

## SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT

REPORT OF: ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
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Wards Affected: All  
Key Decision: No  
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Leader, Finance and Performance  
10<sup>th</sup> March 2021

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### Purpose of Report

1. This report provides the Committee with an update on progress to date against the Council's Sustainability Strategy. The report also outlines the plans for the development of a new Sustainable Economy Strategy as approved by Council in the revised Corporate Plan (September 2020).

### Recommendations

2. **The Committee is asked to:**
  - (i) **Note the progress of delivery of the implementation of the Council's Sustainability Strategy as outlined in Appendix A.**
  - (ii) **Note the roadmap for the development of the new Sustainable Economy Strategy as outlined in paragraphs 9 to 14 including the establishment of a Member Working Group to oversee this work.**

### Background

3. The Council's Sustainability Strategy 2018–2023 was adopted by Council on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2018. Progress against the strategy was last reported to this Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2019.
4. A Notice of Motion on Environment and Climate Change was adopted by Council on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2019. The Notice pledged to actively look for ways to protect the environment and tackle climate change, while supporting the government's work to cut greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050.
5. Following the adoption of the Notice of Motion, further progress against the strategy was reported to and discussed by a cross party Member Working Group, known as the Sustainability and Climate Change Panel. The group had focused discussions on sustainability matters relating to the sustainability metrics and target setting biodiversity, and travel and transport at meetings on 10 October 2019 and 30 January 2020.
6. The onset of the Covid19 Pandemic in March 2020 led to a pause in all Council meetings, including Scrutiny and Member Working Group meetings. Further, the increased workloads faced by the Council in its responder duties and the impacts of the pandemic on pre-existing Council Services, necessitated a reprioritisation of Council resources.

7. In addition, given the impact of Covid 19 on the economy, the Council recognised the immediate need to revise its Economic Development Strategy (adopted 2018) to ensure prioritisation of appropriate interventions to support local businesses in responding to and recovering from the pandemic.
8. The culmination of the above was Council approval of a revised Corporate Plan, on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. The revised Corporate Plan included a way forward for the continued delivery and evolution of the Sustainability Strategy, with commitment, in light of the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic, to revise and merge the Council's Sustainability and Economic Development Strategies with the aim of driving a Green Recovery for the District.

### **Roadmap for the Sustainable Economy Strategy**

9. As agreed by Council in the revised Corporate Plan, the development of the strategy will be supported and informed by a cross party Member Working Group. Given the cross-cutting nature of this work, it will be made up of members of this Scrutiny Committee. The Member Working Group will advise the Leader of the Council who is the Cabinet Member responsible for this Strategy. The draft terms of Reference are attached as Appendix B. These will be formally agreed at the first meeting of the Member Working Group.
10. The scope of the Strategy will be agreed by the Member Working Group. However, officers propose that the Strategy covers a 5 year period and that, especially in light of the uncertain economic climate left in the wake of the Covid19 pandemic, officers will undertake an annual review of relevance to ensure that it remains appropriate to the needs of the Council and the District.
11. It will be important to ensure that the strategy is informed and led by a robust evidence base. This will include a wide range of data and stakeholder input including, but not limited to, carbon baselining and the preparation of a new economic profile of the District including updated research on the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the pandemic. It will be important that up to date evidence is used to not only develop the Strategy, but to inform its delivery on an ongoing basis.
12. It should be recognised that one strategy alone cannot, incorporate all workstreams the Council has relating to economic development/recovery, sustainability and climate change. This Strategy will not duplicate or replace the excellent work that is already set out and being delivered across the Council and its wider partnerships. In particular, it should be noted that the review of the District Plan is underway and, as one of the Council's core strategies, that Plan will continue to secure the delivery of social, economic and environmental sustainability, not least through its spatial strategy.
13. The Sustainable Economy Strategy will, however, seek to provide an agile framework which links and complements workstreams across all Council services, activities and wider partnerships to deliver against the UN Sustainable Development Goals and support a positive future for Mid Sussex by fully embracing the national government desire to "Build Back Greener".
14. It is anticipated that the final draft strategy will, subject to Scrutiny and Cabinet agreement, be presented to Council in the early Autumn.

## **Policy Context**

15. The Sustainability Strategy is consistent with the Council's statement of main purpose and Corporate Priorities, particularly the priorities of Sustainable Economic Growth, Strong and Resilient Communities and providing Effective and Responsive Services and these priorities will continue to be at the heart of the new strategy.
16. Both before and since the onset of the Covid19 pandemic, the national and regional policy landscape of sustainability and climate change has evolved significantly.

