

Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny

Date of Meeting: 16 March 2020

Report Title: Environment Strategy and Carbon Action Plan

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Nick Mannion, Environment and Regeneration

Senior Officer: Frank Jordan, Executive Director Place

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The Council has developed an Environment Strategy to respond to the global threat of climate change and protect and enhance the local environment within our borough.
- 1.2. Cabinet decided on 10 September 2019 to consult on the draft Environment Strategy. This report provides a summary of the consultation responses that were received. It summarises the changes to the strategy as result of the consultation and to reflect progress since September.
- 1.3. The Council has committed to be carbon neutral by 2025 and to work to encourage businesses, residents and organisations in Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint. The Carbon Action Plan sets out how the Council will achieve carbon neutrality by 2025 and influence emission reduction across the Borough.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the draft Environment Strategy and Carbon Action Plan and provides feedback and recommendations to Cabinet.

3. Reasons for Recommendation/s

- 3.1. On 22 May 2019, Cheshire East Council approved the following Notice of Motion relating to Climate Change.

“This Council notes that on 1 May Parliament declared an environment and climate emergency and

a) Requests that a Cheshire East Environmental Strategy is brought forward as a matter of urgency;

b) Commits to the target of Cheshire East Council being carbon neutral by 2025 and asks that details of how to meet this commitment are included in the Environmental Strategy;

c) Will work to encourage all businesses, residents and organisations in Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint by reducing energy consumptions and promoting healthy lifestyles.”

3.2. The Council has developed its Environment Strategy with the following strategic goals:

- Cheshire East Council will be carbon neutral by 2025
- Reduce waste
- Improve air quality
- Ensure new development is sustainable
- Increase sustainable transport and travel
- Protect and enhance our natural environment

3.3. The Environment Strategy will be delivered through a suite of action-oriented strategies and plans. The Carbon Action Plan is the delivery plan that sets out how the Council will be carbon neutral by 2025 and how it will influence carbon emission reduction across the borough.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1. The Council could ‘do nothing’, but that would mean that the Council will take no action to protect, sustain and improve the environment in support of local, national and global priorities.

5. Background

5.1. The Climate Change Act 2008 introduced a legally binding target for the UK to reduce greenhouse gases by 80% by 2050 against a 1990 baseline. In June 2019 the UK Prime Minister announced a revised target - the UK will cut emissions to net zero by 2050.

5.2. The Government published its 25-Year Environment Plan in 2018. Central to this plan is climate change and it sets out its goals for cleaner air and water, thriving plants and animals, and a cleaner, greener country for us all. The Government’s Plan acknowledges that it will require work across society - citizens, businesses, local councils, charities and other non-profit organisations - to make sure that responsible attitudes towards the environment become the norm to secure lasting change.

5.3. Environment Strategy Consultation

- 5.4. The Council consulted on its draft Environment Strategy during October and November 2019. The consultation received a high number of responses from a wide range of stakeholders, including 384 survey responses, 32 formal written responses, and 54 social media comments. Respondents seemed particularly passionate on the topic.
- 5.5. On the whole, the draft Environment Strategy was well received with very large proportions of respondents agreeing the Strategic Goals were relevant (89%) – this suggests the strategy focuses on the right areas. However, respondents felt more detail and greater urgency is needed for the delivery of a successful Environment Strategy
- 5.6. Respondents called for the council to be clearer in the strategy about what its role would be in tackling the climate emergency, with some calling for the council to lead on this issue throughout the borough. Some suggested a sub-regional Carbon Strategy.
- 5.7. Throughout the consultation respondents highlighted some of the key challenges the council will need to meet to face the climate emergency:
- 5.7.1. **Economic growth** – respondents felt that economic growth has in many ways only been possible at the expense of the environment, with a “throw-away” economy, increasing populations and constant development. They questioned how the council will balance economic growth with environmental sustainability. The Council has developed its new Economic Strategy that promotes a ‘sustainable approach’ to growth. Delivering sustainable infrastructure and business environments could be a significant attractor for business to invest in the borough.
- 5.7.2. **Development** - Respondents provided strong views regarding the levels of new housing and development within the borough. They questioned how the council will balance demands for new housing, and new roads, with environmental sustainability. The Environment Strategy explains that the Local Plan, the Council’s plan to manage growth and development over future years, seeks to meet the objectively assessed needs for development which includes accommodating a realistic element of economic growth-derived development need. A strong economy offering sustainable growth is essential in maintaining the borough’s prosperity, but the objective is not economic growth at any price; rather it is the sustainable development of Cheshire East.
- 5.7.3. **Reliance on cars** – Respondents are aware of their reliance on cars, even for short journeys, but feel that there is currently no practical, viable alternative. They felt that current development is not supportive

of this aim – it is “out of town” and therefore car dependent, little green infrastructure is being built, and cuts to bus service subsidies lessen the sustainable transport options available. Electric cars are presented as a solution, but there is doubt that these are environmentally friendly enough to provide a long-term viable alternative. The Environment Strategy acknowledges the reliance on cars within the borough, reporting that Cheshire East has one of the lowest levels of per capita bus use in England. It commits to develop a new Cheshire East Bus Strategy and an Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy.

