

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO**

Cabinet
09 December 2020

Report Title: Sustainable Environment Strategy

Submitted by: Executive Director – Operational Services

Portfolios: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: ALL

Purpose of the Report

To consider adopting a Sustainable Environment Strategy for the Council.

Recommendation

- 1. That Cabinet approve the Sustainable Environment Strategy and Action Plan for the Council and Borough.**
- 2. That Cabinet seek views on and support for the Strategy and Action Plan from key local partners and the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.**

Reasons

The Sustainable Environment Strategy sets out the Council's ambition to be an exemplar local authority in both caring for, and enhancing our local environment for the quality of life of residents now and in the future.

1. Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 4th November 2020, Cabinet received and endorsed the Councils reviewed Medium Term Financial Strategy including a mid-term review of the Council Plan. Under Priority 3 – a Healthy, Active and Safe Borough, Cabinet reaffirmed its commitment to establish a Sustainable Environment Strategy for the Council and the Borough linked to Government targets.
- 1.2 In order to translate the Councils ambitions in respect of the environment, a Sustainable Environment Strategy will be the vehicle for helping the Council achieve its aims of caring for and enhancing our natural environment and to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change.
- 1.3 The focus of the strategy is on delivering those actions that we know will achieve a positive impact and importantly, where we know we have the greatest control and influence to turn our plans into actions for the benefit of the Borough.

2. Issues

- 2.1 Plans are being developed in two complimentary works streams. The first is to fundamentally and comprehensively review the Councils own activities and services and incorporate actions into the Action Plan that make a significant contribution to this Strategy and achieves a net carbon neutral position for the Councils activities and operations by 2030. The second is to work with partners across the Borough and Staffordshire to work together on Borough wide actions that will help achieve agreed targets.
- 2.2 Cabinet are asked to support an aspiration to become an exemplar authority, known for both preserving and protecting our local environment for the present and future and also for enhancing our environment and the quality of life of residents.
- 2.3 The Strategy identifies four priority outcomes and how we will deliver our aims. The four priority outcomes are:
- To reduce our reliance on fossil fuels
 - To reduce carbon emissions
 - To minimise waste and increase recycling;
 - To offset carbon emissions
- 2.4 The Sustainable Environment Strategy outlines the first phase of our commitments and future direction of travel for the Council, but it is by no means the end of the work needed. The strategy acknowledges that this is only the beginning of the journey and further work is required to develop the optimum range of activities in the Action Plan in the future, on an ongoing and flexible basis.
- 2.5 To improve the local environment and mitigate the effects of climate change will require changing the way we do things, looking at our own services and ways of working and taking direct action wherever possible, as well as encouraging, supporting and enabling others to do the same.
- 2.6 It is fully recognised that the Council needs to work with its partners to be able to deliver some of our aims and to enable and support others in delivering their priorities for change. The Council is already working with partners and other Staffordshire Districts, Boroughs and the Staffordshire County Council through the Leaders and Chief Executives Group to identify areas of potential joint working that will benefit the Borough and County as a whole.
- 2.7 In addition the Council has worked with Keele University to secure funding to work with the Centre for Alternative Technology, and Carbon Literacy Project, to facilitate joint working between the Staffordshire councils. The programme of work plans to involve, a 2 day workshop with multiple representatives from all Staffordshire councils to explore learning, synergies, and potential future joint projects, and a number of days of consultancy support from the Centre for Alternative Technology to help drive the identified projects forwards.
- 2.8 It is also recognised that the pace of change related to climate change and policy direction is fast as well as the pace of development of technology and best available techniques to support these changes. This strategy will therefore be fully reviewed annually to ensure that our ambitions and actions are aligned to emerging local, national and global policy and to refresh the Action Plan as necessary to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

2.9 A Sustainable Environment Strategy Steering Group has been established, led by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling. The Steering Group will report directly into Cabinet on progress with this Strategy.

