

Climate Change Strategy



Report to: Scrutiny Committee

Date: 6 February 2024

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Recommended that the Committee:

- A** Recommends to Cabinet that the draft Climate Change Strategy, as set out in Appendix A of this report, be approved for consultation.

Background

1. In July 2019 the council declared a climate emergency, which set out several climate change pledges. In 2021 the council agreed a target date and actions for hitting Net Zero carbon emissions by 2040. A Carbon Reduction Plan (CRP) was subsequently prepared for the period 2021-26, setting out steps the council will take to achieve its target of net zero for its operations by 2040, including:
 - a) Fitting no fossil fuelled boilers into operational buildings after 2025/26;
 - b) Buying no new carbon emitting vehicles after 2022/23;
 - c) Achieving Net Zero from its waste service during the lifetime of the next contract from 2029 Developing a broader climate change strategy for the town; and
 - d) Working with HTS to help them achieve Net Zero by 2040 and to identify a potential 12% saving during the lifetime of this Plan.

Climate Change Strategy's Seven Objectives

2. A draft Climate Change Strategy (CCS) has now been developed setting out actions and proposals for the council's operations and buildings. It has also looked at potential opportunities for influencing the wider community and local economy to deliver reductions

in emissions. The draft CCS is structured around seven objectives, as agreed in a Position Statement in March 2022. The seven objectives are:

- a) To achieve Net Zero emissions from the council's operational buildings, land, vehicles and services, including those provided by service delivery partners;
- b) To achieve Net Zero emissions from all homes and the built environment within Harlow;
- c) To reduce consumption of resources, reduce waste and increase reuse and recycling in Harlow;
- d) To adopt good stewardship of the natural environment across the town to support both climate change adaptation and mitigation;
- e) To achieve a significant modal shift towards more sustainable means of transport;
- f) To promote reduction of emissions by businesses to Net Zero, supported by a successful green economy; and
- g) To lead and encourage local communities, partners and stakeholders to reduce their emissions and contribute positively to meeting the challenges posed by climate change.

Development of the strategy's actions

3. The draft CCS has been informed by a series of internal workshops with colleagues across the Council, including housing services, environmental health, HTS, planning services, landscape and biodiversity officers, parking, economic development, waste management and operations. The workshops identified a range of measures already being undertaken by the council to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate against climate change. These measures were set out in the report to Scrutiny Committee on 31 October 2023 and include retrofitting of housing stock and operational buildings, reviewing Energy Performance Certificates, replacing vehicles with electric vehicles, tree planting, sustainability checklists for new developments and biodiversity net gain.
4. The workshops helped to develop short, medium and long term actions for the draft CCS in order to help achieve Net Zero and mitigate climate change. Several of the short term actions include the development of more specific strategies, proposals and costings, as further detailed work is needed to quantify these. The council will seek external funding to support this as it becomes available, and it is envisaged that Government will continue to implement top-down measures which may be accompanied by funding. The council will continue to monitor this.
5. The strategy notes that external bodies, businesses and partner authorities such as Essex County Council have also been implementing sustainable measures and

initiatives. This includes PV panels, and energy efficiency measures, an Electric Vehicle Maintenance Centre at Harlow College, and engagement activity.

6. Officers who attended the workshops were sent the final draft version of the Climate Strategy for comment prior to it being finalised for presentation to Scrutiny Committee before wider consultation.

Identifying potential implications

7. The draft CCS acknowledges that there will be potential issues and implications of the actions identified in the document which will affect their delivery, including some actions having significant cost and resource implications for the council. For example, retrofitting the council's housing stock. Feasibility studies will be required for some of the actions to determine whether they are viable, such as installation of electric charging points at properties, buildings or particular car parks. The pace at which some actions are delivered will be affected by external factors such as the provision of skills needed to implement sustainable measures, the availability and cost of sustainable materials and the necessary advances in technology. Furthermore, the council has little to no control on ensuring residents and businesses implement more sustainable ways of living and working and can only educate and influence some areas.

Monitoring and indicators

8. The draft CCS attempts to pull together a series of indicators that could be used to help determine whether actions are helping to reach the council's Net Zero targets. It is difficult to quantify the potential carbon reduction of some actions such as improving IT systems. Some actions will only have an indirect impact on overall climate mitigation, such as providing additional courses on retrofitting.
9. The strategy refers to the council's CRP which will remain a useful tool in assessing the council's emissions from operational buildings. It has also identified several indicators for each of the objectives which can be monitored (table 7 in the draft CCS) and several Local Government Association indicators that are pulled together from various sources/statistics which the council will also monitor (table 8 in the draft CCS).

