

BOROUGH OF REIGATE AND BANSTEAD

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY REVIEW PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Panel held at the Executive Meeting Room - Town Hall on 12 February 2024 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillors J. Baker, M. S. Blacker, J. Booton, V. Chester, Z. Cooper, K. Fairhurst and P. Harp (Chair)

Visiting Member Present: Councillor S. Kulka

Visiting Member attending virtually: Councillor N. Harrison

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Blacker nominated and Councillor Cooper seconded Councillor Harp as Chair of the Panel for the 2023/24 Municipal year.

RESOLVED that Councillor Harp be elected Chair of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Panel for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no apologies, all panel members were present.

3. 2023/24 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

Ahead of the meeting, the 2023/24 Review of the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan Report and supporting documents were circulated to the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Panel Members. Advance questions were invited.

Advance Questions – Responses

Advance Questions from panel members were received on 6 February 2024 and were sent for consideration to officers. The responses provided by the Environmental Sustainability team were circulated to panel members on 9 February 2024.

Members of the panel had submitted a total of 21 Advance Questions, which had been grouped accordingly.

The panel reviewed the responses to the Advance Questions received and asked supplementary questions. The Head of Corporate Policy, Projects, and Performance and attendant officers provided further information in response to questions and additional points of discussion.

The outcome of the panel's work would be set out in the Review of the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy Report which would be presented to

Overview and Scrutiny Committee's meeting on 14 March 2024. This would include comments and recommendations from the Panel to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following its review and discussions of the draft Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan. The Strategy and Action Plan would then go forward to the Executive for agreement.

“Climate Crisis”

The panel spent some time discussing the terminology relating to the “climate crisis”. Some panel members felt that this term was alarmist and preferred “climate change”, while others favoured the term “climate emergency”. The panel noted that the United Nations had used the term “climate crisis”. Panel members noted that consistent terminology should be considered and referred to the “cost of living crisis”.

A Panel member requested information on outstanding air quality management areas (AQMAs). The Head of Corporate Policy, Projects, and Performance would request a written response from the Environmental Health team.

Administrative Comments

It was confirmed that the foreword to the strategy would be written by the Portfolio Holder once the review had been completed.

It was confirmed that the draft strategy had been drafted by officers, considered by the Corporate Governance Group and shared informally by Executive members, who had not requested any substantive changes to the draft strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1.1 The Scope of the Review

A panel member noted that the net zero carbon targets should specify that they relate to scope 1 and 2, as no net zero carbon target had been set for scope 3.

A panel member suggested that 2050 could be set as a net zero target for scope 3, but another panel member noted that “2030 or as soon as possible thereafter” was a good aspirational target.

The Harlequin

It was confirmed that the Harlequin was included in the carbon emissions baseline, but that officers would consider adding additional information relating to the Harlequin under 1.5 Constraints to Delivering the Strategy. Additionally, the annual report could contain narrative relating to the Harlequin and the impact of its closure.

3. Energy and Carbon

3.1.1 Annual greenhouse gas emissions - 2050 Vision

A panel member reported that car ownership was increasing rather than decreasing and that cars purchased were not all run on renewable energy.

The availability of electric vehicle chargers was discussed as well as the available power supply to run the chargers. It was confirmed that the Council was consulting with UK Power Networks regarding the installation of further charging points and the opportunities to utilise load management to share the power load across an increased number of charging points. It was also confirmed that the Council's emerging EV Chargepoint strategy was informed by the work carried out by Surrey County Council with regard to electric vehicle charging.

3.2 Priorities

It was confirmed that there was an intention to move away from gas supplies completely, and that this was included in the action plan.

4. Low Impact Consumption

4.1 Overview

Water consumption in Reigate and Banstead borough was reported as 150.8 litres per person in 2022/23; panel members asked for this statistic to specify whether this was per day.

4.2 Priorities

The strategy states that the Council will work with SES Water to reduce consumption of mains water; panel members asked if the strategy could also include an action to work with Thames Water, as both water companies operated in the borough.

A panel member stated that Water Companies should be held to account for their responsibility to repair water leaks and that the Council should pursue them to carry out this responsibility.

It was noted that utility providers had previously been invited to present to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that SES Water and Thames Water could be scrutinised in the future work programme for Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Panel members noted that the definition of water consumption should be more clearly explained in the strategy, as residents may understand water consumption as a term relating to the quantity of drinking water consumed.

5. Natural Environment and biodiversity

5.1 Overview

Panel members noted that although the Council owns approximately 1250 hectares of countryside, this is not all managed by the Council; Banstead Commons Conservators, tenant farmers and other volunteers maintain a significant amount of this land, with the Council managing approximately 60%.

5.2 Priorities

A panel member proposed a policy change to prohibit the felling of any tree over 15feet / 4.6m without planning permission. It was recognised that proposing this

policy change would be difficult, but that this could be raised with the Planning team as part of the Local Plan review.

It was noted that the 10% Biodiversity Net Gain had become national law that day and that this would assist in preventing developers from clearing trees and plants from sites before submitting planning applications.

7. Effective Implementation

7.2 Planning policies

In response to a panel member's question, it was confirmed that the Council was looking into ways to improve the environmental sustainability of its listed buildings, principally the Town Hall. Guidance from English Heritage was available, and examples of National Trust buildings could be viewed for inspiration and to learn from best practice.

