



Prosperous Communities Committee

Tuesday, 4th June 2024

Subject: Environment, Climate Change & Sustainability Strategy Refresh

Report by:

Chief Executive

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To adopt the refreshed Environment &
Sustainability Strategy

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. Members adopt the updated 10-year Environment and Sustainability Strategy, noting the changes that have been made.
2. Members agree that the Environment and Sustainability Strategy Action Plan will be assessed annually as part of the annual monitoring report to ensure it is up to date and reflective of current thinking.
3. Members delegate authority to the Head of Policy and Strategy in consultation with the Chair of Prosperous Communities Committee to make minor editorial modifications to the Strategy where updates to data or legislation occur, that does not fundamentally change to the core objectives of the strategy.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

In May 2019, the UK Government declared a non-legally binding Climate Change Emergency declaration and the Committee on Climate Change recommended a new emissions target for the UK: net-zero greenhouse gases by 2050. This was made a statutory target in June through the Climate Change Act (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019. In April 2021 a new target was enshrined into law to cut national emissions by 78% by 2035.

The Environment Act 2021 was passed in November 2021 with an aim to improve air and water quality, tackle waste, improve biodiversity and make other environmental improvements.

This Environment Act 2021 has two main functions:

1. To give a legal framework for environmental governance in the UK.
2. To bring in measures for improvement of the environment in relation to waste, resource efficiency, air quality, water, nature and biodiversity, and conservation.

The vast majority of this Act does not make any immediate changes for organisations other than regulators. Changes to duties for Local Authorities and others are expected in subsequent legislation made under this Act.

There remain significant implications for a number of areas of this work. Legal implications from this Act and other legislation are accounted for in each of the work themes and service business plans for 2024 onwards.

Any future legislative changes dependent on scale will be picked up within the annual monitoring report of the Environment & Sustainability Action Plan.

There are no direct legal implications from the review of this Environment and Sustainability Strategy, nor the delivery of the Environment and Sustainability Action Plan.

It should, however, be noted that the adequacy and inaction of both national and local government is under scrutiny by environmental interest groups with the threat of potential legal challenge in some areas.

Financial: FIN/15/25/MT/SST

The strategy contains three financial commitments which are not yet costed.

- Have a fully decarbonised fleet by 2035.
- By 2028 the Guildhall will be heated using a renewable energy source.
- By 2030 all other buildings occupied and owned by the Council will have carbon management plans which will include proposals to deliver a fully costed carbon net zero estate.

These objectives may have significant implications which are still unknown. Business cases will need to be brought forward with separate Member decisions for funding when the commitments are realised.

The Corporate Policy & Strategy Team have been in post for just over two years and as part of that team, there is a 1 FTE Climate and Sustainable Environment officer in post who is responsible for delivery of initiatives, supported by departmental resources identified and agreed through WLDC Officer group and Management Team.

There is also an agreement in place to use APSE on a consultancy call off contract for specific project work, as required.

£500k earmarked reserve was approved at Council on 28 June 2021 to support delivery of the Environment and Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan and a further contribution of £182k was approved through the MTFP in 22/23. The current balance of the fund is £531.2k.

All projects brought forward will either be as a result of service business plans or where appropriate, be developed in conjunction with the Climate Change Member Working Group. These will all be subject to Business Cases and funding strategies and signed off in line with the Council's established Governance framework.

Staffing:

Staffing and skills requirements to deliver the strategy will be continually reviewed and monitored.

The approach within the Environment and Sustainability Strategy will support a cultural shift in meeting the challenges of both Climate Change, sustainability and promote resilience, ensuring a sound basis for the organisation to achieve its overall objective to be a net zero organisation by 2050.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights:

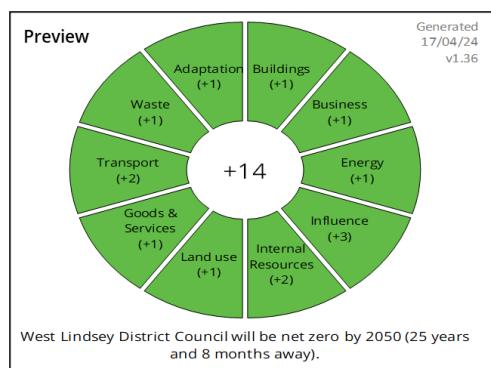
The Council's ambition is to ensure that neither the impacts of climate change, nor the costs of reducing emissions, disproportionately affect any residents of the district.

The Strategy along with the Action Plan is designed to ensure we can reap many co-benefits that have the potential to increase equality and community cohesion. These include improving health and wellbeing through more active travel, improving air quality with reduced vehicle use, increasing social inclusion through community activities and reducing fuel poverty by insulating homes and installing on-site renewable energy.

In practice the Strategy itself is too high-level and long term to undertake a meaningful equality assessment. Individual equality assessments are undertaken as actions are developed.

Data Protection Implications: None

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:



The Environment and Sustainability Strategy and accompanying Action Plan contains the context, priorities and proposals aimed at reducing the Council's carbon emission to a net-zero position by 2050 and seeks to achieve the same across the District of West Lindsey within a similar timescale.

Delivery of the Strategy is measured by annual monitoring of progress against the Action Plan to ensure we, as a Council continue to achieve positive environmental benefits and deliver sustainable services in our mission to become a net zero Council by 2050.

