

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO**

Cabinet
23 March 2022

Report Title: Newcastle under Lyme Sustainable Environment Strategy – Annual Report.

Submitted by: Executive Director – Sustainable Environment and Operational Services

Portfolio/s: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To provide Cabinet with a progress update towards achieving the aims of the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy and linked initiatives and plans.

Recommendation

That:

- 1. Cabinet notes the progress made in the various facets of the Council's Sustainable Environmental Strategy and other linked initiatives.**
- 2. That Cabinet refers the progress update and 2022/2023 Action Plan to the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny and comments.**

Reasons

To review progress and plans towards the aims of the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy and linked initiatives including the Council's Nature Recovery plans, Urban Tree Planting Strategy, UN Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Emergency Plans.

1. Background

1.1 The Council adopted its Sustainable Environment Strategy in December 2020. The Strategy is a landmark document that sets out the Council's commitment to the sustainable environmental future of the Borough and is an over-arching strategy, under which a range of other linked and related plans and initiatives sit.

1.2 There are 4 Priority Outcomes associated with the Strategy as follows:

- ❖ Reduce the reliance on the use of fossil fuels.
- ❖ Reduce carbon and other damaging emissions.
- ❖ Minimise waste and increase recycling.
- ❖ Offset residual carbon emissions.

2. **Issues**

- 2.1 The Sustainable Environment Strategy (SES) is being delivered through an action plan, which identifies a range of actions, which covers an initial 5 years period.

There are also a number of linked plans and initiatives that have been agreed and adopted by the Council as follows:

- ❖ UN Sustainable Development Goals
- ❖ Climate Emergency declaration
- ❖ Nature Recovery declaration
- ❖ Urban Tree Planting Strategy

- 2.2 An Annual Report, detailing progress, has been prepared that encompasses the above and is attached to this report as an appendix. An updated Action Plan for 2022/2023 is also appended to this report.

3. **Proposal**

- 3.1 Cabinet notes the progress made in the various facets of the Council's Sustainable Environmental Strategy and other linked initiatives.

- 3.2 That Cabinet refers the progress update to the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny and comments.

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.

- 4.2 To contribute to the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy, linked plans and initiative with particular focus on its journey to net carbon zero.

5. **Options Considered**

- 5.1 The options considered are whether, or not, to note the report and refer the progress report to the relevant scrutiny committee for scrutiny and comment.

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** In 2020/2021, the Council reduced carbon emissions associated with its operations by 21.5% or 593 tons. It will be noted that this reduction will in part have been achieved during the Covid pandemic. Through the One Council programme, the Council is working to ensure that some of the working practices utilised during the pandemic are built into the Councils core business model.
- 6.4** 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 no financial and resource implications arising directly from this report.
- 8.2** However, the Council has formally recognised a climate emergency and in doing so it acknowledges that there is a real need to act now and plan ahead in how to tackle the environmental threats posed by climate change. This need to act will require a balance to be found between the prioritisation of funding for projects and the duty to be accountable for the way in which public funds are used.
- 8.3** The Council recognises that it will need to make bold decisions where there is a good business case to deliver the right outcomes for our residents and businesses that consider both financial and environmental returns for that investment.
- 8.4** To make further progress on this agenda, the 2022/2023 approved Council budget includes the provision of £100,000 within the Budget Growth Fund to enable tree planting within urban greenspaces, preparation of a roadmap to achieving a net zero Council and progress schemes and initiatives contained in the SES Action Plan.
- 8.5** External funding will play an important part in allowing projects to come forward and the work detailed earlier in this report in respect of the Community Renewal Fund is an example which needs to be followed more widely.

9. Major Risks

- 9.1** There are overarching risks of inaction in respect of the Council’s response to the environmental threats caused by rising carbon emissions, habitat loss, plastic pollution and poor use of dwindling natural resources.
- 9.2** 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.
- 9.3** 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.

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

10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

- 10.1 The Sustainable Environment Strategy and linked initiatives will support the realisation of the aims of UN SDG 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 & 15.



11. Key Decision Information

- 11.1 Approval of the report is considered a key decision as it impacts on all wards in the Borough. It has been included in the Forward Plan.

12. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

- 12.1 There are several previous Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee reports.

13. List of Appendices

- 13.1 Appendix 1 – Sustainable Environment Strategy Progress Report

14. Background Papers

1. Urban Tree Planting Strategy
2. Sustainable Environment Strategy
3. Climate Emergency Motion
4. Natures Recovery Motion
5. UN Sustainable Development Goals