2025/26 Service Area Plan for Environmental Services

1 Context and background of report

- 1.1 Service Area Plans (SAP) are an essential element in achieving delivery of the Council’s Corporate Business Plan 2022-26 (CBP) and five related Corporate Strategies – Organisational Development, Empowering Communities, Climate Change, Economic Development and Health and Wellbeing.
- 1.2 The CBP describes the key priorities for the Council to deliver over the period of the plan. Annual SAP identify how the CBP will be achieved and is action-orientated, identifying resources required to deliver priorities and sets out where increasingly limited resources will be focused for the following financial year.
- 1.3 A moratorium on future budget growth has been included in the MTFS since December 2023. Budget growth will only be considered if it is critical and unavoidable, with the assumption that funding will be met from external resource or via internal transfers rather than from working balances.
- 1.4 The updated MTFS setting out proposed growth items for 2025/26 was reported to both the Corporate Management Committee and Full Council in October 2024. The Council has made progress during 24/25 to close the projected budget gap, however a budget gap remains and must continue to be addressed. The Council’s Financial Sustainability remains a high priority, and all service areas will contribute to this.

- 1.5 In 2024, significant work has been delivered in response to the non-statutory Best Value Notice to demonstrate the Council's commitment to continuous improvement and the delivery of its Best Value duty.
- 1.6 Therefore, the priority and focus for all service areas for 2025/26 continues to be demonstration of ongoing continuous improvement, delivery of savings or income generation opportunities and realisation of benefits to align with the MTFs and address the Council's budget gap. This is alongside delivery of core activity.
- 1.7 In 2022, when the current CBP was approved, a total of 195 actions and activities were identified from the associated 5 corporate strategies. All CBP actions and activities have either been completed, archived (either as a duplication, no longer relevant or has been superseded), or are underway during 24/25 and may continue to be delivered in 2025/26. 125 are either completed or archived, 53 have started and are progressing, 4 have been paused, 10 have yet to start but are due to by the end of March 2025. As a result, there are no new CBP activities to select for 25/26 SAP as additional activities.
- 1.8 Service Area Plans may also include service-specific planned activity that does not require growth and may not be an activity identified as part of the CBP. For example, where legislation or the regulatory framework has been revised, in which the service operates and needs to be compliant with.
- 1.9 Activities that are required to be delivered as part of the Council's Savings & Efficiency Programme and Service review Programme are also included in relevant Service Area Plans. Activities may be identified in-year and are subsequently added to SAP.
- 1.10 Service Area Plans include a Mission Statement to document a narrative of the service area's current position and its direction of travel over the period of the Corporate Business Plan, and a summary of each of the teams that form the service area and the core activity that is delivered as 'business as usual'.
- 1.11 To ensure a 'golden thread' between Service Area Plans and team and individual plans, Corporate Heads of Service will use the planned activity to set team and individual objectives for 25/26.
- 1.12 Progress against delivery of activities detailed in Service Area Plans forms part of Corporate Performance reporting facilitated by the Project Management Office. Progress of delivery of activities is monitored through Quarterly review meetings with Corporate Heads of Service and subject to regular reporting.
- 1.13 Service Area Plans go to their relevant service committee for approval. Approval is subsequently sought from Corporate Management Committee in March 2025 for the Corporate Action Plan (which is an amalgamation of all the plans for the year).
- 1.14 For 25/26, all service areas will be required to provide their relevant Service Committee with a SAP progress update at mid-year point as a minimum.

2 Key Achievements for Environmental Services in 2024/25.

- 2.1 The Service Area Plan delivered during 2024/25 contained 20 actions, including the following actions which have been delivered within the year.