## **Other Options Considered**

17. The option exists to retain two separate strategies for Economic Development and Sustainability and Climate Change, however, the issues are so integrated, it is considered that greater value and increased synergy can be achieved by bringing these two essential workstreams together.

## **Financial Implications**

18. Due to the crossing cutting nature of the Sustainable Economy Strategy it will draw on a number of different budgets in both its development and its subsequent delivery.
19. On 4<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Council established a specific reserve, from the General Reserve, of £100k for Environment and Sustainability work. This is in addition to the annual sustainability revenue budget of £85k. It has not, as yet been necessary to call on the reserve, but it is anticipated that it will be used to develop and deliver elements of the new strategy in the coming financial year.
20. The annual Economic Development revenue budget of £170k covers the delivery of this service and includes resourcing for the Burgess Hill Growth Programme. This is supported by a baseline annual project budget of £210k which is used for research and development, marketing and promotion and delivering events.
21. These budgets and reserves will be used to support the development and delivery of the new strategy in the coming financial year.
22. The Council has been very successful in leveraging in external resources from the Government, its agencies and the private sector to deliver both the sustainability action plan and the economic development action plan and officers will continue to ensure this continues with regard to the Sustainable Economy Strategy.

## **Risk Management Implications**

23. The actions and proposed way forward presented in this report will mitigate the risks of the Council not fulfilling both its statutory duties and to also enable delivery of the Council's objectives.
24. The development of the Sustainable Economic Strategy will protect the Council's reputation as a leader and champion of positive future development of the District.

## **Equalities and Customer Services Implications**

25. The actions and proposed way forward presented in this report include measures to benefit specific vulnerable groups including actions to assist those in fuel poverty. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) of the new Strategy will be undertaken as part of its development and individual projects that emerge will be subject to EIAs in line with the Council's Equalities and Diversity programme.

## **Other Material Implications**

26. None.

## **Background Papers**

1. MSDC Notice of Motion: Environment and Climate Change  
<https://midsussex.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g2246/Printed%20minutes%2026th-Jun-2019%2019.00%20Council.pdf?T=1> (page 12)
2. MSDC Budget 2020-21 Environment and Sustainability Special Reserve  
<http://midsussex.moderngov.co.uk/documents/b7428/Tabled%20amendment%20to%20item%208.%2004th-Mar-2020%2019.00%20Council.pdf?T=9>
3. Greater Brighton City Region Environment Pledge <https://greaterbrighton.com/gb10/>
4. UN Sustainability Goals <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

## Update on delivery of the Sustainability Action Plan 2018-23

### Sustainable Council

1. The Sustainable Council theme focuses on the areas where the Council can directly improve its own performance to reduce environmental impacts through the management of buildings and public spaces and the Council's procurement.

### Energy in Council buildings

2. The corporate performance indicator, for Greenhouse gas emissions from Council Buildings, has outperformed the target set for Q1-Q3 2020-21 by 17.4%. This is due in part to reduced occupation since March 2020 as a consequence of the Covid19 pandemic. Some savings have, however, been offset by cooler than average winter temperatures.
3. Technical building improvements continue despite the pandemic; the majority of the Oaklands site has LED lighting and the window replacement programme will deliver additional energy and carbon savings together with ongoing work on heating system improvements.
4. PV panels on the Council's buildings produced 27,404 kwh of solar electricity during 2020-21; a carbon reduction of 6.9 tonnes. This accounts for approximately 10% of the council's electricity demand. Overall, since 2017, 88,493 kWh of pollution-free electricity has been generated, the equivalent of the annual emissions from 25 homes.
5. In June 2020, the council renewed its gas and electricity contract with the LASER Local Authority consortium. Although not a carbon saving measure, the council did use this opportunity to join an improved purchase-in-advance contract avoiding a default to deemed energy contract rates that would have incurred a minimum 15% (£40,000) cost penalty.

### Next steps

6. **Commissioning a District-level carbon baseline & emissions reduction cost options report**

The work will form a significant part of the evidence base upon which the new Sustainable Economy Strategy will be developed and provide an indication of the council's potential as an organisation to achieve a net zero carbon emissions reduction target.

7. **Council Chamber**

Works to improvement the Council Chamber continue and as well as improved accessibility also include more sustainable heating, air conditioning and upgrades to LED lighting.

### Action on single-use plastics

8. Work has continued through the Terracycle and Refill community waste schemes. Terracycle is a recycling company that handles hard to recycle waste, whereas Refill promotes the use of reusable containers for food and drink. The pandemic initially affected progress, but new work continues – notably through the Terracycle scheme.

