

Rother District Council

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| Report to | - | Overview and Scrutiny Committee |
| Date | - | 27 January 2020 |
| Report of | - | Executive Director |
| Subject | - | Environment Strategy Consultation |

Recommendation: It be RESOLVED: That Cabinet be requested to approve that:

- 1) the draft Environment Strategy, Action Plan and Consultation Plan be approved and a 12 week consultation be undertaken; and
 - 2) that East Sussex County Council Pension Advisers be requested to source alternative investments in non-fossil fuel providers for the pension fund.
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Head of Service: Ben Hook

Introduction

1. At its meeting on 16 September 2019 (Minute C19/38 refers), full Council agreed the following resolution to:
 - i. Declare a 'climate emergency'.*
 - ii. Review and update urgently Rother District Council's current carbon strategy.*
 - iii. Pledge to do what is within our powers, to make Rother District carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions.*
 - iv. Call on the Government to provide any additional powers and resources necessary for Rother District to achieve the target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030, and to implement best practice methods to limit global warming to 1.5°C.*
 - v. Request that Cabinet establishes a Steering Group to report to full Council within six months with an Action Plan, outlining how the Council will address this emergency. The Carbon Neutral 2030 Action Plan will detail the leadership role Rother District will take in promoting community, public, business and other Council partnerships to achieve this commitment throughout the District. The Action Plan will also outline adequate staff time and resources to undertake the actions to achieve the target.*
 - vi. To investigate all possible sources of external funding and match funding to support this commitment.*
 - vii. Identify citizens across Rother who are climate champions for their communities and to use them to inform on ideas to implement locally.*

viii. Investigate what Rother District Council can do to minimise the emission of gases which adversely affect climate change even more than CO₂.

2. The purpose of this report is to approve the draft Rother Environment Strategy and Action Plan; consultation plan; setting a baseline for the measurement of greenhouse gas and carbon emissions; and allocation of funding to enable the delivery of the strategy.

Climate Change Steering Group

3. A Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) was established and tasked with developing a draft Environment Strategy and Action Plan outlining how the Council intends to address the climate emergency. The CCSG comprises of Councillors Field (Chairman), Coleman, Gray, Mrs Hart, Langlands, Osborne and Prochak.
4. The CCSG has met on two occasions. At the first meeting on 15 November 2019, the CCSG heard evidence from a number of experts and received presentations. The CCSG formulated a number of actions to be developed and reported to the next meeting.
5. Prior to developing an Action Plan, it was important to understand what the starting point was and how it can be measured and whether what the Council is planning will have an impact. A data review was undertaken which showed the position across the district and how the Council as an organisation is having an impact on the environment. The data review (Appendix 1) sets out data for:

District wide:

- CO₂ emissions
- Walking and cycling
- Low emission vehicle use
- Waste – recycling, reducing and reusing
- Noise pollution
- Superfast broadband coverage

Rother District Council:

- Electricity usage
- Gas usage
- Water usage
- Car use/mileage
- Flexible working
- Paper use

6. The information within the data review was presented to the CCSG and used, along with evidence from a number of other presenters to assist in informing the draft Environment Strategy and Action Plan.
7. The second meeting took place on 3 January 2020. The CCSG agreed the draft Environment Strategy and Action Plan (Appendix 2) and Consultation Plan (Appendix 3) and resource requirements as presented within this report.

Environment Strategy and Action Plan

8. A draft Environment Strategy and Action Plan has been prepared, developed and agreed through the Council's CCSG for consultation. The document sets out the Council's proposals for the vision and priorities and sets out the actions required to deliver on these and the Council's ambitious target to be carbon neutral by 2030.
9. The document sets out eight action plan priorities for consultation and these are:
 - i. Smart Digital District
 - ii. Green Economy
 - iii. Air Quality
 - iv. Waste
 - v. Energy
 - vi. Biodiversity
 - vii. Construction and Existing Buildings
 - viii. Environmentally Friendly Council

Setting a Baseline

10. In order to meet carbon neutrality as an organisation by 2030, the Council must understand the current position and work with an external advisor to provide the following information:
 - Produce a baseline utilising greenhouse gases (GHG) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions where possible, for the 12-month period April 2018 – March 2019 for the Council.
 - Develop a carbon management programme designed to support the Council in meeting its (organisational) carbon neutral target by 2030.
 - Set ongoing annual targets, and a trajectory to achieve the carbon neutral target (for the organisation) by 2030.
 - Set individual high-level targets which will feed into and ensure that the Council meet the overall (organisation) carbon neutral target by 2030.
11. Further detailed work will be required across the district and this work will be undertaken collaboratively with East Sussex local authority partners to ensure a consistent approach.
12. The CCSG also discussed the subject of ethical investments and noted that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) currently invested with fossil fuel providers for its pension fund. The pension fund has a fiduciary duty to pensioners and members of the fund. The Pension Fund Committee consists of County Councillors who act as quasi trustees and cannot be mandated. The CCSG requested that Cabinet recommend that East Sussex County Council Pension Advisers be requested to source alternative investments in non-fossil fuel providers for the pension fund.