- 2.1.1 The switch from diesel fuel to HVO fuel. This project was delivered within existing budgets as the fuel tank was refurbished rather than replaced. The cost of HVO fuel has dipped since budgets were estimated and so far, no growth has been required to deliver this climate change activity.
- 2.1.2 Procurement of a new grave digging contract. The new contract includes removal of spoil from all graves. The long-standing spoil heaps at Englefield Green and Chertsey cemeteries have been removed with a plan in place to prevent spoil accumulating in future.
- 2.1.3 Procurement of a contractor to deliver a borough wide tree survey. The new contractor Greendale is due to start the borough wide survey before the end of the financial year.
- 2.1.4 DEFRA approval of draft Air Quality Action Plan. The action plan has been reviewed by DEFRA and subject to public consultation. The revised plan is scheduled for approval at E&S in January 2025.
- 2.1.5 Implementation of a new management structure in Environmental Health. The new management team are now in post. Vacancies were advertised with one hard to fill post successfully filled in 2024 and another out to advert for a second time.
- 2.1.6 Approval of a new Waste and Recycling Policy. The new policy introduced new clear bin allocation criteria for residents living in flats and in Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- 2.2 A number of activities identified in the 2024/2025 service area plan will remain active project in 2025/2026 including the following activities.
 - 2.2.1 Procurement of new bus shelter contract. The new contract when formally signed and implemented will deliver replacement of the existing contracted bus shelters and integration of additional shelters into the contract. These older shelters will also be upgraded. The contract is expected to deliver additional profit over the 10-year life of the programme.
 - 2.2.2 Procurement of new tree software. This procurement exercise is integral to enable delivery of arboricultural works identified within the tree audit.
 - 2.2.3 Route Optimisation work with Bartec. This project has started and is at the information gathering stage.
 - 2.2.4 The complete Service Area Plan for 2025/2026 incorporates a substantial volume of work and can be found in Appendix 1. A summary is provided below.
- 2.3 **Service Area Mission Statement:**
 - 2.3.1 Environmental Services is a multi-disciplinary business centre covering a range of operational services including Environmental Health, Private Sector Housing and Licensing, Direct Services Operations (DSO) including Street Care, Collection Services, Grounds Maintenance, fine turf sports facilities, and the Cemeteries Service, Parks and Green Spaces including arboriculture, events and playground maintenance and Engineering Services.

2.4 Contribution to Corporate Strategies 2022 to 2026:

2.4.1 Climate Change Strategy

2.4.2 We will factor our aim for net zero carbon into the design and delivery of all operational activities across Environmental Services. Key deliveries as follows:

- Support delivery of the Depot site refurbishment works and the transition of staff to new office accommodation in the former St John Ambulance building which will reduce our carbon usage and operational costs.
- Implement the sustainable fleet management strategy and review the fleet to maximise efficiency.
- Maximise use of HVO fuel with 100% target HVO fuel usage.
- Deliver new route optimisation across the collection services street sweeping service to maximise efficiencies with respect to fuel and use of operational resources.
- Ongoing review of summer schedules and winter works programme for grounds maintenance to optimise efficiency.
- Preparation for delivery of waste and recycling changes impacting the household collection services as introduced by the Environment Act 2021 from April 2026.
- Progress the roll out of food waste collections from flats utilising the DEFRA food waste collection grant.
- Support and promote recycling through a project in collaboration with digital transformation and the communications team. Work will include reviewing and updating the website offer, developing a more dynamic comms programme incorporating short videos and tailored communication with residents and cohorts of residents who need additional support to recycle effectively.

2.5.1 Empowering our community's strategy

2.5.2 We will strive to design services which reflect the needs of our communities, and which enhance their quality of life. Key deliveries as follows:

- Respond within time frames to service requests and complaints across all service areas.
- Work with voluntary groups to encourage participation in a wide range of activities, such as litter picking, planting, ground maintenance and conservation.
- Work with Applied Resilience to provide information which supports communities vulnerable to flooding.
- Working with colleagues in digital transformation, review the way we communicate with residents who report fly tipping to ensure they are kept advised of any actions. Separately review the practical response, particularly with respect to vehicle availability and practicalities.
- Economic Development Strategy
- We will design services to enhance the street scene in our town centres and offer local employment opportunities to local residents in our direct services teams. Key deliverables as follows:
 - Recruitment campaigns for all direct services to include locally directed marketing.
 - Improvements to street scene infrastructure to be funded by the national Shared Prosperity Fund including upgrading street furniture including the litter bin and bench portfolio.
 - Support our trade waste customers implement changes in the proposed Simpler Recycling Regulations due to be introduced from 2025.

2.6.1 Health and Wellbeing Strategy

2.6.2 We will support local residents, local workers, and visitors to Runnymede through advice and, where necessary, enforcement with respect to private rented housing and health and safety at work. We will maintain our parks and open spaces and facilities to provide safe and welcoming access to the natural environment.

