

Item 09 – Climate Change Strategy

The attached report was considered by the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee on 22 February 2024. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee (22 February 2024, Minute 45)

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report, which set out the Council's proposed Climate Change Strategy, which would provide a framework for actions relating to reducing carbon emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change. The strategy represented a change of emphasis to prioritise the Council's leadership role, as the majority of emissions within the district could be influenced but not controlled by the council.

The Principal Infrastructure Delivery Officer outlined the report. The council's aspiration to reach Net Zero by 2030 was no longer realistic, due to a number of factors and restraints, including cost and a lack of infrastructure. Work would continue to reduce council emissions where practicable. The council was responsible for less than 0.5% of the district's emissions, and was limited in its ability to influence the two main sources of emissions of transport (60%) and domestic use of gas and electricity (26%) across the district. The strategy thus prioritised community leadership and engagement, and sought to work with residents, businesses, partners, visitors, and community groups to raise climate awareness and combat climate change. The officer outlined the six climate change priorities within the strategy. A new action plan would be developed for the strategy, which would identify projects across the council to deliver the strategy's aims.

In response to questions, the Policy Officer explained that the main sources of the council emissions were from fuel use in large vehicles, and gas use for heating at its two leisure centres and offices. A carbon reduction plan had been commissioned, focusing on heat reduction plans for council assets. This plan set out three scenarios, for conducting business as usual, mid-level intervention, and high level intervention. The mid-level intervention would require an investment of around £3.24 million, including costs for offsetting emissions that could not be reduced. The high-scale action scenario, which would bring the council closest to its goal of Net Zero by 2030, would require heat pumps and solar photovoltaic panels at all assets, and the total conversion of the council's fleet to electric vehicles, and was calculated to cost around £7million. The Commercial & Property Team would continue to work on these issues, but it was not possible to achieve this by 2030.

In response to further questions, the Principal Infrastructure Delivery Officer explained that the strategy's focus was on the district-wide emissions that the council could readily influence. The action plan would set out the specific projects through which this could be done. These actions would be supported across the council's range of service areas, such as the integration of Walking, Wheeling, and Cycling routes with planning applications. It was explained that

the council would continue to address the issue of climate change, and that a change in timeframe would not impact the work being undertaken. A number of projects were reliant on external funding, and a set deadline would not impact how these schemes were delivered.

Members discussed the aims and key measures of success within the strategy. The officer explained that the strategy was a high-level document, which would reinforce the council's commitment to tackling climate change and set a clear direction of the council's plans. The associated action plan would set out in further detail the key performance indicators and work necessary to achieve these aims.

Members discussed the mechanisms for including member feedback into the development of the action plan, including the possibility of the formation of a working group.

Members discussed specific elements of the strategy. They raised the possibility of including elements of a circular economy within the strategy, in relation to waste and businesses. They were advised that the council were working with Kent County Council on this issue, details of which would be included within the action plan. Members also suggested including specific reference to reducing the use of single-use plastics under the "Resources, consumption and waste" priority. It was further suggested that a stronger first line should be incorporated to the strategy.

Resolved: That

- a) It be recommended to Cabinet that the Climate Change Strategy be approved, subject to final design and any associated amendments; and
- b) that subject to the approval of the Climate Change Strategy, the associated Action Plan be brought to the committee within the year.