

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2022-2025

REPORT OF: ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: Yes
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Leader, Finance and Performance
22 March 2022

Purpose of Report

1. This report presents to the Scrutiny Committee for Leader, Finance and Performance the proposed draft Mid Sussex Sustainable Economy Strategy 2022-2025 (attached as Appendix 1). Following consideration by the Scrutiny Committee, the strategy will be recommended for approval by Council.

Summary

2. This Report:
 - Summarises the purposes of preparing the Sustainable Economy Strategy (SES) which will replace the approved Economic Development Strategy (2018 – 2023) and the Sustainability Strategy (2018 - 2023);
 - Describes the process of preparing the draft SES, including preparation of the evidence base; stakeholder engagement; and the work of the cross-party SES Member Working Group; and
 - Summarises the Vision and Objectives of the draft SES.

Recommendations

3. **That the Scrutiny Committee:**
 - (i) **Considers and comments on the draft Sustainable Economy Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2025 attached as Appendix 1;**
 - (ii) **Recommends to Council that the draft Sustainable Economy Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2025 be approved.**
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Background

4. On 30 September 2020, the Council approved a revised Corporate Plan which outlined the Council's response to and early plans for recovery from the Covid19 pandemic. The Plan included a way forward for the continued delivery and evolution of the Council's Sustainability Strategy, and, in light of the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic, committed to revise and merge the Council's Sustainability and Economic Development Strategies with the aim of driving a Green Recovery for the District.
5. The commitment to developing a new Strategy was also included in the Corporate Plan and Budget for 2021-22.

6. The outline roadmap for the development of a new Strategy was presented to Members of the Scrutiny Committee for Leader, Finance and Performance on 2 March 2021 which also agreed to establish a cross party Member Working Group to advise on the development of the Strategy.
7. On 2 March 2022, the Council approved the Corporate Plan and Budget for 2022-2023 which included a commitment to deliver a new Sustainable Economy Strategy.

Development of the Strategy

8. Consultants (Marshall Regen and Ricardo) were appointed to support the development of the draft Sustainable Economy Strategy (the draft SES). These consultants bring industry expertise, best practice and benchmarking principles to the project.
9. A member working group was established to lead and inform the process. The member working group comprises 8 members from this Scrutiny Committee, representing geographical and political balance. A total of 8 member working group meetings have been held to advise on the development of the draft SES and the Action Plan. These meetings were supported by the Council's consultants.
10. An officer working group supported this work and consisted of representatives from across the Council including but not limited to Planning, Economy Development, Sustainability, Estates, Community and Commercial Services.
11. In line with previous strategy development at the Council, the development of the SES strategy progressed through three phases:
 - (i) Discovery: Reviewing current policies, existing operations and benchmarking
 - (ii) Challenge: Challenging policies and operations to establish priorities, future needs and delivery requirements, supported by policy (existing and anticipated) and delivering value for money
 - (iii) Design: Developing a strategy and action plan to guide strategic development and future delivery.
12. Throughout the phases, account was taken of previously commissioned work, progress against existing strategies and actions plans and, an extensive review was undertaken of current and anticipated policy at local, regional and national levels. In addition, there was comprehensive benchmarking of where the current and proposed pathways and actions sit in relation to neighbouring and other comparable local authorities.
13. The following additional evidence was also commissioned:
 - (i) A carbon baseline and emissions pathways at a District level
 - (ii) A carbon baseline and emissions pathways at a Council level
 - (iii) Employment land need
 - (iv) Town centre health checks and retail needs
14. The background evidence is summarised in the Mid Sussex District Profile which is attached as Appendix 2. The evidence was used by officers and the working group to inform the development of a draft SES and Action Plan, meeting the overall aim of supporting sustainable economic growth within the district.

