

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 14 March 2024

Draft minute 80 – Review of the Council’s Environmental Sustainability Strategy

Councillor Moses, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, introduced the Review of the Council’s Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

The main changes proposed to the Council’s Strategy included more detail about the scope of the Council’s carbon footprint. There was also a new chapter addressing how the Council adapts to the impacts of climate change.

The report contained information about the main challenges and risks to delivering the Strategy, and the Action Plan had been fully revised to include 91 new actions, and more information about how actions would be funded and reported on.

The review process, and a draft version of the Strategy and the Action Plan, were considered in detail by the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Scrutiny Panel on 12 February 2024; the Portfolio Holder thanked all the members of the Panel for their questions, comments, and suggestions. All specific suggestions made by the Panel had been considered, resulting in a number of changes being made to the Strategy and Action Plan. Annex 3 provided more detail about where changes had been made, and where (in some cases) officers do not consider changes to be necessary.

One of the main Panel comments had been making sure delivery of the Action Plan could be clearly tracked and reported on. As a result, timeframes of all actions in the Action Plan had been reviewed. Start dates were provided for all actions, plus an indication of when actions would continue over several years.

Performance indicators had also been reviewed. Changes had been made in a number of cases to make it clearer what information will be reported. In some cases, further work would be required to identify detailed actions and reporting measures.

An example of this was the Greenspaces Strategy:

- In the ES Action Plan, there was an action to develop a Greenspaces Strategy, so the Performance Indicator would be whether this has been achieved or not.
- The Greenspaces Strategy itself would then contain more detailed actions and indicators.

Another comment from the Panel had been about being able to understand how the Strategy would deliver the Council’s carbon reduction target. Unfortunately, this was not straightforward to do, but some information had been provided in Annex 4. The first chart showed the impact of different measures to reducing the Council’s carbon footprint. For example, the impact of moving to HVO in bin lorries, and to removing gas heating in Council-owned buildings. Where there was uncertainty, this had been shown. Examples of uncertainty included the future of the Harlequin Theatre; and evolving vehicle technology for HGVs.

The second chart showed what progress over the next few years may look like. Less certain actions had not been assumed, but of course, these may be brought forward sooner if uncertainty is resolved.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed the need to balance the Council’s environmental sustainability work with the need to be financially sustainable; the Strategy and Action Plan did this. Overall, the actions in the Action Plan would ensure that the Council continues to make good progress towards its carbon reduction targets. The annual

reports to this Committee would continue, so members could review and comment on progress. There was also an intention to continue with the Cross-Party Member Sustainability Group, to provide informal input into and feedback on key elements of work.

The Executive Member for Environment and Sustainability invited Members to ask questions and comment on the Review of the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy Report provided in the agenda pack.

In response to the questions raised, the following clarifications were provided:

#### The UK as a contributor to UK and world carbon emissions

The Head of Corporate Policy, Projects and Performance confirmed that figures for the UK were published by the Government and that Government reports were available on the UK's carbon emissions. She agreed to share links to these with Committee Members.

#### Offsetting carbon emissions

It was explained that when carbon emissions had been reduced to a reasonably low level (the example given is 10%), the remaining percentage could be offset by removal of carbon from the atmosphere, with methods such as investing in carbon offsetting schemes, which would provide carbon credits.

#### The main changes to the Strategy achieved from the review

The Head of Corporate Policy, Projects and Performance confirmed that the new action plan, a new section on climate resilience, sections relating to scope 3 carbon emissions, and more detail on reducing the Council's organisational carbon emissions were all important changes made but confirmed that everything in the Strategy was important.

#### Net Zero target for scope 3 carbon emissions

Some members of the panel had suggested setting a Net Zero target for Council scope 3 emissions for 2050. Some Members of the committee felt that this target should be set in the Strategy, to hold the Council to the same standards as those expected of the borough's businesses and residents.

#### Activities currently out of scope but to be included from 2030

The Head of Corporate Policy, Projects and Performance explained that the reasons why these activities were out of the scope of the Strategy were explained in the Strategy document. For example, some of these activities were currently listed as out of scope due to complexity of contractual arrangements, or lack of direct ability to control. The Head of Corporate Policy, Projects and Performance confirmed that there were actions in the action plan to work towards addressing those uncertainties, which would mean that in the future it may be possible to bring the activities into scope.

#### Evidence-based approach

There was some discussion on whether specific targets for individual actions should be set at this point, for actions such as improving energy efficiency across Council operational buildings and the delivery of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points, or whether it was more important to first gather evidence and take a responsible evidence-based approach using detailed business cases to inform work to deliver overall targets.

### Private sector engagement

The Head of Corporate Policy, Projects and Performance confirmed that the team was encouraged to engage with the private sector to learn from best practice and to receive any assistance offered to local authorities.

### Investments within scope 3 carbon emissions

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that, as well as considering the security, liquidity and yield of potential investments, the Council rates investments in terms of the Net Zero Asset Managers (NZAM) Initiative and the UN Principles for Responsible Investment and Responsible Banking. However, local authorities were bound by CIPFA guidance in this area, which is still evolving. The Head of Corporate Policy, Projects and Performance confirmed that this was not yet included in the Environmental Sustainability Strategy, due to complexity, data, uncertainty and the fact that it was an emerging area, but there was a commitment to review the Strategy every three years and this issue could be considered for inclusion in a future review.

### Capital requirements

The Head of Corporate Policy, Projects and Performance confirmed that there were some less certain actions in the trajectory of carbon emissions by 2030; it was important to develop robust business cases and costings before capital requirements could be established before achieving these actions.

Councillor Harp, Chair of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Panel thanked panel members, the Portfolio Holder and officers for their work. The panel meeting had led to significant changes to the strategy and had been a useful exercise.

**RESOLVED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Noted the findings of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Scrutiny Panel, the officer responses at Annex 3, and the revised Environmental Sustainability Strategy at Annex 1 and Action Plan at Annex 2 and made observations to the Executive.