- 5.7.4. **Reducing waste** – Reduction of the amount of waste produced by residents was seen as a high priority – achieving this with an affluent population will be a challenge, particularly in a consumer economy, as will reducing use of packaging and single use plastic by manufacturers and retailers. Not producing waste in the first place is by far the best environmental and economic solution to tackling waste, then reusing it followed by recycling and composting. Through a range of waste education and awareness initiatives, the Council is encouraging residents to make waste prevention, reduction and reuse a priority over recycling and disposal.
- 5.8. The consultation asked whether the delivery of the Environment Strategy should be subsidised from local taxation or cost neutral to the council, i.e. by relying on government grants and other external funding. Respondents favoured delivery of the strategy being cost neutral to the council – though opinion was fairly split on this. 47% felt delivery of the strategy should be cost neutral to the council, 34% felt it should be subsidised from local taxation, while the remaining 19% were unsure. The adoption of the Environment Strategy will help ensure the financial decisions the Council makes in future are increasingly influenced by carbon accounting principles and the impact on climate change.
- 5.9. The Strategy is designed to provide the policy framework for the Council to evaluate strategies, policies, plans, projects, service delivery and partnerships to consider the environmental and climate change impact. It will ensure that the Council provides strong environmental leadership and stewardship, leading local action in support of the Government’s 25-Year Environment Plan to make sure that responsible attitudes towards the environment become the norm to secure lasting change.
- 5.10. There have been wide-ranging changes to the Environment Strategy to acknowledge and respond to the consultation feedback and in particular the key challenges highlighted by respondents. The Strategic Goals have remained the same, albeit re-worded to reflect the sense of urgency.

- 5.11. The strategy has also been updated to reflect the progress made against the priority actions identified in the draft strategy. For example, the Carbon Action Plan, Local Transport Plan, Municipal Waste Strategy and Green Infrastructure Plan have all been completed and provide the more detailed action plans that respondents to the consultation were seeking.
- 5.12. The strategy identifies that there are further key strategies that will be brought forward to support the achievement of our goals, in particular:
- Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (Local Plan part 2)
 - Minerals & Waste Development Plan Document (Local Plan part 3)
 - Cheshire East Bus Strategy
 - Town Delivery Plans
 - Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy
- 5.13. Carbon Action Plan
- 5.14. The scope of the carbon neutral ambition for 2025 are those emissions over which the Council has direct operational control. The current carbon footprint of the Council has been assessed to be 15,447 t/CO₂e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent). These include the nationally recognised scope 1 (direct fuel/gas use) and scope 2 (direct electricity use). Some elements of Scope 3 (indirect) have been included, where the council has a high level of control even when procured/commissioned and are consistent with the wider environmental messaging around sustainable travel, waste and water use.
- 5.15. The scope does not include emissions from schools and commuting given the council does not have the ability to directly influence. The scope also does not include the remainder of Scope 3 emissions concerned with emissions from the wider array of goods and services procured or commissioned, given that the council does not directly control and they are impossible to measure accurately.
- 5.16. The Carbon Action Plan acknowledges the varying influence the Council has on its own emissions versus borough wide emissions. As a result, the Action Plan firstly address topics directly under the Council's control and then expands the scope to address areas of medium and weaker influence in the borough. Some actions relate to the 2025 target whereas others relate to the broader borough-wide ambition.
- 5.16.1. **Behaviour Change and Internal Policy** - Actions that focus on internal policy, culture and behaviour of the council (e.g. decision-making and procurement process). Changes in this category are generally the least financially intensive and can be initiated quickly. It

is also important to drive actions in this area as an enabler and stimulus of further action in the wider borough.

5.16.2. **Energy Demand Reduction** - Focused on council operations and assets (e.g. council buildings, fleet), but unlike the above, relates to more tangible, capital investment related actions that the council can take to use less energy and fuel, and improve efficiency.

5.16.3. **Increase Low Carbon Energy Supply** - Alongside a reduction in energy demand, it is necessary to improve the supply of energy from renewable sources. This includes both a council and borough-wide focus for action, as measures will commonly deliver benefits at scale that can provide opportunity for stakeholders beyond just the council.

5.16.4. **Natural Capital** - Similar to energy supply – the council has the opportunity to progress action both on its own land estate and within the borough more widely.

5.16.5. **Reduce Borough-wide Emissions** - Although these emissions may be under the least influence from the council, in-borough emissions must also reach net zero to keep the UK on track with the national target. The council's role becomes one of a partner or facilitator amongst the community and local businesses, but there is the potential to offset direct council emissions through this work. The Council will develop communication resources and toolkits to assist parish town councils and communities in calculating, reducing and offsetting Carbon.

