

Referral from Scrutiny Committee - Adoption of Climate Change Strategy



Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	19 March 2025
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Nicky Purse, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability
Lead Officer	Tanusha Waters, Assistant Director Planning and Garden Town (01279) 446595
Contributing Officer:	Vicky Forgione, Planning Policy Manager (01279) 446878
Key Decision:	Yes
Forward Plan:	Forward Plan I017694
Call In:	This item is subject to call in procedures
Corporate Mission(s):	Related to all Corporate Priorities
Wards Affected:	All Wards

Executive Summary

- A** The Climate Change Strategy (CCS) 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 CCS sets out seven key objectives relating to achieving Net Zero. Each of the objectives sets out short (within 1-3 years or by 2028), medium (within 10 years or by 2035) and long term (by 2040 or beyond) actions/proposals. Some of these include the creation of specific action plans or detailed strategies that will set out specific measures with their own timings and costs.
- C** The CCS was published for consultation between 21 October to 20 December. 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 Appendices B and C to the original report.

- D** The report recommends adoption of the CCS so it can be a material consideration in the council's future decision-making processes.

Recommended that Cabinet:

- A** Notes the responses received to the consultation (as set out in Appendix B to the original report) and agrees the consequential amendments made to the Climate Change Strategy.
- B** Adopts the Climate Change Strategy (as set out in Appendix A to the original report) and delegates authority to the Assistant Director – Planning and Garden Town in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability to make and agree any minor or inconsequential amendments to the Strategy arising from any matters discussed and agreed at Cabinet.

Reason for decision

- A** The Scrutiny Committee carried out a review of the final Climate Change Strategy, which is to be adopted.

Other Options

- A** Do not adopt the Climate Change Strategy (CCS). 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 CCS 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 CCS will also assist in seeking funding opportunities, setting future budgets and agreeing priority projects.

Background

1. At its meeting on 04 March 2025, the Scrutiny Committee conducted a review of the comments made as part of the consultation on the draft CCS and the final version now being recommended for adoption in this report. They were also presented with the Equality Impact Assessment that sits alongside the CCS.
2. The Scrutiny Report (Appendix 1 to this report) provides further details in respect of the consultation, representations received, changes that have been made and outcomes of the Task and Finish Group set up to oversee the CCS. Below is a summary of the information Scrutiny Committee received:
 - a) A total of 18 people/organisations responded to the consultation.
 - b) The majority of which were statutory bodies, departments at Essex County Council and partnering authorities such as Uttlesford District Council and HGGT.

- c) Representations were split into 108 separate points or comments and the following additions/changes made:
 - i) Additional references to air quality have been made throughout the CCS.
 - ii) Wording inserted on increasing home-grown timber for construction purposes and increasing tree canopy cover nationally and locally.
 - iii) Using waterways for potential thermal energy and freight movement.
 - iv) References added on ensuring consideration is given to historic buildings and archaeological areas when implementing measures.
 - v) Consideration of strengthening policies in a future Local Plan review on Net Zero homes, permeable materials and water efficiency.
 - vi) References to additional useful documents and toolkits which are available e.g. Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework.
 - vii) Additional ideas around using public estates for renewable generation, Bio Roofs and community energy projects.
 - viii) 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).
- d) Due to its length the Environment Agency response can be found separately in Appendix C to the original report.
- e) 15 questionnaires were completed.
- f) The CCS has been updated to reflect changes in government legislation and national targets/measures since the draft was prepared.
- g) The CCS 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.

Matters identified at the 4 March 2025 Scrutiny Committee

- 3. The 04 March 2025 Scrutiny Committee identified the following matters for further consideration.
 - a) Regular monitoring and reporting of the actions of the Strategy. This is set out in paragraph 6 of this report and paragraph 10.1 of the Strategy.

- b) Implementation of non-fossil fuelled boilers in the council's operational buildings to be brought forward.
 - c) To note the low consultation rate but agreed that there would be further consultation and engagement with the public as actions and proposals come forward.
 - d) Ensure that the council's budget aligns with the actions.
 - e) Ensure that the council, under Objective 1 and 7, takes the lead in implementing projects and actions that help tackle climate change and reduce emissions.
 - f) Better understand future bus improvements (routes and timings) and EV charging points in the long term. The Bus User Group will help develop actions on improving bus provision and officers will continue working with partners on EV charge points, including the provision of necessary infrastructure.
 - g) Ensure that the most up to date air quality data is available on the council's website.
4. No changes were required to the CCS as a result of Scrutiny Committee.

Next Steps – Monitoring and Implementation

- 5. Subject to adoption, it will be important to set out a clear plan for implementing actions, identifying new actions and monitoring success of the CCS. An annual action plan, informed by a 'tracker' that brings together existing actions the council is undertaken. It will identify short term projects and will be frequently monitored. Regular reviews will also be undertaken to the CCS itself and the council's Carbon Reduction Plan. Projects will need to be prioritised, timetabled, resourced and properly costed and risks identified. Technical evidence or feasibility studies may need to be undertaken to support the development of a scheme or proposal, and this also will be set out in the action plan.
- 6. 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 projects 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.
- 7. 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 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 to original report).

Climate Change

As detailed in the report and accompanying Scrutiny Report (Appendix 1 to this report).

Finance

The Strategy 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 annual action plan is fully developed there will be a requirement to factor further and ongoing costs of delivery into 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 1 – Scrutiny Committee Report to meeting on 4 March 2025

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

EV – Electric Vehicles

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.