

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	10 February 2020
Report of the	-	Executive Directors
Subject	-	Environment Strategy Consultation

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 27 January 2020, considered a report on the Environment Strategy Consultation. The recommendation and minute arising is reproduced below.

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That

- 1) the draft Environment Strategy, Action Plan and Consultation Plan be approved and a 12 week consultation; and
 - 2) 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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OSC19/47. **ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY CONSULTATION**

Members received the report of the Executive Director which gave details of the draft Rother Environment Strategy, Action Plan and Consultation Plan developed by the Climate Steering Group (CCSG) and the resource requirements. The document detailed the Council's proposals for the vision and priorities and set out the actions required to deliver on these and the Council's ambitious target to be carbon neutral by 2030.

The document set out eight action plan priorities for consultation: Smart Digital District; Green Economy; Air Quality; Waste; Energy; Biodiversity; Construction and Existing Buildings; and Environmentally Friendly Council. The CCSG also discussed the subject of ethical investments and noted that East Sussex County Council invested with fossil fuel providers for its pension fund. 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.

The resolution passed by Council in December 2019 included a requirement for additional resource. The required capacity, skills, experience and expertise were not available within the Council and therefore a dedicated post was 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 draft Revenue Budget for 2020/21 contained a provision of £100,000 per annum of funding, subject to approval, for an additional

member of staff and associated costs. As a consequence this had increased the funding gap for the next financial year which, in the short term, would require the amount of reserves used to balance the Revenue Budget to increase. It was possible that costs would be reduced through the actions of the Council to reduce its carbon footprint, in particular power and fuel, but at this stage these had not been quantified.

The Consultation Plan gave details of the groups to be consulted and the methodology, commencing from 25 February 2020. Consultation would take place via an online questionnaire, telephone and written responses and a minimum of three events to take place in Bexhill, Battle and Rye. Additionally, information points around the district to ensure the opportunity to engage was maximized. Feedback from the consultation would enable the development of a final document to be presented to Cabinet and then full Council in September 2020. Once adopted, the strategy would need to be kept under constant review as more knowledge and understanding on climate change emerged.

The consultation questionnaire set out a number of questions related to the draft Environment Strategy, in addition to questions which would enable the Council to understand the profile of the responders in order to ensure a diverse range of groups had been successfully targeted.

The CCSG also proposed to launch the consultation with a 'tree cover' initiative, including the setting up of an interactive web-page to allow 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 was to increase tree cover across the district and encourage residents and businesses to get involved.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were noted:

- the Environment Strategy document was a working document. Members were encouraged to respond to the consultation and encourage their residents to do so also;
- climate champions should also be identified at Parish and Town Councils and therefore in every patch of Rother;
- Members favoured the use of locally sourced building materials;
- a request was made that all Members went paperless; and
- the CCSG to consider whether the use of grey water be included in the action plan.

All of the OSC's comments on the action plan were to be forwarded to the CCSG and considered as part of the consultation process.

(Councillor Barnes declared a personal interest in this matter in so far as he was Vice-Chairman of Friends of Rye Harbour and Rye Harbour Management Committee, a member of the National Trust and an elected Member of East Sussex County Council and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the room during consideration thereof).

(Councillors Clark and Field each declared a personal interest in this matter in so far as they were elected Members of East Sussex County Council and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the room during consideration thereof).

(Councillors Courtel, Errington, Gray and Langlands each declared a personal interest in this matter in so far as they were members of the Bexhill Environment Group and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the room during consideration thereof).

(Councillor C.R. Maynard declared a personal interest in this matter in so far as he was an elected Member of East Sussex County Council and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the room during consideration thereof, but elected not to vote).

(Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda Item 7).

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director