2.10 The Government has very recently announced its 10 Point Plan which is aimed at eradicating the UK's contribution to climate change by 2050, which has been enshrined into law as part of the net-zero emissions target. A budget of £12bn. has been agreed to transition the UK into net carbon neutrality and the plan includes a wide range of actions that includes green energy production and use, energy efficient buildings, carbon capture and the natural environment.

2.11 On the issue of achieving carbon neutrality, Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee supported the target date of 2030 for the Borough Councils activities and functions. In relation to Borough wide carbon neutrality, the Committee considered the practicality of achieving Borough wide carbon neutrality at its meeting on 30th September 2020. This followed consideration of the issue at a cross party Working Group and resolved to recommend to Council that the target date for this aspect be adjusted to 2050 to align with the government target and that of neighbouring authorities and to reflect the importance of ensuring that it is achievable and credible.

3. **Proposal**

1. That Cabinet approve the Sustainable Environment Strategy and Action Plan for the Council and Borough.
2. That Cabinet seek views on and support for the Strategy and Action Plan from key local partners.

4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

4.1 The Sustainable Environment Strategy sets out the Council's ambition to be an exemplar local authority in both caring for, and enhancing our environment. Adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change means changing the way we do things for the long term benefit of the Borough.

5. **Options Considered**

- 5.1 Agree the proposed Sustainable Environment Strategy and Action Plan designed to achieve protect the local environment and Carbon neutrality for the Councils operations by 2030.
- 5.2 Do not agree the proposed Strategy and Action Plan and seek an alternative method of achieving the above.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 The Climate Change Act 2008 has the following provisions:

Carbon targets and carbon budgeting - The Act places the government under a legal duty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% below 1990 levels by 2050

The Committee on Climate Change - The Act also establishes the Committee on Climate Change, an independent, expert body to advise government on the appropriate level for the targets, budgets, and on matters relating to mitigation and adaptation. The

Committee will submit annual reports to parliament on progress towards the targets and the government must respond to this report.

6.2 Councils Duty to reduce carbon emissions - There are currently no statutory requirements for local authorities to set or negotiate targets to reduce their own or area wide emissions.

6.3 All Local Authorities also have a “biodiversity duty” under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 There are no adverse equality impact identified as a consequence of this report. Specific actions contained within the proposed Action Plan will need to consider any equality impacts on a project by project basis.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 There are financial and resource implications associated with the implementation of the proposed actions contained within the Action Plan. There will be different implications action by action, which may require revenue and or capital expenditure and investment as well as in some cases savings resulting from an action.

8.2 Each action will be need to be considered on their balance of costs and benefits and approval for expenditure sought as appropriate in each case in the context of competing financial pressures, available funding, return on investment and potential external funding contributions.

8.3 Some of the possible interventions will require the completion of a detailed business case to be completed.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1 There are overarching risks of inaction in respect of the Councils response to the environmental threats caused by rising carbon emissions, habitat loss, plastic pollution and poor use of dwindling natural resources.

As a result, Councils around the UK and Governments around the world are responding to these threats and public calls for a robust and rapid reduction and mitigation measures and have declared Climate Emergencies as well as reigniting environmental strategies with the aim of accelerating action to achieve carbon neutrality, consider how to mitigate the effects of climate change and change how resources are used.

There are growing expectations that Councils take a leading and decisive role in this respect and there are reputational risks to the Council in not acting positively.

Any risks associated with specific projects contained within the proposed Action Plan will be assessed and considered on a project by project basis.

10. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

10.1 This strategy seeks to help the Council achieve its aim of caring for and enhancing our natural environment and to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change. The Strategy has a specific intention to adopt appropriate monitoring systems for tracking our reduction in emissions and increased capacity for offsetting and publish our progress.

11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 The recommendations contained within this report affect all wards within the Borough, is therefore a Key Decision and as such has been included on the Councils published Forward Plan.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 Full Council – 3rd April 2019

12.2 Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee

12.3 Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 None

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 Draft Sustainable Environment Strategy