

Climate Change Strategy



Report to: Scrutiny Committee

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Lead Officer: Tanusha Waters, Assistant Director Planning and Garden Town
(01279) 446595

Contributing Officer: Vicky Forgione, Forward Planning Manager (01279) 446878

Executive Summary

- A** The Climate Change Strategy sets out how Harlow Council will achieve Net Zero through its own operations but also how it will influence the wider community and local economy to deliver quantifiable reductions in emissions for the town.
- B** The Climate Change Strategy sets out seven key objectives relating to achieving Net Zero. Each of the objectives proposes short-, medium- and long-term objectives. Some of these objectives include the creation of specific action plans or strategies that will set out detailed measures with their own timings and costs.
- C** The draft Strategy was published for consultation between 21st October to 20th December 2024. The consultation responses that have been received and the Council's proposed response and recommended changes to the Strategy are detailed within this report and Appendix B.
- D** Subject to Cabinet adopting the Strategy, as set out in Appendix A, actions identified in the document will be prioritised, costed and resourced and their progress monitored. It will also inform future budget decisions and service plans and can be used to help access grants and funding.

Recommended that

- A** Scrutiny notes representations received to the consultation, the Council's response and amendments proposed to the Strategy as set out in Appendix B of this report.
- B** Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that the final Climate Change Strategy, as set out in Appendix A of this report, be adopted.

Reason for decision

- A To enable the Strategy to be formally adopted by the Council for it be a material consideration in the Council's future decision-making processes and to ensure that the Council reaches its Net Zero target by 2040.

Other Options

- A Do not adopt the Strategy. This would result in an uncoordinated approach to delivering projects and actions that would support the Council's target for reaching Net Zero. Without the Strategy there is a risk that the Council will fail to reach this target as there will be no overarching guidance or identified actions in place for departments to consider and implement. The Strategy will also assist in seeking funding opportunities, setting future budgets and agreeing project priorities.

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 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 and services.
2. A draft Climate Change Strategy (CCS) was developed setting out additional actions and proposals for both the Council's operations, buildings and services but also potential opportunities for influencing the wider community and local economy to deliver reductions in emissions. The draft CCS is structured around seven objectives:
 - 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.
3. The draft CCS was informed by a series of internal workshops with departments across the Council. This helped to provide information on existing projects and proposals, potential future actions and issues and challenges in delivering those actions.

Climate Change Strategy consultation process

4. The draft CCS was published for consultation between the 21st of October and 20th December 2024. Appendix B lists the engagement methods used during the consultation. This included the use of an online platform to host a questionnaire and interactive document, several posters across the district with a unique QR code, social media and website links, hard copies in all libraries and the Council offices and circulation to a number of organisations. It was also advertised in the Essex County Council climate change newsletter, shared with children's groups and promoted at the Harlow Business Forum and Harlow Times.
5. A total of 18 people/organisations responded to the consultation, the majority of which were statutory bodies such as Natural England and Historic England as well as technical departments at Essex County Council and partnering authorities such as Uttlesford District Council and HGGT. Their representations were split into 108 separate points or comments. Each one has been responded to in the schedule of responses set out in Appendix B. Where a change has been made to the CCS, these are highlighted in bold in the appendix.
6. A summary of the main points raised and proposed changes to the CCS are below:
 - a) Additional references to Air Quality have been made throughout the CCS
 - b) Wording inserted on increasing home-grown timber for construction purposes and increasing tree canopy cover nationally and locally
 - c) Using waterways for potential thermal energy and freight movement
 - d) References added on ensuring consideration is given to historic buildings and archaeological areas when implementing measures
 - e) Consideration of strengthening policies in a future Local Plan review on Net Zero homes, permeable materials and water efficiency
 - f) References to additional useful documents and toolkits which are available e.g. Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework
 - g) Additional ideas around using public estates for renewable generation, Bio Roofs and community energy projects
 - h) Inclusion of the Biodiversity Duty placed on local authorities and work that has taken place on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (Essex County Council led Strategy)
7. Due to its length, the Environment Agency response can be found in separately in Appendix C.
8. In addition to the consultation responses received via email or the online platform, 15 questionnaires were completed. The results of these can also be found in Appendix B. The results reveal that implementing actions that improve Council homes, increase recycling rates and deliver improved Council operations and services were primarily supported over other actions. Improving cycle paths and foot paths was also identified as an important action. Regarding information the public would find useful, this focussed

largely on available grants/subsidies, ideas for recycling and reducing waste and community events or initiatives such as repair days/clothes sharing events. These results will help inform actions the Council may wish to prioritise or consider in the short-term including how we engage in the future with residents/businesses and what information they may find beneficial.

