

Adoption of the Waste Strategy for Essex 2024-2054



Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	12 September 2024
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Nicky Purse, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability
Lead Officer:	Tanusha Waters, Assistant Director - Planning and Environment (01279) 446595
Key Decision:	Yes
Forward Plan:	Forward Plan number I017062
Call In:	This item is subject to call in procedures
Corporate Missions:	Protect our Communities Deliver High Performing Council services
Wards Affected:	All

Executive Summary

- A** The Waste Strategy for Essex sets a clear ambition and commitment to reduce the impact on our environment and reducing what goes to landfill. It is a 30-year strategy for the county of Essex that has been jointly developed by the Borough, City and District Councils with Essex County Council (ECC). It provides a framework for waste management forming the future design of waste services and our joined-up approach to waste treatment and disposal.
- B** The document reflects what people have told us is important to them; accessible and extensive recycling services for everyone, a circular economy where manufacturers reduce waste at source and protect our environment by reducing rubbish, increasing recycling, and stopping the use of landfill. The strategy identifies the things we need to do, the challenges we need to address and will shape our future work.

- C** The document aligns with Everyone's Essex particularly its focus on delivering a High-Quality Environment by supporting residents to reduce waste, increase recycling, encourage reuse of materials, and move towards a more circular economy.
- D** This report presents the findings of the recent public consultation on the draft strategy prepared by the Essex Waste Partnership (EWP) and seeks approval to adopt the Waste Strategy for Essex 2024-2054.
- E** The strategy identifies what we need to do, the challenges we need to address and will shape our future work. To deliver the strategy vision, the Essex Waste Partnership has identified the following priorities:
- i) **Move to a Circular Economy** - where natural resources are used efficiently and products are designed to be durable, easy to repair and recyclable. Deliver the Waste Hierarchy - by designing services that prioritise waste reduction, reuse, and recycling, and recovering energy and materials from waste that can't be recycled.
 - ii) **Collaborate and Innovate** - with each other and with government, businesses, and communities to create a more sustainable waste system.
 - iii) **Educate and Engage** - listen to feedback and deliver information and initiatives to support residents and businesses to reduce waste and recycle more.
- F** The partnership (comprising 12 districts including Harlow) is committed to achieving the government's national targets as a minimum standard, but we would like to go beyond these targets and have a bigger impact more quickly.
- i) We will ensure that all residents have access to recycling services for plastic, paper, card, metal, glass, and garden waste by 2026.
 - ii) We will ensure that all residents have access to food waste recycling collections by 2026.
 - iii) We will ensure that all residents have access to recycling services for plastic film by 2027.
 - iv) We will stop using landfill by 2030.
 - v) We will reuse, recycle or compost 65% of waste by 2035 with an ambition to achieve 70% or more.
 - vi) We will halve the amount of residual waste per person to 110 kg per year by 2042.
 - vii) We will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to achieving net zero by 2050.

Recommended that Cabinet:

- A** Agrees to the adoption of the Waste Strategy for Essex 2024-2054 in the form (attached as Appendix A to the report).
- B** Notes the Post Adoption Statement on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (attached as Appendix B to the report).

Reason for decision

- A** Adoption of the Waste Strategy for Essex provides the framework for waste management across the county for the next 30 years and demonstrates a commitment to the provision of high performing waste management services in Harlow.

Other Options

- A** Not adopting the Waste Strategy. This is not appropriate as the Council would be failing in its legal duty to maintain a strategy for the management of waste.

Background

1. Essex County Council (ECC), together with the borough, city and district councils, has a legal duty to maintain a joint strategy for the management of waste. The thirteen councils have worked together, as the Essex Waste Partnership (EWP), to jointly develop a new Waste Strategy for Essex to comply with this duty.
2. A draft Waste Strategy for Essex was developed and endorsed by the EWP for public consultation in June 2023. The consultation methodology was designed in line with the HM Government code of practice and the Gunning principles and externally validated by The Consultation Institute (TCI).
3. The public consultation commenced on 13 September 2023 for 10 weeks. Respondents were also able to have their say on the priorities and approaches proposed in the draft strategy and provide feedback on the Strategic Environmental Assessment published alongside the draft strategy. The findings of the consultation exercise have been independently analysed and used by the EWP to develop a final strategy. Over the consultation period 4,545 consultation questionnaire responses were received.
4. The consultation provided an opportunity for respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the draft strategy, its priorities, targets, and approach to the management of waste. Respondents to the consultation were also able to provide comments and suggestions on the strategy and its approach. This has enabled quantitative and

qualitative analysis of the consultation responses to be undertaken to inform the final strategy content. A summary of the consultation findings is detailed below.

Quantitative Findings Summary

5. At a county wide level there were very good levels of support for all the elements of the strategy. The level of agreement for each distinct element of the strategy ranged from between 61% and 86% with the levels of disagreement between 11% and 26%. Although views differed across the county, the levels of agreement exceed the levels of disagreement in all cases. A full breakdown of responses by a range of demographic factors such as location, age and gender are contained in the Final Consultation Report (attached as Appendix C to the report).
6. The consultation also provided respondents with an opportunity to indicate their views on the proposed targets and level of ambition. 48%, nearly half of respondents thought the targets were about right. 28% of respondents indicated a preference for more ambitious targets

Qualitative Findings Summary

7. Respondents to the questionnaire were able to provide additional contextual information in the form of comments on all aspects of the draft strategy. Over 16,000 comments were made by those responding to the consultation. These comments were grouped into common themes by the independent evaluator to enable analysis and to inform the development of the final strategy. The detailed analysis of comments is contained in the Final Consultation Report.
8. The comments made by respondents included broad support for the strategy, suggestions for action planning, and raised some areas that respondents felt needed to be addressed in the final strategy or action planning. Similar comments and themes were identified across the different sections of the strategy and are summarised below.
 - a) General support for the strategy proposals, aims and ambitions.
 - b) A suggestion to include clear actions and commitments from the partnership to deliver the necessary change and to enable progress to be monitored.
 - c) Respondents are supportive of strategy proposals to provide further information and guidance on how to reduce waste.
 - d) Respondents are supportive of the strategy proposals to provide accessible and expanded reuse and recycling services.
 - e) Questioning whether the strategy aims were achievable and affordable.