5.17. These actions, alongside decarbonisation of the electricity grid, are expected to reduce the Council's carbon emissions by 6,095 t/CO₂e, a 39% reduction on 2019. The Council will therefore need to plan to offset a minimum of 9,352 t/CO₂e. This will be done through two mechanisms:

5.17.1. Green Electricity – the residual carbon from electricity can be offset with purchase of green electricity, this includes an allowance of 10% electrification of heat and fleet emissions. The Council will prioritise purchase from local energy generating projects where available. This is expected to save 2,191 t/CO₂e.

5.17.2. Authority Based Insets – the remaining 7,058 t/CO₂e will be offset through local offsetting projects. These local offsets being described as 'insets' because they are within the scope of the council's control, in this instance the borough. It is anticipated that this will be a 50/50 split between carbon sequestration and reduction projects, but this will be reviewed following the development of detailed implementation plans.

- 5.18. The Council is engaging with sub-regional partners through the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to consider our common goals and how our stronger, collective voice can have a better impact, in particular in influencing government and business.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1. Legal Implications

6.1.1. There is no legal obligation to publish an Environment Strategy, but doing so resonates with the approach taken by government in respect of its 25 Year Plan and the draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill 2018. It ensures the Council is well positioned in respect of the direction of travel at national and international level.

6.1.2. There are no implications from the Environment Strategy, as its purpose is to guide the formulation of other strategies and plans with a focus on environmental matters. There may well be legal implications that arise from the formulation or implementation of those other strategies and plans, but those will be addressed on a case by case basis.

6.2. Finance Implications

6.2.1. To support the delivery of this strategy, the Council has included investment totalling £12.7m (revenue and capital) within the 2020/24 Medium Term Financial Strategy supporting the development of a range of measures including:

- Improving energy efficiency across the Council's buildings estate
- Improving active and sustainable travel options
- Exploring and developing local schemes for sustainable energy production
- Investing in locally focused carbon offset schemes including large-scale tree planting, hedgerow replacement and peat moss regeneration
- Establishing crowd funding applications and policies to allow local communities to contribute to carbon offset through community tree planting.

6.2.2. Further investment requirements will need to be incorporated into the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy as projects complete initial feasibility and business case planning stages.

6.3. Policy Implications

6.3.1. The Environment Strategy sets out priorities and actions that will contribute to priorities at a borough, national and global level. The strategy contributes to two of the Council's strategic outcomes: that Cheshire East is a green and sustainable place and that People live well and for longer.

6.3.2. The Carbon Action Plan will have policy implications across the council, in order to introduce carbon budgets and targets and assess projects on a carbon benefit, in addition to cost benefit.

6.4. Equality Implications

6.4.1. An Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted and concluded that there are no direct equality implications.

6.5. Human Resources Implications

6.5.1. There are no implications for human resources from the strategy. Any new projects initiated as a result of the Environment Strategy will assess their specific HR implications through the business case process.

6.6. Risk Management Implications

6.6.1. The Environment Strategy has been developed to help mitigate the risk of further harm to our environment.

6.6.2. The key risk to the delivery of the Environment Strategy and Carbon Action Plan will be competing priorities within the council.

6.7. Rural Communities Implications

6.7.1. The Environment Strategy will help to protect and enhance the character of our rural areas and support rural communities.

6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

6.8.1. Improving our environment benefits all people, but taking action on climate change will help to leave the environment in a better state for the next generation. Young people in many parts of the world have been actively protesting that their environment is being destroyed and calling on governments to take urgent action on climate change. This has led to the UK Government to announcing that a group of young people will advise the government on priorities for environmental action.

6.9. Public Health Implications

6.9.1. Spending time in the natural environment improves mental health and feelings of wellbeing. The Environment Strategy seeks to protect,

develop and enhance our green spaces and in so doing help people of all ages access and benefit from their use. Encouraging active travel such as cycling or walking will also be beneficial.

- 6.9.2. The strategy also recognises the impact air quality can have on public health and reinforces our commitment to improve the air quality environment in Cheshire East.

6.10. Climate Change Implications

- 6.10.1. The key purpose of the Environment Strategy is to set out the strategic goals and priority actions the Council will take to respond to the global challenge of climate change. The Carbon Action Plan will have a positive impact on climate change through delivering carbon neutrality for the Council's operations and promoting climate action mitigation measures across the Borough.

7. Ward Members Affected

- 7.1. All wards.

8. Consultation & Engagement

- 8.1. The Council consulted on its draft Environment Strategy during October and November 2019. Three reports have been produced to report on the consultation: a summary report, which is included as appendix 2 to this report; a full report, and a report containing all formal response. All reports will be published on the council's website.

9. Access to Information

- 9.1. The Council's Environment Strategy is provided as appendix 1 to this report.
- 9.2. The Environment Strategy Consultation – Summary Report is provided as appendix 2.
- 9.3. The Carbon Action Plan is provided as appendix 3.

10. Contact Information

- 10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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