Key deliveries as follows:

- Respond to complaints about working conditions and investigating, advising, or enforcing as necessary to ensure appropriate safety systems are in place.
- Respond to complaints about private rented housing, giving advice or taking enforcement action where appropriate, in line with our enforcement policy.
- Deliver a programme of inspections of food businesses to ensure resident safety.
- Deliver actions as agreed in the approved Air Quality Action Plan.
- Work with colleagues in Assets and Regeneration and Community Services to develop a delivery model for offering sports facilities which serves the community.
- Identify the unit cost for delivering all discretionary services including grounds maintenance across all environmental services service areas.
- Deliver the tree audit and procure new tree management software with an embedded schedule of rates to ensure risks that are identified by the audit are addressed.
- Manage a programme of memorial testing to ensure visitor safety in our cemeteries.

2.7.1 Organisational Development Strategy

2.7.2 We will work with Human Resources to ensure we have the right staff in place to deliver our services. Key deliveries as follows:

- Where approval is given recruit to vacancies across all services, including vacancies in Green Spaces, Grounds Maintenance, Environment Health and the Direct Service teams, providing training and further development as required.
- Working with Human Resources, ensure that cohorts of staff who do not have access to the staff home pages are briefed regarding information, proposed changes or opportunities that relevant to them.

3. On-going services to be delivered:

3.1 Environmental Health

Following the restructure in February 2024 we will continue to deliver all existing services as identified in the background service information in section one of this service delivery plan.

3.2 Engineers

The Engineers will continue to deliver services to reduce the risk of flooding, including participation in the planning process, clearance of ditches and managing street scene and green scene infrastructure. The team will review existing drainage assets including pumping stations and gullies at Housing developments in significant flood risk areas. They will commission principal inspections of bridges in borough open spaces. The team will also manage the transition to new borough-wide bus shelter infrastructure, generating increased revenue.

3.3 **Direct Services Operations (DSO)**

- 3.3.1 Functions to be delivered by the DSO include the collection services, residual waste, recycling, food, garden and trade waste together with street care and cleansing, cleaning public toilets, fine turf, and grounds maintenance for green spaces housing and cemeteries.
- 3.3.2 The recycling team promote recycling, focusing on homes where recycling is harder to deliver such as flats above shops. A business support team provides administrative support for both Green Spaces and the Direct Services teams.

3.4 **Green Spaces**

- 3.4.1 The team will deliver the following services: arboriculture, inspections services for parks, allotment services, event management on RBC land, response to complaints, contract management of the in-house ground's maintenance service, complaint response to green spaces related enquiries, liaison with volunteers and wardens, officer support and committee reports to progress activities related to Englefield Green Committee, Cabrera Trust and Chertsey Meads Liaison Committee, general enquiries and all related enforcement functions including incursions and encampments on RBC land.

4. **Budget Growth required:**

The intention is to deliver all planned services within existing revenue budget. There are, however, some unknowns relating to the delivery of memorial testing which will need to be reviewed as indicated below.

4.1 **Memorial Testing**

- 4.1.1 Runnymede has responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Occupiers Liability Acts 1957 and 1984 and the Local Authorities' Cemetery Order 1977 with respect to health and safety within our cemeteries. Officers are presently assessing our liabilities across the cemeteries and closed graveyards to determine an approach to managing the risks associated with memorials based on good practice. This work will lead to a programme of inspection, testing and remedial safety works across all cemetery and graveyard sites where RBC has liability. Some of this work may not be contained within the existing cemeteries budget.

5. **Capital Programme**

- 5.1 Runnymede Fleet. The Sustainable Fleet Management Strategy at Environment and Sustainability Committee on 7 March 2024. There were the three tenets within the policy; safe and compliant, fit for purpose and offers value for money, and environmentally friendly. The information technology actions identified in the policy have now been delivered with the fleet data fully digitalised.
 - 5.1.1 Following this work, a full fleet review will be undertaken in 2025/26 by the Fleet Management team, to develop a vehicle replacement programme for the next five years.
 - 5.1.2 In Spring 2025, the Bartec route optimisation software will be used to review all collection rounds and sweeper routes. It is anticipated that savings in the delivery of the collection rounds will be realised through the route optimisation process and this may impact on future fleet requirements.

