

Minute from Overview & Scrutiny Meeting on 7 September 2023

Environmental Sustainability Strategy: Annual Report

The Committee received the third annual update on the progress in delivering the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy, adopted in July 2020.

Councillor Moses, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, outlined the work that had taken place over the past year, challenges and next steps. In addition, the agenda pack included Annex 2 which is summary of the external studies that have been commissioned to assist in the Council's journey to net zero. The Council's sustainability work is very wide ranging and split across two main areas - at a council level – where there is direct control – and also more widely working with others to improve sustainability across the borough as a whole.

The following areas were highlighted:

Data and Evidence

Annex 2 provides a useful summary of the background work that is ongoing to ensure the evidence base is up to date.

This work is important: The Council has choices about how it achieves its sustainability targets while also meeting service delivery and financial sustainability commitments. This information will help inform those choices.

The Council still faces some issues with data availability, as described in the report, but this has improved since the Strategy was adopted and will continue to do so.

Progress on the Action Plan

The Council continues to make good progress on the actions in the Action Plan.

Members will recall that the original action plan included over 100 actions.

Annex 1 shows the progress that is being made against all of these. It shows those that have been completed, those that are underway and (in a few instances) where the Council has not been able to complete actions or where actions have needed to be postponed.

Carbon Emissions

The organisation's carbon emissions have increased as we have come out of the two years of pandemic-related lockdowns. During this period, a number of Council buildings were closed, and activities restricted.

Overall, however, emissions are down from the pre-Covid baseline year.

The covering report (at paragraphs 26 to 31) explains some of the specific interventions being progressed to continue and accelerate this reduction in the short term. It explains how these will be funded and the carbon savings they are expected to generate. Annex 2 includes information about the trajectory towards net zero.

Funding

The Council has allocated £239,000 of external UK Shared Prosperity Funds to deliver a range of sustainability activities over a three-year period. £850,000 of Strategic CIL funding has also been secured to reduce energy use across Council buildings; this will also save money on the Council's energy bills.

Other funding to improve Council buildings and reduce carbon emissions from the fleet will be sought via internal budget setting processes or from external sources.

Funding allocations will be linked to there being satisfactory business cases for these activities.

Review of the Strategy

More information about the scope of this is provided in the covering report at paragraphs 32 to 34.

There will be Member engagement as part of this process, and any relevant suggestions from Committee members tonight will be factored into that review process.

Several advance questions on this item had been submitted prior to the meeting. The advance questions and their responses can be viewed here:

[Document Advance Questions and Answers OS 7 September 2023 | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

The Executive Member for Corporate Environment and Sustainability, Councillor Moses, invited Members to ask questions on the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Annual Report provided in the agenda pack. In response, the following clarifications were provided:

Carbon emissions

The Council's own emissions constituted 0.2% of emissions in the Borough. The remainder of emissions in the Borough come from several sources, such as domestic, transport, and industrial usage; The Local Government Association suggests that 33% of all emissions are within the influence of local authorities. The Council is working with businesses to help them reduce their carbon emissions. It was confirmed that the Council has a good working relationship with Surrey County Council at officer level and that it also works closely with other partners in the local area on collaborative working to reduce carbon emissions. National funding is sought, which is often delivered county-wide but at the local level, value is added through local promotion, using local data and evidence, and marketing.

Action Plan

It was confirmed that the action plan would be reviewed as part of the strategy review. In relation to the trajectories, there were a number of uncertainties, particularly around technology; currently there was no certainty when low carbon HGVs that meet the service's needs will be available, but as technology evolves, that was expected to change. The expectation was for the O&S Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Panel to meet early in 2024.

Tree planting

It was important to ensure that the right type of trees were planted in the right areas. It was confirmed that 6,600 trees had been planted by Surrey County Council and now that the Countryside Officer was in place, this officer and the Woodland Officer could liaise with Surrey County Council on the type of trees planted and their location.

Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO)

It was confirmed that virgin crops could not be used in the production of HVO; this oil must be produced from recycled oil from industries, such as the food industry, and

was audited and tested to ensure compliance. Hydrogen powered vehicles were also being explored as an option by the Council.

Transition to electric vehicles

It was confirmed that these trajectories were based on transitioning vehicles to electricity and that replacement of vehicles would be on a rolling basis. The charging capacity would be a consideration and had not yet been factored into the trajectories; work to explore this had already begun including discussions with UK Power Networks.

Agricultural Council-owned land

It was suggested by a committee member that Council-owned land adjacent to Banstead Wood could be converted to woodland to support environmental sustainability, which could potentially be part-funded by woodland planting funding to celebrate the coronation of King Charles. The Portfolio Holder would discuss this possibility with the Countryside and Woodland Officers.

Recycling and waste

It was confirmed that all newly built flats were directly added to the recycling service and that the Waste and Recycling team were embedding recycling for flats. However, there was a backlog of flats waiting for full recycling service, exacerbated by the delay in publication of The Government's Waste and Resources Strategy. The chair noted that officers had previously agreed to supply members with details of the backlog of properties in their ward. A written response would be provided with an update on the plans for the service being provided to all flats.

A committee member requested that provision of industrial-sized recycling bins for organisations, such as Reigate College, could be considered in the action plan.

It was confirmed that the Waste and Recycling team have secured CIL funding to introduce solar compacting bins in public locations and that consideration would be given to how best to direct residents on which bin to use for different streams of waste, to reduce contamination of recycling bins.

Greenspaces Strategy

The Greenspaces Strategy could not be undertaken until the Strategy Guidance document had been approved. Once the guidance has been approved, the Greenspaces Strategy would be started; more would be known early in 2024.

Improvements to Council buildings

In improving operational buildings, consideration must be given to how these buildings would be used in future; reviews would be undertaken and then infrastructure built to support the uses, which would take meticulous planning, to avoid the need for works to be revised if the building underwent a change of use.

A written response would be provided with an update on LED replacement roll out across Council buildings.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- i. Noted the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Annual Progress Report at Annex 1 and made observations to the Executive.
- ii. Agreed to request Democratic Services (in consultation with the O&S Chair and relevant Head of Service) to prepare a scoping report looking at establishing a

time limited Scrutiny Panel for the forthcoming Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review, to be considered at a future meeting.