15. The Council engaged with partners and stakeholders from the public, private and community / voluntary sector as well as directly with residents. This included a residents survey, meetings with different sectors including individual businesses, the District's three Business Associations (Burgess Hill, East Grinstead and Haywards Heath), the Mid Sussex Partnership, a variety of fora hosted by MSVA and sustainability networks including the Sussex Nature Partnership. In addition, meetings were held with delivery partners who will help secure the delivery of the Action Plan. These conversations will continue and be built upon as the Strategy is delivered over the coming months and years.

Draft SES and Action Plan 2022-2025

16. The draft SES provides a framework within which to identify and prioritise areas for intervention and investment, and to assist in securing external funding. Clear in its priorities, it is inherently adaptable to changing circumstances, emergent policy and new technologies, placing the Council in the best position to maximise opportunities as they are realised.
17. The overarching Vision of the SES is:

“A vibrant District that is attractive, resilient and innovative that balances social well-being, environmental protection and sustainable economic growth.”
18. The Vision is supported by a series of objectives under the following three themes:
 - People –protecting and creating better employment (particularly in the new and emerging green economies); developing skills; improving pathways to work; and reducing pay inequality.
 - Place –reducing the Council’s carbon emissions; supporting businesses to reduce their carbon emissions and to both recover from the pandemic and to grow; encouraging business start-ups; promoting sustainable business practices; developing digital infrastructure; enhancing bio-diversity; providing new homes; creating quality town and village centres which meet local needs; and improving active travel connectivity.
 - Partnerships – The Council’s guiding principles of working in partnership are openness, trust, honesty and mutual respect. The Council will agree and deliver shared goals, based on common values and will maintain regular and effective communication with all our partners.
19. Each Theme is underpinned by strategic objectives and performance measures, linked to the most relevant United Nations¹⁷ Sustainable Development Goals¹
20. The draft SES is supported by 44 actions which set out how the Objectives will be delivered, detailing broad timescales and organisations that will lead on and participate in its delivery. Many of the objectives in the strategy cannot be directly delivered by the Council alone. The draft SES recognises that effective change can only be delivered by working in partnership with residents, other Council stakeholders, other organisations, and businesses.
21. The draft SES and Action Plan is attached as Appendix 1 to this Report.

¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

22. The Council's aim is "to be an effective Council delivering value for money services and helping to create a strong economy, environment and community". The draft SES provides a key opportunity to enable the Council to achieve this.
23. The draft SES provides a clear roadmap for the Council's post-Covid 19 response, driven by the specific needs of the District. It is informed by the national 'Building Back Better' agenda, the Government's decarbonisation and Net Zero ambitions and underpinned by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. It addresses how economic development and social and environmental sustainability can successfully co-exist and be sustained in Mid Sussex for future generations.
24. Finally, the draft SES also provides the District with a renewed focus on sustainable growth, enabling the economy to grow whilst reducing carbon emissions. This includes: supporting resource efficient consumption; reducing ecological footprints; improving residents' skills and health and well-being; promoting green innovation; creating new jobs; attracting new investment; and supporting business formation and growth.

Risk Management Implications

25. There are no risk management implications associated directly with this report.

Equalities Implications

26. There are no direct equality implications contained within this report. Equality impact assessments (EIAs) are undertaken within individual services and projects contained within the action plan as required. An overarching EIA has been undertaken for the strategy as a whole and is provided as Appendix 3.

Sustainability Implications

27. The Sustainable Economy Strategy has been informed by the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These aim to mitigate climate change, eradicate poverty, reduce gender and social inequality and improve economic and health conditions. They are a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". Whilst they are broad and inter-dependent, they are underpinned by specific targets and measures.

Financial Implications

28. A reserve of £100k was established to support the Council's work in this area. There is a remaining budget of £60k which will be used to deliver the sustainability measures in the Strategy.

Background Papers

1. [MSDC Corporate Plan and Budget 2022-23](#) (March 2022)
2. [MSDC Scrutiny report: Sustainability Strategy progress report](#) (March 2021)