Resources

13. The resolution passed by Council in December and set out at paragraph one of this report represents a requirement for significant additional resource. The required capacity, skills, experience and expertise are not available currently

within the Council and therefore a dedicated post is required to enable the delivery of the Environment Strategy, and ongoing development, delivery, monitoring and reporting to deliver on the Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030. The benefits to having in place this additional resource will include the ability to co-ordinate and access partner resources and apply for funding necessary to take forward the strategy, working with partners.

14. Total anticipated initial resources required are set out at table 1, below:

| | 2020-21 | Ongoing |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Environment and Sustainability Officer (including on-costs) | £52,200 | £52,200 |
| Consultation event support | £2,500 | |
| Carbon emissions baseline modelling | £5,000 | |
| IT equipment for above post | £1,000 | |
| Revenue budget | £30,000 | £30,000 |
| Total: | £90,700 | £82,200 |

Table 1: Environment Strategy and Action plan budget requirements

15. The draft Revenue Budget for 2020/21 contains provision for an additional member of staff and associated costs. As a consequence this has increased the funding gap for next financial year which, in the short term, will require the amount of reserves used to balance the Revenue Budget to increase. It is possible that costs will be reduced through the actions of the Council to reduce its carbon footprint, in particular power and fuel, but at this stage these have not been quantified.

Work Completed to Date

16. While the Council once had an Agenda 21 Strategy and Environment Policy (2010-2015) no formal environment policy is currently in place, however, the Council has taken forward some significant projects based on environmental gain. These include:
- Solar panels installed on the rooftops of Amherst Road building and Bexhill Museum.
 - Introduction of flexible working to reduce car use.
 - A cycle to work scheme.
 - A programme on Council owned sites for whip planting, tree planting and environmental grass.
 - A review of business processes which has led to a reduction in paper use, printing and postage.
 - Town Hall – a programme of refurbishment including new roof, roof insulation and windows.

The Consultation

17. The Consultation Plan is attached at Appendix 3 and sets out the groups to be consulted and the methodology. Consultation will take place via an online questionnaire, however, telephone and written consultation responses will be accepted. It is intended that the main communication methods for this consultation will include a minimum of three interactive events to take place in Bexhill, Battle and Rye. Additionally, information points will be placed around the district to ensure the opportunity to engage is maximized.

18. The consultation questionnaire sets out a number of questions related to the draft Environment Strategy. In addition, questions will be included which will help us to understand the profile of the respondees in order to ensure we have been successful in targeting a diverse range of groups.
19. The CCSG is keen to have some 'quick wins' and proposes to launch the consultation with a 'tree cover' initiative. This will include the setting up of an interactive web-page which allows residents, community groups, and businesses to pledge a commitment to planting a tree and to add their tree planting action to a thematic map. The objective is to increase tree cover across the district and encourage residents and businesses to get involved.

Conclusion

20. The draft Environment Strategy and Action Plan has been developed through the Council's CCSG, using data and information from various organisations and sources to enable the Council to understand its current position and what is required to meet its commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030.
21. Should Cabinet approve the draft Environment Strategy and Action Plan, a 12 week consultation which has been designed to encourage engagement from residents, community groups, public and private sector organisations will take place from 25 February 2020. The feedback from this consultation will enable the development of a final document which will be presented to Cabinet and then full Council in September 2020. Once adopted the strategy will need to be kept under constant review as more knowledge and understanding on climate change emerges.
22. Members are advised that a provision of £100,000 per annum of funding has been made available in the draft revenue budget 2020/21 subject to approval, to enable the progress of this Environment Strategy and delivery of its Action Plan.
23. Finally, the CCSG is requesting that Members recommend to Cabinet that ESCC Pension Advisors be requested to source alternative investments in non-fossil fuel providers for the pension fund.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

Lack of a strategy and action plan will mean the Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030 is unlikely to be met. Lack of consultation on plans to meet the carbon neutral commitment could lead to the Council being challenged regarding introducing a change in priority and resources without care for due process.