



STRATEGY GUIDANCE

May 2026

Strategy Guidance

1. Introduction

This guidance sets out the organisation's approach to strategy management. It explains:

- Why the organisation has decided to codify its approach to strategies.
- How strategies are divided into the two categories of key and enabling strategies.
- How each of the strategy types should be managed, including how the need for new strategies will be identified and what to do when a strategy reaches the end of its life.
- The information which should be included within strategies, and how this should be organised.

2. The need to manage council strategies

This guidance has been developed because the council's strategy landscape has over time become cluttered and confusing.

Prior to the development of our new approach, we carried out an exercise to map the council's strategies. In so doing, we identified issues which needed to be addressed. Notably, we found:

- it was not always obvious which strategies were still in effect and which were obsolete.
- strategies could not be identified or accessed from a single point.
- there was no consistency in terms of their form and content or language used.
- there was no easy way to understand which strategies were most important.

The confusion was compounded by the differences in timelines covered by the strategies. This cannot be easily overcome, but clearer labelling to set out the time periods covered and review dates will help to mitigate the confusion.

To address these issues, this document sets out the council's preferred approach to:

- Language used in strategies
- Content to be included in strategies
- How strategies should be managed in terms of their creation, revision, and end of life.
- The creation of a strategy map and central document to record the status of the strategies the council has adopted.

3. Strategy, Plans and Policies

Across the organisation, and even beyond it, there is confusion about how we describe things, with lines blurring between plans, strategies, policies, frameworks and procedures. For the purposes of this guidance, we are setting out our understanding of Strategy, Plan and Policy. This is to enable joint understanding when we use these terms.

Strategy: A strategy sets out a long-term vision and priorities. It answers the question, 'What outcomes do we want for our area and why?'

The definition we have adopted is:

- *A strategy / strategic document is anything which includes the following:*
 - *A vision of where we are now, where we would like to be in the future, and a route map of how we will get there.*
 - *Contains goals to be achieved. These may explicitly be expressed as outcomes.*
 - *Covers a time period of 3+ years. Some strategies may be considerably longer.*

By comparison, plans and policies are characterised as follows:

Plan: A plan translates the strategy into practical steps and projects. It details how the council will deliver within available timescales.

Policy: A policy provides the rules and principles that guide decision making and service delivery. It ensures consistency, compliance with legislation and fairness.

4. Our strategy map

We have divided our strategies into two types. These are **Key Strategies** and **Enabling Strategies**.

Key Strategies

- COG has agreed an approach wherein we have Key Strategies which link to the priorities set by the administration. The assumption is that Key Strategies are required to deliver on the council's priorities.
- In a number of cases, we have identified 'umbrellas' which group existing and future strategies together. (See Appendix 2: strategy map.)

Enabling Strategies

- In the course of our strategy mapping and rationalisation exercise, we have identified several strategies which do not neatly align to the delivery of council priorities. This is not to suggest they are not important, only that the strategies may not require the same profile as the Key Strategies.
- Enabling Strategies will remain in place until they come to the end of their lives at which point they will be reviewed. At the time of review, they may be revised and updated or removed from the strategy map on the grounds they are not required.

A mandate will be required from SLT for the creation of a new/updated strategy. See section 5.

5. Transition to a more structured approach to managing our strategies.

In order to address the challenges outlined in section 2, **strategies should adopt the new format (section 6 and Appendix 1) as they are consolidated and renewed.**

We recognise that some strategies are driven by legislation and direction from Scottish Government. Where this is the case, it may not always be possible to follow the guidelines set out in this document. However, this should be the exception rather than the rule, and any deviations from the guidance set out in this document must be defensible.

We recognise that change will take place over a period of time, rather than there being a 'big bang' shift. Strategies will be reviewed, dropped or replaced at the end of their current life.