Issues identified at the October 2023 Scrutiny Committee

10. The October 2023 Scrutiny Committee meeting identified five issues for consideration as set out below:
 - a) A list of quick wins be developed;
 - b) Progress on the CRP be reviewed;
 - c) Consideration be given to the use of solar tiles;

- d) Consideration be given to having identified Officers responsible for areas of the CCS; and
 - e) Clear costs for implementing the CCS be developed.
11. In reference to quick wins, the draft CCS has identified several short term actions, some of which are already in progress or can be more easily implemented. Further discussions with workshop officers will help determine which of these are quicker to implement than others. These discussions will help to identify the relevant departments and therefore senior officers that have responsibility for particular actions. However, the extensive workshops that were undertaken with individual departments and officers have supported this already. Some actions will also require cross-departmental working with different responsibilities before, during and implementation of an action.
 12. The draft CCS does not currently include a detailed costings for actions although there are several projects already underway or budgeted for which are identified in the strategy document. Following consultation of the strategy, the next step will be to identify available resources and prioritise projects. This will take time and the consultation process may reveal other priority projects. The draft CCS also identifies the need for further studies and strategies that will detail viability and costings and therefore it will be difficult to estimate the cost of everything currently identified in the strategy.
 13. The CRP will continue to be updated and will be an important component of the monitoring framework for the strategy and delivery plan.

Next Steps

14. The draft CCS will be published for consultation and circulated to a range of partners, internal departments who did not have an opportunity to provide informal comments, interested parties, stakeholders, businesses and made available for residents. It is the intention that a separate shorter version of the document is published on the council's website which will be quicker and easier to read. The detailed version of the document will sit alongside it.
15. Officers consider consultation will help improve the document and the actions within it. Businesses and residents may already be undertaking actions that the council is unaware of and can support, it may also identify new ideas and proposals for the strategy to consider. Engagement may also identify implications and issues for some of the actions that the council has not considered.
16. Following consultation, the document will be amended and subsequently recommended for adoption.
17. As technologies, supplies, skills and legislation changes, the CCS, actions and plans arising from it will need to be responsive to this, therefore the Strategy will need to be periodically reviewed and updated. This will be supported by the review and refresh of the

council's CRP (latest 2021/26) which will outline how the council has reduced its carbon output. Other monitoring tools will also be considered.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

An Equality Impact Assessment decision tree will be completed once the strategy has been subject to consultation and prior to adoption.

Climate Change

As detailed in the report.

Communities and Environment

The successful implementation of recommendations and actions stemming from the Climate Strategy once approved are anticipated to have wide ranging positive benefits for Harlow residents, communities, and the local environment. The successful delivery of net zero will also benefit the wider context of the Environment nationally and internationally.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Finance

The report sets out the measures already taken by the Council to reduce its carbon emissions which have been funded through specific grant funding, revenue budget or the council's capital programme. Once the strategy is fully developed there will be a requirement to factor further and ongoing costs of delivery in to its medium term financial plans.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Governance and Corporate Services

The Governance Directorate work supports the implementation of many of the projects mentioned in both this and previous reports. Technology exploitation that avoids the use of fossil fuel energy and resources is essential. Examples include hybrid working, moving away from on-site IT infrastructure and our IT Strategy for SAAS and changing procurement to encourage use of local resources and reducing carbon footprint.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services

Strategic Growth and Regeneration

The delivery of the Council's Net Zero ambitions is already being factored into the delivery of regeneration programmes such as through the commitment to Passivhaus standards in the Council's housebuilding programme. Commitment to Net Zero in the delivery of new housing by the private sector can to some extent be influenced by the Council's planning policy but to a larger extent will be influenced by the National Planning Policy Framework. The delivery of the town's growth ambitions though will also be reliant on the provision of suitable sustainable infrastructure, particularly transport, and the Council will need to see that keeps pace with growth plans.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Chief Executive

Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Climate Change Strategy

Background Papers

Harlow Carbon Reduction Plan 2021/26 -

<https://moderngov.harlow.gov.uk/documents/s18646/Harlow%20Council%20Carbon%20Reduction%20Plan%20Final.pdf>

March 2022 Cabinet Position Statement -

<https://moderngov.harlow.gov.uk/documents/s19898/Appendix%20A%20-%20Climate%20Change%20Strategy%20-%20Position%20Statement.pdf>

October 2023 Scrutiny Report Paper -

<https://moderngov.harlow.gov.uk/documents/s24497/Climate%20Change%20Strategy.pdf>

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

CCS – Climate Change Strategy

CRP – Carbon Reduction Plan

PV – Photovoltaic or Solar Panel

Net Zero - refers to the balance between the amount of greenhouse gas (GHG) that's produced and the amount that's removed from the atmosphere. It can be achieved through a combination of emission reduction and emission removal.