7.3 Procurement

Panel members noted that the Council had in past years engaged in public awareness campaigns regarding food waste and that it would be good to revive this kind of engagement to align with the schools' curriculum regarding sustainability and wellbeing. It was confirmed that there were several actions in the action plan relating to waste and recycling; this section of the strategy was focused more on the purchase of sustainable food rather than food waste. Officer agreed to investigate this further.

7.5 Monitoring and Reporting

A panel member questioned why the Environmental Sustainability Strategy v2 would be reviewed "no later than 2029", and not specifically scheduled for 2027. Officers explained that the Council's policy was to review strategies every 3-5 years, this would provide a review date of 2027-2029. Officers would review this wording in the strategy.

Challenges and Opportunities

9.2 challenges

Panel members again voiced their concern over the electrical grid capacity to manage increased electric vehicle charging.

Panel members noted that better tree watering management would be necessary to the survival of tree planting.

Action Plan

Panel members noted that in the action plan, several actions were marked as "ongoing" and queried whether this should be marked as "business as usual"; officers explained that for ongoing actions, a start date was specified and confirmed that although some actions were "business as usual" it was nonetheless important to capture these actions in the action plan, with progress being illustrated in the annual reporting. Additionally, it was challenging to identify completion target dates for some actions where they are "ongoing".

Panel members felt that it would be advantageous to have phase completion dates or milestones identified for actions.

In response to a panel member question about the effectiveness of education, officers confirmed that providing educational information and offering advice to Council tenants on energy efficiency was important; information sessions were held in community centres, and residents were engaged and interested in learning about energy efficiency. Education and advice were part of the overall package of delivering sustainability.

A panel member requested that a trajectory graph to net zero be included in the strategy document to demonstrate progress on the target. Officers confirmed that an annual trajectory graph was included in the annual report, in addition to narrative in the covering report provided to the panel on the progression towards target. The trajectory would be easier to illustrate for fleet than for buildings. Officers agreed to reflect on the request and how best to illustrate progress to Members. Key projects and performance measures had been identified, and progress would be reported on by a combination of quantitative measures and qualitative narrative. It was explained that achieving key projects such as moving buildings from away from gas, and moving fleet vehicles to HVO fuel, would result in a large leap in the percentage of progress towards net zero.

In response to a panel member's question, officers confirmed that trade waste collection was available through the Council for paper and cardboard, and residual waste. The collection service would be expanded to include more waste from 2025 in response to the Government's Resources and Waste Strategy, which will make it compulsory for businesses to recycle waste. Panel members suggested the introduction of an incentive scheme to encourage schools and organisations to recycle their waste paper.

Panel members requested an explanation of offsetting. Officers explained that when carbon emissions were at 10% or less, the Council would look to offset the remaining percentage by removal from the atmosphere, with methods such as tree planting. There was a new section in the strategy addressing this process and exploring options for offsetting.

It was confirmed that the Greenspaces Strategy and Tree Strategy would be drafted in 2024/25. The Greenspaces team would lead on the strategy, but the Environmental Sustainability team would also be involved to provide an Environmental Sustainability perspective. The Planning team would also be reviewing the Green Infrastructure Strategy. A panel member suggested that the Council could work with other local landowners to create greater biodiversity in the local area.

Annex 3 – Environmental Sustainability Strategy Objectives

Objective 4 – A panel member requested that promotion of community travel be included in this objective to tie in with reducing personal car travel. Officers confirmed that community travel was being explored with the Community Partnerships team, and that they would consider the suggestion. Officers confirmed that electric bikes were acceptable for road use, but that electric scooters were not. Officers also reported that work was ongoing with Sustrans to promote active travel,

and options for working with Surrey County Council to encourage low carbon emission transport were being explored.

Objective 11 – A panel member asked why native tree species mix would be improved rather than increased. Officers explained that this change in wording had been made on the advice of the Greenspaces team and was largely driven by the problem of Ash Dieback. The objective had been amended to focus on maintaining the health of existing trees, however did not preclude an increase in the number of trees. Panel members questioned the amount of tree management carried out by the Council. Officers confirmed that other agencies did contribute to tree management but highlighted that the importance should be placed on successful tree management, rather than who performs it. Although Ash Dieback would have a negative impact on trees in the borough, there was no intention to accept an overall decline in woodlands.

Objective 12 – It was confirmed that soft landscape referred to greenspaces that were not trees or woodland, for example grassland.

Objective 14 – Panel members identified the need to be aware of the pesticides and herbicides used by the Greenspaces team and noted that there were no targets set regarding the use of these chemicals. Officers would also check which authority (RBBC or SCC) held the responsibility for weedkilling on pavements.

Annex 4 – Engagement Report

In response to a panel member question regarding partner organisations and interest groups engaged, officers confirmed that a large number of interest groups had been invited to engage but only four groups were able to attend. Officers were keen to engage with further interest groups and invited panel members to provide contact details of additional groups to be contacted.

A Panel member suggested working with private sector partners. Officers recognised that while there could be benefits from working with private partners, caution would need to be taken. The Council continued to learn from best practice.

A panel member had several questions which she agreed to submit in writing to the clerk following the meeting.

Councillor Moses, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability thanked the officers for their work and thanked the panel.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The observations and comments of the panel are contained in minute 3 above.

5. NEXT STEPS

Next steps are as follows:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the 2023/24 Review of the Council's Environmental Strategy and Action Plan updated in light of the panel's observations recommendations
14 March 2024

Executive considers the 2023/24 Review of the Council's Environmental Strategy and Action Plan updated in the light of the panel's observations / recommendations and any further observations made by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21 March 2024

6. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

The Meeting closed at 9.12 pm