To rationalise the number of strategies and to ensure they are aligned to the overall strategic needs of the organisation, from now on **all strategies require a mandate from SLT.**

Mandate for the creation of a new/updated strategy

In developing a proposal for a new or updated strategy, officers should consider the following questions:

1. Does the proposal fit the agreed definition of a strategy?

- If the answer is yes, continue to question 2.
- If the answer is no, do not create a strategy.

2. Does the proposal deliver on one or more of the council's priorities?

- If the answer is yes, continue to question 3.
- If the answer is no, you will need a **mandate from SLT** to proceed. This is because we are aiming to rationalise the number of strategies the organisation has. Even if the proposed strategy does not directly deliver on the council's priorities, it may still be appropriate to proceed, for example if Scottish Government requires one to be produced or if the strategy will reduce strategic risk. If SLT approves the mandate, the strategy produced will fall into the category of an Enabling Strategy.

3. Does your proposal complement an already existing Key Strategy?

- If the answer is yes, consider amending the existing strategy to include the proposal.
- If the answer is no, consider whether it falls under one of the existing 'umbrellas'. You will need a **mandate from SLT** to create a new Key Strategy whether or not it falls under one of the 'umbrellas'.

6. Standard strategy content

Appendix 1 sets out the organisation's preferred way for the information in strategies to be organised.

As stated in section 5, there must be good and defensible reasons for deviating from this structure.

7. Strategic outcomes and performance monitoring

To complement the council's priorities set out in the corporate plan, we also wish to establish a set of Strategic Outcomes. These, with their attached Strategic Outcome Indicators, will enable us to monitor the delivery of our strategies.

Moreover, the setting of clear Strategic Outcomes will enable officers when applying for funding to more effectively set their proposals against the strategic needs and direction of the organisation.

The suite of outcomes and indicators will evolve over time with the creation and renewal of our strategies.

Each new strategy will be required to set out the arrangements for measuring and monitoring its success. Thus, alongside the creation of the strategy, the strategy owner must also create an action plan to show how the strategy will be delivered and its impacts measured.

8. Other things to bear in mind

Strategies should not be prepared in isolation. When developing strategies, you must also bear in mind:

- Requirements to carry out integrated impact assessments.
- Requirements for, and the council's approach to, community engagement and consultation.
- The need to include other services and partners
- The council's commitment to the Scottish Approach to Service Design.

9. Storage and management of strategies

Once approved, all strategies should be stored in a shared drive, with review dates and alerts put in place. (To be developed.)

Appendix 1: Standard strategy content:

Note: the purpose of this guidance is to set out the headings to be used and organisation of material in the strategy, not its graphic design.

Title of strategy

Period covered by the strategy

Purpose of the strategy

Sets out what the business area covered by the strategy does.

Comprises one or two short paragraphs written in a way that can be public facing and understood by stakeholders.

Vision

Describes where the business area wants to be. What will the business area look like in the future.

What success looks like

Sets out what the world will look like when you have delivered on the strategy. ([This tool](#) from the Service Design toolkit may help.)

Contribution to organisational direction

How does this strategy contribute to:

- Corporate priorities?
- Link to Strategic Risk Register – what risks are the strategies designed to overcome?
- Key strategies / 'umbrellas' which are, in turn, contribute to corporate outcomes?

The wider landscape and key drivers

Narrative setting out the context in which the strategy is operating.

Analysis of the wider landscape must include input from Strategic Risk Register along with narrative to explain which risks are relevant to the strategy.

Narrative should also include:

- What are the external forces which are shaping the strategy?
- What are the internal forces which are shaping the strategy?

Narrative should be informed by a combination of PESTELI and SWOT. PESTELI provides good prompts for topics which should be considered, while SWOT provides a structure for identifying where attention should be focused.

You may consider using a combination of PESTELI and SWOT as a way to present the information.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Political		
Economic		
Social		
Technology		
Environment		
Legal		
Infrastructure		

	Opportunities	Threats
Political		
Economic		
Social		
Technology		
Environment		
Legal		
Infrastructure		

Outcomes

Will be identified on the basis of what the strategy aims to achieve and will drive analysis. Links between relevant strategic risk, the outcomes and actions to address these should be clearly identified.