9. The final CCS has also been updated to reflect changes in government legislation or national targets and measures since the strategy was first drafted. It also reflects the latest position in respect of any actions or schemes that departments across the Council and other partners are currently implementing or have implemented.

Climate Change Strategy Task and Finish Group

10. The Scrutiny Climate Change Task and Finish Group was established to oversee the consultation and development of the CCS as well as identify other actions that would help the Council reach its Net Zero target. The Group assisted in implementing the following actions:
 - a) Informed the consultation arrangements of the CCS – provided guidance on who could be contacted and engagement methods.
 - b) Set out a Terms of Reference which can inform future Climate Change groups/ member panels. Useful additions included:
 - i) *To identify measures which could help the council meet its net zero targets following the declaration of a climate emergency*
 - ii) *To work with Officers to develop strategies, action plans or similar that relate to Climate Change*
 - iii) *Advise on priorities of focus in the Climate Change Strategy and forward plan of actions*
 - iv) *Develop monitoring/risk strategies of delivering Net Zero targets*
 - v) *Facilitate collective action across departments*
 - vi) *Consider future budgets*
 - c) Supported the development of a tracker which would set out existing sustainability or climate change related projects being implemented across the Council. Along with being a useful monitoring tool for the CCS, the tracker would:
 - i) *Monitor short term actions linked with climate change or net zero*
 - ii) *Be completed internally by all relevant departments with dedicated departments or individual officers assigned to projects*
 - iii) *Updated quarterly or when a sooner update is provided by an officer*
 - iv) *Consider the use of a traffic light (RAG) system for monitoring the actions*
 - d) Raised awareness of the Climate Change Action Scorecards which officers responded to. The Scorecards scores local authorities on certain actions undertaken to mitigate climate change and reach Net Zero.
 - e) Were presented with information on the representations made to the CCS and the Council's proposed response.

11. Along with a variety of indicators and periodical reviews of the CCS, the tracker and Scorecards highlighted by the Group will be used to help monitor progress of actions identified in the strategy as well as any new actions identified across the Council. The Scorecards also provide several helpful targets which can be updated annually through the Scorecard process to monitor progress.
12. The Group acknowledged the representations received to the consultation and agreed with the proposed additions and changes to the CCS.

Implementation and Monitoring

13. Once adopted it will be important to set out a clear plan for implementing actions, identifying new actions and monitoring success of the Strategy. An annual action plan, informed by the tracker, that identifies short term projects and is frequently monitored will be an important element of this as will regular reviews of the CCS and Carbon Reduction Plan. Projects will need to be prioritised, timetabled, resourced and properly costed. Risks will also need to be identified. Technical evidence or feasibility studies may need to be undertaken to support the development of a scheme or proposal. This will need to be set out in the action plan.
14. It is recommended that the focus is on those actions where the Council can deliver the greatest change in the shortest time and is therefore likely to be actions where the Council has most control. This can feed into the annual budget and service plans for departments. Further community engagement on actions and proposals will be essential to ensure residents and businesses are fully engaged. As technologies, supplies, skills and legislation changes, the action plan and CCS will need to respond to this.
15. Monitoring of emissions will be an important indicator for success of the CCS, however there are other important measures that need to be monitored. This includes biodiversity increases, water and waste reduction, resource re-use, air quality, sustainable travel and successful community engagement. The CCS includes a detailed section on measures and indicators that will can be used to monitor the document.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached with this report (Appendix D).

Climate Change

As detailed in the report.

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: Jacqui Van Mellaerts, Assistant Director – Finance and Section 151 Officer

Governance

In 2021 Harlow Council's Cabinet set carbon emission reduction target of zero emissions by 2040 with a commitment to review this on an annual basis and to seek to improve on this target as technology allows. The adoption of a strategy to support activities in relation to this target will support the council in meeting the target it has set by providing a framework and monitoring regime for actions that reduce emission. Additional work will be required to put the relevant actions in place to achieve these savings, as identified within the report through the proposed production of an action plan.

Author: Rebecca Farrant, Assistant Director – Corporate Services and Improvement, and Monitoring Officer

Appendices

Appendix A – Final Climate Change Strategy for adoption

Appendix B – Schedule of Representations and Council's Response

Appendix C – Environment Agency Response

Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessment

Background Papers

[Harlow Carbon Reduction Plan 2021/26](#)

[March 2022 Cabinet Position Statement](#)

[October 2023 Scrutiny Report Paper](#)

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

CCS – Climate Change Strategy

HGGT – Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

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.