9. The council's aim is to promote each scheme district-wide, both as a scheme participant and by supporting the network of community volunteers. To this extent the council has established a network of Terracycle contacts in Mid Sussex and consulted the community to identify new potential collection sites.

#### Next Steps

10. Promotion of the 'Refill Refreshed' campaign through social media and sustainability contacts in Mid Sussex has continued. Refill has, however, suffered from the effects of Covid19 lockdown restrictions given its reliance on retail and hospitality partners, most of whom have been closed for much of the past year.
11. Focus on ways to increase the volume and range of materials being sent for reprocessing through Terracycle.
12. With the reopening of the high streets and easing of social distancing restrictions distances, restart the Refill reusable bottle scheme, promoting the app directly to businesses and through sustainability advocates across the district.

#### Corporate Travel

13. The pandemic and the government's "stay at home" directives have had a considerable impact on staff commuting and council business travel.
14. Business mileage claim costs and emissions compared to 2019-20 have fallen by approximately 40% Q1-Q3 2020/21.
15. Since March 2020, the Council's two electric bikes have enjoyed continued and repeated use by those staff working from Oaklands. Used for both business and recreation, they have helped to promote and enable cycling for staff and usage has encouraged several staff to go on to purchase their own electric bicycles.
16. Parking Services are in the process of placing an order to lease three Renault Zoe electric vehicles to replace part of the current petrol civil enforcement fleet. There is a considerable lead in time for these vehicles, but it is hoped that they will be introduced in the summer of 2021.

#### Next Steps

#### 17. **Sustainable Staff Travel Plan**

As longer-term working trends emerge from the Covid19 pandemic, policies and working practices will be developed that consider travel options that reflect the changing needs of future council services.

#### 18. **On Campus EV Charging**

Increase number of EVCPs at the Councils offices to accommodate the new electric parking fleet with support via an OZEV funding application.

## **Sustainable Environment**

19. The Sustainable Environment theme focuses on areas where the Council can promote sustainable development and economic growth.

### **The Burgess Hill Growth Programme**

20. This programme has secured £20 million of funding (including S106 monies) for sustainable transport initiatives in Burgess Hill which are being delivered by the Place and Connectivity programme including over 3,500m of enhanced footways and bridleways which have been delivered in the past year.
21. The commitment by Homes England to sustainability in their development at the Northern Arc is set out in its Masterplan and included in the S106 legal agreement which has a net biodiversity gain commitment of 10% but is on track to achieve more.
22. Further, with regards to Electric Vehicles
- (i) All homes with private off-street parking will have capability for trickle charging points;
  - (ii) 1 in 5 dwellings with off street parking will have fast home charging points;
  - (iii) 30 public car parking spaces will have rapid charging points located with the three mixed use local centres;
  - (iv) 1 in 10 commercial car parking spaces will have fast charging points.

### **Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)**

23. In November 2020 transport consultants PJA began an eight-month commission to identify infrastructure improvements that would support increased walking and cycling. The commission considers the district's three towns and will be used as an evidence-based for future funding bids to create detailed designs and scheme implementation. Two of the five stages are now complete.

### **Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP)**

24. Besides two at the Oaklands campus, a further six charge points are currently provided at three Council owned car parks. Following technical issues with some of the chargers over the past 18 months, the charge points have experienced an increase in use with 39000 kWh consumed – an increase of 30% compared with 2019-20. In total there are now 33 publicly available chargers under the control of various operators in Mid Sussex.

### **Green Flag Awards**

25. Awards have been retained by Beech Hurst, St Johns Park, and East Court. Ashplats Wood in East Grinstead achieved the standard in August 2019.

### **Air Quality**

26. The annual report on air quality was considered by the Scrutiny Committee for Community, Customer Services and Service Delivery in February 2021. Air pollution in the District is in line with the regional average. There has been continued improvement in the one designated Air Quality Management Area in the District at Stonepound Crossroads, Hassocks. This improvement is mainly due to improved technology in the national vehicle fleet, i.e. vehicles with lower emissions and the use cleaner fuels.

27. Through the Sussex Air Quality Partnership awareness is being raised of the issue of domestic solid fuel burning with promotion cleaner fuel options and upgrading appliances. The Government has recently announced plans for the phasing out of sales of coal and wet wood. Defra funding has also been secured for an anti-idling project to be run across Sussex, targeting schools and businesses close to pollution hotspots, including two schools in Hassocks. The Council is also part of the West Sussex Inter-Authority Group which has adopted an Air Quality Plan. The Council will review the installation of an air quality real time monitor, which will measure additional pollutants such as PM<sub>2.5</sub>.

