

Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 13 October 2022

Draft Minute 25 – Agenda Item 5 Annual Environmental Sustainability Strategy Progress Report

The Committee received an annual update on the work towards the objectives set out in the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy, adopted in July 2020.

Councillor Lewanski, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Policy and Resources, outlined the work that had taken place over the past year, challenges and next steps. In addition, the agenda pack included Annex 1 which set out the progress on Environmental Sustainability Strategy (ES Strategy) Actions and Indicators for 2021/22.

As well as carbon emission data, the priority topics were:

- The Council's own assets and buildings
- The Council's vehicle fleet
- Rolling out electric vehicle charging infrastructure; and
- Domestic retrofit

Several advance questions had been received. The questions and responses can be viewed here:

[Document Advance Questions OS 13 October 2022 | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

In addition, Members asked the following questions:

Natural Environment: Ecological Enhancement – Members commented that the planting of new trees was commendable but that some of these trees were dying due to lack of maintenance and watering and felt that a resource was necessary to care for the new trees. It was confirmed that residents were requested to water new trees and that the Council relied on residents' goodwill. Members observed that this was not feasible if the trees were well away from housing, such as in parks and open spaces. It was suggested by Members that new trees planted in these areas could be smaller trees which required less watering.

The Environmental Sustainability Strategy has an action encouraging trees removed due to new developments be relocated elsewhere in the borough; Members asked whether this practice was in actively place. It was confirmed that although this had occurred on a few limited occasions it was not regularly used and that this was an aspirational target.

Energy and Carbon: Renewable Energy – Members asked how retrofitting of homes was facilitated in older homes with solid wall construction. It was confirmed that retrofitting presented challenges and could not be made mandatory by the Council. However, there were several options available to

residents including government grants such as the Sustainable Warmth Grant and officers asked Members to make their constituents aware of these grants. Options were not limited to cavity wall insulation, other options for solid wall construction homes were available such as external wall insulation, internal wall insulation, loft insulation and window and door insulation.

Although noting that the number of upgraded properties was low compared to the total number of homes in the borough, Members commended officers for their work on raising awareness of and facilitating retrofitting and commented that there had been some significant successes.

Members enquired whether the Home Upgrade Grant would be applied for. It was confirmed that this grant was included in the Sustainable Warmth package.

Effective Implementation: Communications – Members asked how the Council communicates with residents regarding energy saving tips and similar information. It was reported that information is available on the Council website and through the Borough News publication regarding issues such as the Sustainable Warmth Grant and sign posting to other sources of information. The Council provides a wealth of communication pertaining to general ways of saving and works with the Surrey County Council Campaign, the voluntary sector, parish councils and food banks.

Electrical Vehicle Charging – Members noted that of 29 charging points in the Borough, only 7 are owned by the Council and were concerned that this number should be increased. It was confirmed that the Council is working on an agreement with Surrey County Council to provide further electric vehicle charging points.

Members asked for the full fleet review and the consultant survey of buildings to be shared. It was confirmed that the fleet review report would be shared following the meeting but that the survey of assets had not yet been completed – the key outcomes from this work would be shared when it had been finalised.

Members asked that future information more clearly shows progress against targets with an analysis of targets met, factors resulting in reductions and next steps to address challenges. It was reported that the Environmental Sustainability Strategy had been written pre-COVID and was due to be reviewed next year, and a carbon trajectory is in the process of being produced; officers would be happy to work with Members to adapt future reporting to be more specific during the upcoming review.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Noted the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Annual Progress Report at Annex 1 and made observations to the Executive.

Advance Questions

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Question 2

Page 50 What measures are being looked at to reduce the carbon emissions and reduce overall energy usage from buildings?

Written Answer

In relation to the Council's operational buildings a wide range of measures is being considered. Examples include:

- Energy efficiency measures: eg LED lighting, antiglare film, glazing upgrades, wall / loft insulation, gas boiler replacement
- Energy management and behaviour change measures: eg building energy management systems, heating controls, sub-metering, motion sensors
- Renewable energy opportunities: eg transitioning from gas to electric heating, solar and battery storage

Question 3

- a) Page 53 Great that we have reached Bronze level Carbon literacy. What proportion of officers is 20 who are now carbon literate and what does it take to get to Silver?

