

Referral from Scrutiny Committee – Climate Change Strategy consultation



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| Report to: | Cabinet |
| Date: | 21 March 2024 |
| Portfolio Holder: | Councillor Nicky Purse, Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Environment |
| Lead Officer: | Donna Beechener, Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits (01279) 446245 |
| Contributing Officer: | Vicky Forgione Principal Planning Officer (01279) 446878 |
| Key Decision: | No |
| Forward Plan: | Forward Plan number I016872 |
| Call In: | This item is subject to call in procedures |
| Corporate Priority: | Related to all Corporate Priorities |
| Wards Affected: | None specifically |

Recommended that:

- A** Cabinet approve the draft Climate Change Strategy at Appendix B of this report for consultation.

Reason for decision

- A** The Scrutiny Committee carried out a review of the draft Climate Change Strategy, which is to be published for consultation.

Other Options

- A** No other options were considered.

Background

1. At its meeting on 06 February 2024, the Scrutiny Committee conducted a review of the Council's draft Climate Change Strategy with a question and answer session with officers. As a result, the draft Strategy has been amended to include minor technical changes.
2. The Committee agreed its recommendation to Cabinet which is included as recommendation A in this report.

Matters identified at the 6 February 2024 Scrutiny Committee

3. The February 2024 Scrutiny Committee identified the following matters for consideration.
 - a) Timeline – dates for short, medium and long term actions.
 - i) The Council's draft Climate Change Strategy (CCS) is structured around seven objectives, as agreed in a Position Statement in March 2022. For reach of the objectives, the CCS sets out the short (1-3 years or by 2026), medium (within 10 years or by 2032) and long term (by 2040) actions.
 - ii) It is proposed that once the strategy is approved, these short, medium and long term actions are collated into a corporate action plan with relevant timelines required to deliver the action plan. This will be simpler for shorter term actions as some medium/long term actions are dependent on technologies changing and improving, becoming more cheaper, an increase in skills or are reliant on external parties making changes/top-down government legislation being put in place.
 - b) Decarbonisation feasibility studies – current progress, when will they / have they been started, and when will they be finished.
 - i) Paragraph 3.5 of the strategy refers to this and table 1 includes this as a short term action. No work has started on the feasibility studies as yet. These studies will help understand the extent of the decarbonisation works and therefore costs. This will lead to business cases for capital funding or bids for other sources of funding. There is no timetable for the feasibility studies at this time, although this may be considered in the next iteration of the Carbon Reduction Plan or undertaken separately subject to resources.
 - c) Training options – clarify what training will be provided.
 - i) Paragraph 3.14 of the strategy refers to potential training opportunities to enable officers to be more carbon literate or more knowledgeable of the subject. This is not specific as to what training this could be as it might be that bespoke training is required for certain officers in certain subjects relevant to

their department (this already happens across departments through in-person or online training sessions) or that a general training course for a range of officers is more appropriate in other cases. Officers will consider what is most appropriate but there are specific accredited courses on Carbon Literacy that could also be beneficial.

- d) EPC ratings – look at whether these are the best measure for decarbonisation long term.
 - i) EPC rating is indeed not the best measure for decarbonisation however it does give the Council a good understanding of the energy efficiency of a home and what retrofitting may be required to get it to an acceptable standard to then move on to full decarbonisation. Ensuring that properties are well insulated ensures that installing measures such as heat pumps are not wasted as heat would still be lost. As set out in paragraph 4.8 of the Strategy, understanding EPC ratings is the first step of the process.
- e) Mitigation rates – what has already been achieved since 2020.
 - i) Paragraphs 2.2 and 10.6 of the strategy provide information regarding Harlow’s requirements to cut emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement. The Council closely monitors its CO₂ reductions (operational buildings/fleet) through its Carbon Reduction Plans (CRP). Harlow Council’s target for the period of the current CRP will be to reach a 50% reduction in CO₂ emissions from the 2014/15 2,700 tonne baseline, i.e., a reduction to 1,350 tonnes by 2026.
 - ii) The council monitors its CO₂ emissions and voluntarily reports this annually online with the published figures showing emissions being 1,765 tonnes for 2022-23. Whilst the data shows an increase in emissions in comparison to 2020-21, this is largely due to the requirement for the Veolia fleet to travel further to dispose of waste. The emissions for 2022-23 are overall lower than 2021-22, indicating the trend is downward. Additionally, the council is committed to boiler replacements in its operational buildings over the next 12 to 18 months and this will further help to achieve our target.
- f) PassivHaus Standard – possible briefing for councillors on what this means.
 - i) Passivhaus buildings provide a high level of occupant comfort using very little energy for heating and cooling. Passivhaus adopts a whole-building approach with clear, measured targets, focused on high-quality construction, certified through an exacting quality assurance process. This could form part of the training options as referred to in paragraph 3.14 of the strategy and detailed in a separate action plan.

- g) Stock condition surveys – what is being included in the surveys? Does it involve future works that could be carried out?
 - i) The updated stock condition survey of the council's 9,000 plus homes will look at the state of internal and external components, including kitchens, bathrooms, central heating systems, roofs, walls and other external structures. This may identify improvements that will help the energy efficiency of a building and its EPC rating, thereby linked with paragraph 4.8 of the strategy.
- h) Planning guidance – what does guidance currently say, and what could it say?
 - i) Local planning authorities, including Harlow, will determine planning applications against national policies and local policies including those in the Harlow Local Plan. Officers must weigh up the positive aspects of a proposal as well as its potential impact. This is the same for all types of planning proposals including those involving sustainable improvements e.g. heat source pumps or solar panels. Some sustainable measures do not require planning permission so long as certain conditions are met, although in Harlow covenants also need to be considered. In certain areas such as Conservation Areas or for particular buildings including Listed Buildings planning permission will be required. This has been noted in the Strategy as a potential issue or constraint.
 - ii) In the future the Government may relax some planning rules and regulations and the Council will consider how future Local Plan policies can enable homes across the district to more easily implement sustainable measures, but this must still be carefully balanced against longer term impacts on the environment and neighbouring properties.
- i) Evidence – Number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) in Harlow.
 - i) As set out in the Council's Economic Development Strategy, Harlow has a higher proportion of larger businesses than comparator areas (predominantly manufacturing and education). However, as is true across the UK economy, around 99% of businesses in Harlow are SMEs (with almost 90% being micro businesses with fewer than 10 employees).
 - ii) These figures are taken from UK Business Counts 2022. An SME in the UK is generally one with less than 250 employees so even some of Harlow's larger companies may still be considered an SME in employee number terms.

Next Steps

4. The next steps are as detailed in the report to the meeting Scrutiny Committee on 6 February 2024

Implications

The implications are as detailed in the report to the meeting Scrutiny Committee on 6 February 2024.

Appendices

Appendix A – Report to Scrutiny Committee on 06 February 2024

Appendix B – 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.