### Next Steps

28. **LCWIP and Active Travel**

In the coming year discussions with stakeholders will consider and further refine the data to develop the final plans. With respect to Burgess Hill, this work is being carefully coordinated with the Place and Connectivity Programme.

Work will continue to support major infrastructure schemes including the sustainable transport initiatives through the Place and Connectivity Programme.

29. **EVCP**

Retender, in partnership with West Sussex County Council and Horsham, Adur and Worthing, Arun and Crawley district and borough councils for a supplier to plan, fund, install and operate a county-wide EV charging infrastructure.

Support local businesses and other organisations to secure OZEV grant funding and other support to install EVCP infrastructure.

30. **District Plan Review.**

The review of the District Plan, already underway, will provide the opportunity to consider policy approach going forward in the light of new evidence and changes in national requirements.

31. **Green Flag Award**

Work towards a fourth Green Flag award at Victoria Park, Haywards Heath.

32. **Rewilding**

The success of the Rewilding schemes will be evaluated following trials at a number of sites in the District, including West Common in Lindfield, Beech Hurst Gardens, East Court in East Grinstead and Coopers Close open space in Burgess Hill.

### **Sustainable Communities**

33. The Sustainable Communities theme focuses on initiatives and interventions that seek to address sustainability issues by working with our communities to encourage, support and enable behaviour change and raise awareness of sustainability and climate change mitigations.

### **Green Homes Grant Scheme**

34. Work to promote the scheme is underway and will continue next financial year. An award of £3.1m was made to a consortium of West Sussex and Hampshire authorities to target support for low-income householders living in homes with the poorest energy-efficiency. The scheme nationally and locally has been beset by delays, although marketing and surveys have now commenced. Across West Sussex installations to date are so far limited to just a handful of park homes, although the scale and nature of support is expected to change and increase. Recognising the shortages in the supply chain and administrative delays government is extending implementation timescales.
35. In January 2021 a new Home Energy Advice Service, managed through Citizens Advice, was launched to help those who live in West Sussex with their home energy bills and home energy improvements. The service fills a notable gap in provision, for Mid Sussex and other districts and boroughs, by providing an impartial one-stop shop, single phone number and point of contact.

### **Waste**

36. Following considerable changes to service demand arising from the pandemic and the increasing interest in exploring the introduction of food waste, the waste contract is undergoing review and redesign. The percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting was 42% in 2019, whilst the contamination rate of recyclables was 4%, which is the lowest in West Sussex. In addition, the Council's garden waste service has reached its capacity of 20,000 subscribers and the Waste Team have developed proposals for its further expansion.
37. The British Heart Foundation kerbside collection pilot of textiles and small electrical equipment resulted in 46 tonnes of material being collected in the trial period.

### **Building the Evidence Base**

38. In partnership with West Sussex County Council and Local Partnerships, using a model developed by Hampshire's Behavioural Insights team, a County wide engagement exercise was undertaken to examine how to secure householder behaviour change and engagement in sustainability issues. The details from this work are expected for publication by March 2021. The council's new strategy towards raising awareness and public action on sustainability will aim to reflect and apply recommendations arising from this research

### **Next Steps**

#### **39. Building the evidence base**

Development of, a post-Covid19, socio-economic and health inequalities profile and needs assessment for the District. This will aid identification and targeting of groups eligible for affordable warmth and/or wider health and wellbeing support.

## **Draft Terms of Reference for Member Working Group**

### **Sustainable Economy Strategy Working Group – Terms of Reference**

#### **Membership**

8 Members proportionate to the political balance, drawn from the Scrutiny Committee for Leader Finance and Performance.

#### **Objective of the Working Group**

The objective of the Working Group is to oversee the revision and merging of the Council's Economic Development and Sustainability Strategies, as set out in the Sustainable Economic Growth Recovery Plan approved as part of the Revised Corporate Plan 2020-21.

Action 8 iii)

“Respond to the Government’s economic recovery strategy by revising and merging the Economic Development and Sustainability Strategies to direct an emphasis on support for those sectors most significantly impacted and on driving a green recovery. It is proposed that this work will be overseen by a Member working group”

#### **Frequency of Meetings**

The Members’ Working Group will meet bi-monthly with additional meetings if necessary, with the agreement of the Chair. It is anticipated that 4 - 5 meetings will be convened to inform the development of the new Sustainable Economic Recovery Strategy, before presentation to the Scrutiny Committee for Leader, Finance & Performance in August 2021.

On completion of this task the Working Group will cease to be in operation unless otherwise agreed by the Scrutiny Committee.