Written Answer

The Council has over 500 employees in total, so 20 carbon literate staff is clearly only a small proportion of this.

However, there is already good representation of carbon literate staff across a range of service areas including at the senior management level. Service areas that have participated include communications; democratic services; corporate policy, projects & performance; fleet; place delivery; property; data & insight; licensing & regulation; economic prosperity; revenue, benefits & fraud; community partnerships; waste & recycling. Trained managers and staff are able to promote sustainability within their teams until more staff are able to be trained.

The Silver level award requires a greater proportion of staff to be certified carbon literate, and carbon literacy to be integrated in various ways in organisational procedures, eg recruitment, performance management etc.

Other forms of sustainability training, briefings and updates are also provided to staff, recognizing that carbon literacy training may not be appropriate for everyone. These include online training, briefing sessions and staff news items.

- b) Would it be possible to increase ambition and plan to train all Councillors to be carbon literate?

Written Answer

All Councillors have been offered the opportunity of carbon literacy training, and further training will be offered in the future. However, we are very aware that the format of certified carbon literacy training may not work in practical terms for all Councillors, so (as for staff) other forms of training and briefings are also made available.

- c) What are the reservations about the ranking methodologies applied by Climate Emergency UK in ranking district and boroughs strategy and action plans?

Written Answer

Our concerns were primarily methodological, and included:

- Only looking at a single published strategy document rather than the wider range of information published by the Council over a period of time
- An expectation that operational details would be provided in said strategy document, which is not usual practice
- A simplistic (tick box) approach to assessment scoring

It was however positive that Climate Emergency UK engaged with local authorities on their draft assessment, and we took this opportunity to communicate our concerns to them.

Question 4

Page 53 What scope is there for the tree strategy to include anything to reduce instances of pre-emptive felling of mature trees by developers on sites not owned by Council?

Written Answer

This would unfortunately not fall within the scope of the tree strategy; instances of pre-emptive tree felling by developers is a planning issue, with council powers defined by legislation.

Question 5

Page 59 What progress has been made on investigating the potential for PV on Council operated assets? Mentioned in Actions but not in progress.

Written Answer

Opportunities for PV have been considered as part of the Energy Audits project (see Question 1 above). Surrey County Council also commissioned consultants to do a desktop assessment of potential opportunities.

However no detailed feasibility assessments have yet been carried out – where appropriate this will be done as part of our ongoing work to retrofit our operational buildings.

Question 6

Page 59 What is the measure used to decide if moving to Green tariffs is financially viable?

Written Answer

We use the energy management consultancy 'Beond' to manage our energy contracts; with bids invited from all types of suppliers, and the ability to then select based on cost or other considerations. Clearly financial cost to the Council is an important consideration at this time and a number of our electricity contracts are coming up this Autumn.

Question 7

Page 60 What is the progress on car club provisions? (I have personally asked for conditions re Car clubs to be added to Planning applications, so this doesn't seem to be done by Planning team and I have investigated with Surrey for one in my area and have struggled to get a response from SCC)

Written Answer

The Development Management Plan policy TAP1 encourages consideration of car pools/car clubs but does not mandate them, and such measures are only likely to be suitable to require on larger developments.

SCC offers discounted car club membership – we promote this via our website, and we continue to work with officers at the county in relation to how this could be further enhanced.

Question 8

Page 63 How is it possible that we cannot measure the waste generated in the council offices and facilities? How is this being addressed?

Written Answer

Organisational waste generation can be measured in two ways, by:

- a. weighing the waste at the time of collection, or

- b. weighing on-site before it is collected (either as business-as-usual or by undertaking quarterly or annual 'snapshots').

In relation to (a), the way in which the Council (as collection authority) collects commercial waste (ie waste from businesses) does not allow for it to be weighed at the time of collection, this is due to not all vehicles having the technology to weigh the waste that is collected.

In relation to (b) options to do this are currently being scoped, however resource availability within the Waste & Recycling team (and the need to prioritise waste & recycling collection from residents) means that this is unlikely to be possible to introduce in the short term.