Key actions

Actions underpin each outcome.

This section should focus more on mechanisms in place for delivery than on detailed operational plans.

Actions may be high level, especially if the strategy is underpinned by plans (see Delivery and Implementation).

Where actions relate to changes to service delivery / transformation activities, these should be linked to the Service Design approach.

Delivery and implementation

Identifies the plans which deliver the strategy.

As the review of strategies takes place over time, the contents of this section may expand as existing plans and strategies are absorbed into higher level documents.

Performance and improvement

Key performance indicators for the strategy including indicators, targets, benchmarks.

Ideally small in number, tied into the strategy's goals and demonstrating impact.

There is an assumption that delivery/implementation plans will have additional performance metrics which are not included here.

Reporting

Arrangements for where and how progress on delivering the strategy will be reported. This should include details of the relevant Board and / or Committee, along with frequency of reporting. (See also Review, below.)

Review

Arrangements for review. The default assumption is that each strategy will be reviewed annually to check progress, with improvement actions identified and strategic risk register updated as required.

Additionally, how will the impact of the strategy at the end of its life be reviewed and evaluated?

Appendix 2a: Strategy Map (as at February 2026) – accessible format

Strategies are divided into Key and Enabling Strategies.

Key strategies relate directly to the priorities set by the administration. In the strategy map, the strategies sit under the priority which they deliver.

In a number of cases, we have identified ‘umbrellas’ which group existing and future strategies together. In the strategy map.

In addition to the Key Strategies, we have identified several **Enabling Strategies**. These do not neatly align to the delivery of council priorities. This is not to suggest they are not important, only that the strategies may not require the same profile as the Key Strategies.

Key strategies

Priority: Communities

- Strategy: Refugee and Asylum Strategy

Priority: Children and Young People

- Umbrella: Our Children, Their Future, Thriving Together
 - Under the umbrella: Parental Engagement Strategy; Early Years

Priority: Environment

- Umbrella: Climate Change
 - Under the umbrella: Net Zero Route Map; Renewable Energy Action Plan; Decarbonisation Plan (will be superseded by Climate Change); Woodland and Forestry Strategy; Local Biodiversity Action Plan
- Other strategies listed under Environment: Waste (Draft Waste Strategy); Local Development Plan

Priority: Transport, Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity

- Umbrella: Transport
 - Under the umbrella: Active Transport (under development)

Priority: Housing, Economic Growth and Population

- Umbrella: Local Housing Strategy

- Under the umbrella: Argyll and Bute Strategic Housing Investment Plan
- Umbrella: Economic Strategy and Action Plan
 - Under the umbrella: Business Strategy

Priority: Sustainable Service Delivery

- Umbrella: ICT and Digital
 - Under the umbrella: Website Strategy; Customer Service Strategy
- Umbrella: People Strategy
 - Under the umbrella: Wellbeing Strategy
- Umbrella: Capital and Asset Management
 - Under the umbrella: Corporate Asset Management Strategy (Fleet, Roads, Harbours); Council Estate Strategy (including Learning Estate Strategy)
- Other Strategies listed under Sustainable Service Delivery: Capital Investment Strategy; Financial Strategy (under development)

In addition to the Key Strategies listed above, the following Enabling Strategies have been identified.

