

CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

Cleaner and Greener Advisory Committee – 22 February 2024

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer for Planning and Regulatory Services

Status: For decision

Also considered by: Cabinet – 14 March 2024
Council – July 2024

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary: This report presents a Climate Change Strategy for Sevenoaks District to members for approval.

This report supports the Key Aim of: The Council's commitment to tackling climate change.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. McArthur

Contact Officer(s): Emma Henshall, Ext. 7358; Margaret Carr, Ext. 7341

Recommendation to Cleaner and Greener Advisory Committee:

To consider the Climate Change Strategy and recommend to Cabinet that it be approved, subject to final design and any associated amendments.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

To approve the Climate Change Strategy for Sevenoaks District; subject to final design and any associated amendments.

Recommendation to Council:

That Council notes the previous aspiration to reach net zero by 2030 for the Council and its assets will not be achieved, for the reasons set out in paragraphs 1-4 of the report.

Reason for recommendation: To ensure that the District Council continues to play its part in tackling the challenge of climate change.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Council's commitment to tackling climate change dates back to 2019. Over the last five years we have successfully delivered a wide range of projects that have contributed towards a reduction in the Council's carbon emissions.
- 2 However, cumulatively these efficiencies are not enough to get us to net zero by 2030 and we still face a significant challenge. Decarbonising the Council's buildings and fleet and offsetting the emissions we cannot remove has been estimated to cost in the region of £7 million. Whilst we have a plan in place to replace our fleet with more efficient and less polluting vehicles, it is not currently possible to make this operation net zero as the electric waste vehicles available do not have the range required to complete our waste rounds. We therefore need to be realistic about what we can achieve given the resources available.
- 3 Additionally, the most recent data from the Department of Energy and Net Zero (DENZ) tells us that our own carbon emissions account for less than 0.5% of those across the District.¹ Furthermore, the Council has very little scope to directly and substantially influence the two major sources of these emissions, namely those from transport and domestic use of gas and electricity. These sources account for 61% and 26% of the District's emissions respectively.
- 4 The evidence therefore suggests that the Council's aspiration to reach net zero by 2030 is no longer realistic, and we should use our limited resources where they will make the most impact. While we will continue to work towards reducing our own emissions where resources allow and where practicable, we are more likely and better placed to make a difference through focusing more on community leadership, partnership and engagement to take a broader, inclusive approach to the challenge of climate change.
- 5 The Climate Change Strategy has been developed to this end, shifting the focus to prioritise working with our residents, businesses, partners, visitors and community groups to raise climate awareness and unlock potential.
- 6 Whilst there is currently no legal requirement for local authorities to act, the Council is well placed to respond both as an organisation in its own right as well as having the potential to influence and to demonstrate leadership within our communities.

¹ (*source: www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-local-authority-and-regional-greenhouse-gas-emissions-national-statistics)

What the Climate Change Strategy does

- 7 The Climate Change Strategy brings our work to reduce carbon emissions in line with national and regional climate change policy, strengthening our opportunities for partnership working to unlock funding and initiatives, and ensures we are all working towards the same goal.
- 8 It aligns with the Council Plan and directly links with other Council strategies, policies and projects, ensuring a robust and inclusive approach that puts climate change consistently at the forefront of all Council decisions and across all service areas.
- 9 It identifies the opportunities and challenges that exist within the District, including our strategic road network, the Green Belt, how our population is expected to change, and our sphere of influence. Analysis of these key considerations clearly identifies easy wins and where we should focus our efforts.
- 10 It then sets out six climate change priorities covering: movement, travel and transport; energy and buildings; the Council's built assets and fleet; resources, consumption and waste; the natural environment; and awareness and engagement. Specific high level aims are set out for each priority.
- 11 The Strategy itself is deliberately high level, recognising that we need to aim high, but also retain flexibility to cope with and adapt to change. It is envisaged that, subject to the Strategy being approved by Members, a new Action Plan will be developed to deliver the priorities, and monitor progress against them. Each service area across the Council will be responsible for delivering their actions.

The Council's 2030 commitment

- 12 The previous aspiration to reach net zero by 2030 for the Council and its assets is no longer realistic and will not be achieved, for the reasons set out earlier in this report. It has been recorded on the Council's Strategic Risk Register since 2019, which identifies the following risk factors and mitigation (internal controls).

Risk factors:

- Technology does not sufficiently advance to allow the Council to replace fleet;
- Technology is too expensive to allow the Council to replace fleet;
- Cost of work to Council assets (prohibitive);
- Retrofitting of assets not technically feasible;
- Delay in delivering actions and projects beyond 2030;

- Lack of adequate funding; and
- Slippage on net zero pathway.

Mitigation (internal controls):

- Officer working group;
- Monitoring and political oversight;
- Training and skills development through best practice groups;
- Net zero fund;
- Net Zero Action Plan has been agreed by members;
- Progress against actions is monitored by Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee quarterly;
- Kent & Medway Environment Group (KMEG) and county alignment;
- Continual pathway analysis; and
- Procurement of a carbon reduction plan.

13 As a result, with the adoption of the Climate Change Strategy it is considered timely to revisit the previous aspiration to align with what is practicably possible.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

The Council has made a commitment to tackle the challenge of climate change. We could continue with the current Action Plan dating back to 2019, however this is not recommended. Our knowledge and understanding of climate change and carbon emissions for the Council and the District has changed and improved, including our awareness of what we can and cannot influence. This new Strategy provides a reset, and takes account of where the Council should be allocating resources to have the most impact on reducing carbon emissions.

Key Implications

Financial

Funding will be required to deliver the priorities and aims set out the Strategy, however much of this can be met through existing budgets and we will seek to maximise external funding wherever possible. Any additional funding will be considered and identified at a project level in the forthcoming Action Plan.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

No legal implications have been identified.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended in this paper directly impact on the Council's commitment to tackle the challenge of climate change. The impact has been reviewed and there will be a decrease in carbon emissions produced in the District as a result of this decision.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Sevenoaks District Climate Change Strategy

Background Papers

None.

Richard Morris

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer for Planning and Regulatory Services