6. **Challenges and Opportunities:**

6.1 The main challenges for 2025/2026 will be as follows:

- Maintaining delivery of the Direct Services Operations at the Ford Road Depot in Chertsey whilst a programme of repairs and improvements are delivered to ensure the site is safe and complaint.
- Relocation of the direct services office cohort to the former St John Ambulance site further along Ford Road.
- Implementing changes following the route optimisation project.
- Implementing changes to the food and recycling collection rounds to deliver requirements in the Environment Act 2021. Consultative work with Surrey CC (the disposal authority) and Runnymede's trade waste customers will be undertaken to agree and deliver services which fit with the requirements of the disposal authority and enable trade waste customers to meet their legal responsibilities.
- Additional work for the Private Sector Housing team will be generated by the draft Renters' Rights Bill.
- Managing the transitional arrangements and data migration process as the Environmental Health team move from Civica to NEC data management software.
- Delivering the tree survey and addressing tree works identified during that project within budget. This work will be done alongside a procurement process for new tree management software and development of schedule of rates for appointed arboriculture contractors. All tree management work will be delivered in collaboration with Housing and Planning colleagues.
- Managing procurement of contract renewals including stray dogs, arboriculture contractors, tree management software and playground inspections.
- Review of all Environmental Services fees and fee structures to identify where possible individual unit cost and any service subsidies. This work will be done working with colleagues in the Finance team.
- Review of Grounds Maintenance in collaboration with Surrey CC and their new contractor Relay. Both Surrey CC and Runnymede BC remodelled their grounds maintenance functions in 2022, Surrey CC took back agency for verge cutting service and Runnymede brought the outsourced grass cutting service back in house. Working with Surrey CC partners we will review collaborative arrangements to ensure the best service standards achievable are delivered for residents.
- Runnymede manages a number of public toilet facilities. These facilities will be reviewed over the summer of 2025.

7. **Savings & Efficiency and Service Review activity:**

- 7.1 Savings and efficiency has been and will continue to be integrated into all aspects of service delivery. Is the service mandatory, can it be done more efficiently and what are residents' priorities are questions which will be asked at every opportunity for change.
- 7.2 Environmental Services has already contributed savings by reducing or cutting budget lines and by deleting a number of vacant posts.
- 7.3 The proposed route optimisation and forthcoming review of street cleansing are both expected to deliver additional savings in 2025/2026.

8. Policy framework implications

8.1 Plan activities.

9. Resource implications

9.1 No growth has been sought for 2025/2026. As identified in item 4.1 officers are identifying how the statutory health and safety memorial testing programme may be delivered and to what extent of the work must be outsourced. If possible, expenditure beyond the capacity of existing cemetery budgets will be spread across wider Environmental Services budgets.

10.0 Legal implications

10.1 No direct legal implications identified as a result of this report. Where there are contractual or other legal implications linked to any of the proposed areas of work, full consideration of these, working with colleagues in Law and Governance, will be undertaken.

11. Equality implications

11.1 No direct equality implications identified as a result of this report.

11.2 Equality Impact Assessments will be conducted for relevant activities and projects being delivered as part of this plan. This will ensure that any equality implications are identified and addressed before new initiatives are introduced.

12 Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

12.1 No direct environmental/ sustainability/ biodiversity implications arising as a result of this report. For all planned activity, consideration will be given to environmental, sustainability and biodiversity implications, in support of the Council's commitment to climate change and its Climate Change Strategy. Planned activity from across the organisation that supports climate change will be reported to Members regularly during the year.

13 Risk implications

13.1 The Service Risk Register has been reviewed for factors that may impact service delivery in 25/26. Risks have been identified, categorised and scored and any risks that score above the Risk Threshold as set out in the Risk Management Framework are reviewed by CLT to be included in the Corporate Risk Register. Planned activity in service area plans may include actions required to mitigate these risks.

13.2 Without approved annual Service Area Plans, there is a risk that is a lack of clarity and prioritisation of activity and resources to enable delivery of the CBP.

14. Conclusions

14.1 The Service Area Plan presented supports the delivery of the Council's CBP and associated corporate strategies. Resources required for delivery must be considered against the financial position of the Council.

(To resolve)

Background papers

Appendix A - Proposed Service Area Plan 2025/26