- f) Respondents wanted to understand more about the environmental and local impacts of waste infrastructure, particularly EfW facilities, and where such facilities may be located.
- g) Suggestion that the partnership should be more active in lobbying government and ensuring businesses reduce waste and packaging.
- h) Asking for the final version of the strategy to be clear and easy to understand, avoiding the use of jargon.

Post Consultation Strategy Amendments

- 9. The consultation response, insight and government policy updates have been fully considered by the Essex Waste Partnership when reviewing what revisions to apply to the Waste Strategy for Essex prior to a decision on adoption. As the public have been broadly supportive of the strategy it has not been necessary to make any substantive changes to the final version proposed for adoption. However, the insight obtained via the consultation has highlighted several areas requiring minor amendment, update or enhancement. The strategy document appended to this report is the output of the post-consultation consideration process and is the version of the Waste Strategy for Essex 2024-2054 proposed for adoption.
- 10. Details of how consultation response, insight and government policy updates have been considered and reflected in the Waste Strategy for Essex are detailed in the EWP Response to Consultation (attached as Appendix D to the report). Detailed below are the key changes that have been made in response to the feedback received.
 - a) Language has been simplified and unnecessary technical terms or jargon have been removed to ensure the strategy is easy to understand.
 - b) The vision statement has been updated to ensure it more strongly aligns with the strategy focus on waste reduction, reuse and recycling.
 - c) The commitments and high-level actions proposed by the partnership have been updated to make them easier to understand. These will be used by the partnership as the basis for the development of detailed action plan.
 - d) The targets and ambitions have been updated and consolidated to ensure only things which can be quantified and measured are included.
 - e) The strategy position on landfill has been strengthened by committing to ceasing the use of landfill by 2030.
 - f) Interim steps to achieve a target have been removed from the strategy. These will be incorporated into future action plans to ensure progress can be consistently measured.

- g) A commitment has been added to regularly review the strategy to ensure it is fit for purpose and to publish progress reports to ensure continued transparency.
- h) A commitment has been added to work together to increase recycling in public spaces, reduce litter and fly tipping.
- i) The strategy now includes an enhanced commitment by the partnership to lobby government for better regulation to tackle waste at source, ensuring manufacturers and retailers play their part to reduce waste.
- j) The strategy has been updated to better reflect the role of business and communities and the need for the partnership to support them to reduce the impact of waste.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 11. A Strategic Environmental Assessment ('SEA') was undertaken in accordance with the SEA regulations (attached as Appendix E to the report). This assessment considers the environmental impacts of the strategy, and the approaches proposed to ensure a high level of protection for the environment and that sustainability is at the forefront of the draft strategy.
- 12. In accordance with the SEA regulations statutory consultees were invited to give responses to the SEA. Responses were received from Natural England and the Environment Agency. Natural England confirmed that, in their view, the proposals contained within the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites that it has a statutory duty to protect. The Environment Agency had no comment to make on the documents.
- 13. Feedback on the Strategic Environmental Assessment was also received from 288 respondents via the public consultation. Of those that responded to the SEA, 54% thought the Environmental Report correctly identified the likely significant effects of the draft strategy. Full details of consultation response to the SEA is included in the Final Consultation Report

Implications for Harlow

- 14. The agreement to the Waste Strategy for Essex has no immediate direct financial implications for Harlow District Council, however by working together there will be longer term benefits for all taxpayers in Essex.
- 15. Adoption of the strategy does not commit the Council to any service changes, and Harlow will retain responsibility for determining how waste is collected across the district.

16. Any financial implications resulting from the action planning to deliver the priorities and commitments within this strategy will be subject to future governance, after a detailed action planning workstream is conducted by the Essex Waste Partnership.

Next steps

17. Following agreement on the strategy, the partnership will work together to develop and deliver the necessary action plans required to achieve the strategy ambitions. Progress and performance against the strategy targets will be published on an annual basis and reported accordingly.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity Implications

18. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when the Council makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:
 - (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
19. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
20. The Equality Impact Assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

Climate Change

Please see the section on the Strategic Environmental Assessment

Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However there may be financial implications if the strategy is adopted and future decisions are taken within the service area.

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Governance

Harlow Council is a waste collection authority, and Essex County Council is the waste disposal authority for Essex. Areas with separate collection and disposal waste authorities in England

are required under s32 of the Waste Emissions Trading Act 2003 to have in place a joint strategy for the management of household and similar wastes.

The Act also obligates these Authorities to:

Ensure that the policies in the joint strategy are kept under review;

Have regard to the relevant government guidance; and

When formulating a joint strategy “carry out such consultation as they consider appropriate”.

The adoption of the strategy will discharge statutory obligations of the Council.

Author: Julie Galvin, Legal Services Manager and Monitoring Officer

Appendices

Appendix A – Waste Strategy for Essex

Appendix B – Strategic Environmental Assessment

Appendix C – Final Consultation Report

Appendix D – Essex Waste Partnership Response for Consultation

Appendix E – Strategic Environmental Assessment

Appendix F - EqIA

Background Papers

None

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None