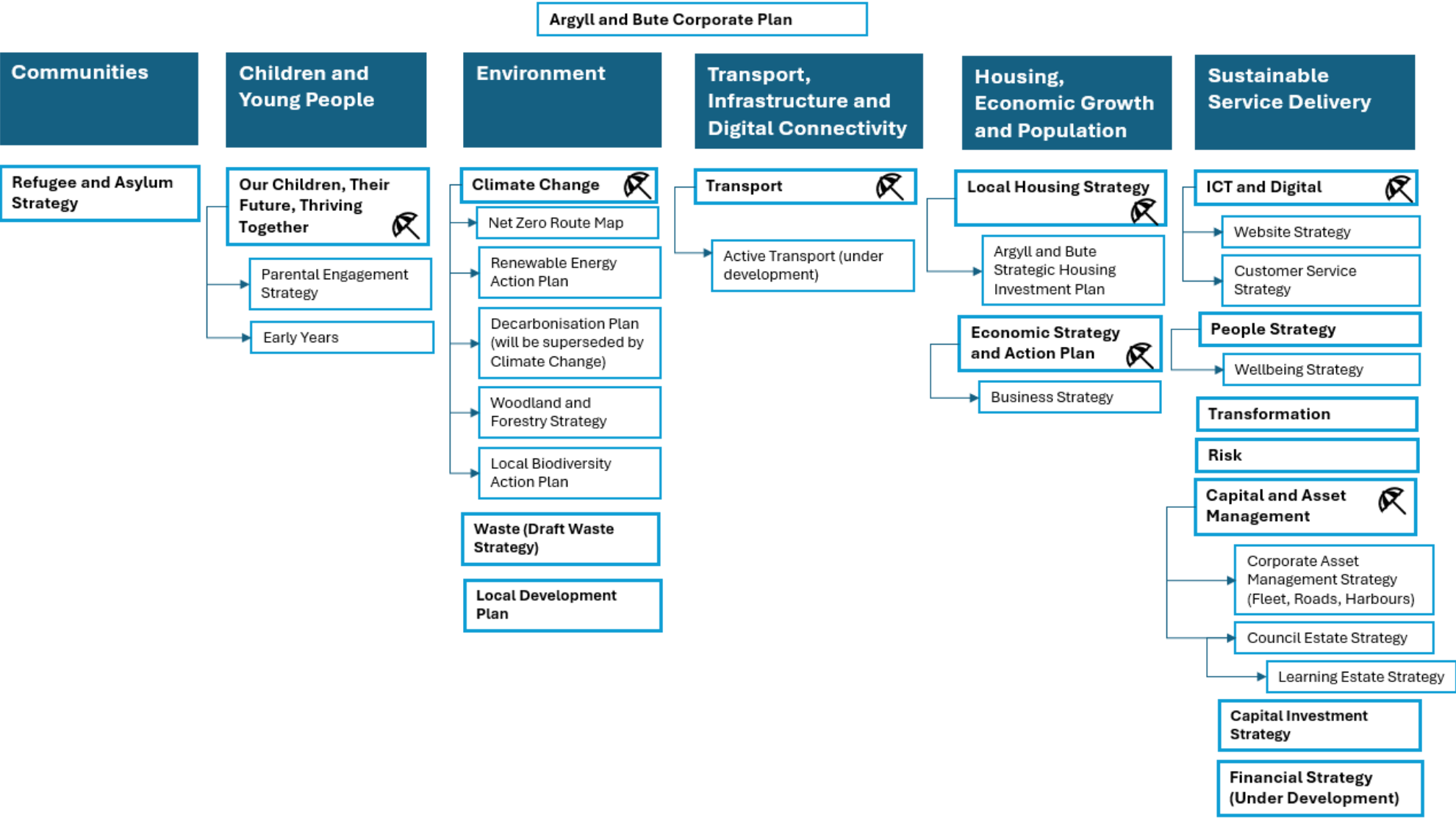
Communities

- Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Child Poverty Action Plan
- Climate Resilience

Sustainable Service Delivery

- Communication Strategy
- Data Strategy
- Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy
- Internal Audit Strategy
- Anti-fraud, Corruption and Bribery Strategy
- Sustainable Procurement Strategy

Appendix 2b: Strategy Map (as at February 2026) - diagram



In addition to the Key Strategies shown in the diagram, the following enabling strategies have been identified. Communities:

- Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Child Poverty Action Plan
- Climate Resilience

Sustainable Service Delivery:

- Communication Strategy
- Data Strategy
- Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy
- Internal Audit Strategy
- Anti-fraud, Corruption and Bribery Strategy
- Sustainable Procurement Strategy