The decision-making tool wheel is entirely green as the Environment and Sustainability Strategy provides a positive strategic context, including objectives, aims and outcomes across each of the 10 themes, which impact directly of the 14 areas of decision making. The scores are only 1 for many of the segments because the Strategy provides the framework and direction, it will be the associated Action Plan which will actually deliver the impacts.

However, it remains extremely important to recognise the key role a Strategy plays in setting the direction for the delivery the Council's priorities.

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations: None

Health Implications:

Health and wellbeing are strongly linked and interwoven into the aims of the Environment and Sustainability Strategy as co-benefits of taking positive action in these areas, with a view to supporting resilient communities as well as tackling Climate Change deliver positive health outcomes across the district.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

[Environment and Sustainability Strategy Progress Report](#) (Nov 2022)

[Environment and Sustainability Strategy Progress Report](#) (Oct 2023)

WLDC's [Carbon Management Plan](#) and [Greenhouse Gas emissions report](#)

Risk Assessment:

WLDC recognised the UK Govt's climate emergency and Members have continued to positively support the approach of promotion and delivery of the Council's previous Strategy. The last two monitoring reports of the delivery of the Council's Action Plan which has been developed with the Member Working Group and Services through annual Business Planning have been unanimously supported.

The risk associated with not adopting the revised Strategy are:

- a. Risk of exacerbating the problems associated with the environment and sustainability caused by climate change due to disjointed Corporate Strategy and delivery, risking the principles of the Green Thread established over the last 2.5yrs.
- b. Risk of a damage to reputation. Having declared WLDC support for urgent action – there is a risk of inaction generating subsequent reputational harm, which could create a relationship breakdown (trust, credibility, and confidence) between the authority and citizens.

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy was first adopted by West Lindsey District Council in summer 2021. This was the first time the Council had a specific strategy designed to tackle the impact of Climate Change on the Council and broader district.
- 1.2 Since the adoption of the Strategy there has been a number of changes made, including significant steps forward made in relation to the Council's response to the impacts of Climate Change.
- 1.3 The Council adopted a new Corporate Plan during the summer of 2023 which reaffirmed the Council's commitment to tackling the impacts of Climate Change.
- 1.4 The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan was also adopted in April 2023. This Local Plan is only one of three across the Country taking significant steps towards tackling Climate Change through local plan policy. Providing policies on energy use in all new build development as well as delivering positive steps in biodiversity and nature recovery and fossil fuels.
- 1.5 Also, since the adoption of the Strategy the Corporate Policy and Strategy Team was formed, which includes the overall responsibility for Environment and Climate Change, facilitating the introduction of the principle of the 'Green Thread' throughout the whole organisation.
- 1.6 The Corporate Policy and Strategy Team has led the delivery of the Strategy and the Associated Action Plan.

2 Progress Update

- 2.1 Since the formation of the Corporate Policy and Strategy Team there has been a number of significant steps taken in relation to the implementation of Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy and the associated action plan. This includes a successful audit of the service which found substantial assurance, including in relation to the approach to implementation of the strategy.
- 2.2 The Member Working Group has also been established and is working effectively to drive and shape Council priorities, monitor the delivery of actions, through an agreed monitoring framework as well as develop a pipeline of opportunities for the Council to explore to ensure the organisation continues to challenge itself in delivering against a difficult agenda.
- 2.3 A new decision-making tool, known as the Climate, Environment and Sustainability Impact Assessment (CESIA) Tool has been developed and implemented. The tool has been designed to assess the impact of all decisions to be taken by the Council on the Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability to ensure that opportunities and challenges are considered and understood as part of the wider decision-making process.
- 2.4 A robust annual monitoring framework has been developed which tracks delivery of the strategy action plan. This is presented to Prosperous Communities Committee and provides an update on progress against actions. The report is now in its third year and is evolving in terms of detail, narrative and targets.
- 2.5 The role of Business Planning is now well established within the Council, which provides an annual opportunity to work with teams and team

- managers in delivering the strategy by turning the strategic objectives and priorities into agreed actions to be delivered across the organisation.
- 2.6 All the actions through the Business Plans are attributed to a theme and link to the three main themes within the Corporate Plan of Our People, Our Place and Our Council.

3 Why Review the Strategy

- 3.1 The decision to review the current Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy was taken by the Prosperous Communities Committee last year as part of the annual update on actions. The decision to review the strategy was based on a number of specific reasons.
- 3.2 The Member Working Group has worked with Officers to establish the strategy action plan and monitoring framework and develop the ten strategic themes in more detail, identifying strategic aims, objectives and outcomes for each.
- 3.3 In doing this exercise it was concluded that the current Strategy needed to become more focussed and responsive to the often fast-paced changes experienced in the sector. It was also felt that the name of the strategy was too long and that whilst the strategy aims to mitigate against the impacts of Climate Change, Climate Change is in fact an outcome and as such the strategy should promote the actions rather than focus on a specific symptom of past behaviour and choice.
- 3.4 The Member Working Group were also keen to more clearly draw out the priorities and pledges the Council has made to ensure accountability in delivery.
- 3.5 Equally, the adoption of two key corporate strategies midway through 2023, namely the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan and the new Corporate Plan in 2023 meant that a review of the Environment., Climate change and Sustainability Strategy was necessary to ensure priorities of the organisation were coherently represented across all three documents, maintaining, and promoting both the Golden and Green Threads.
- 3.6 Finally, as detailed within section 2 of the report, it was also recognised that since the adoption of the original strategy a number of key actions had been undertaken and as such it was an appropriate time to refresh and refocus to ensure that delivery remained at the heart of the strategy.

4 Approach to the Review

- 4.1 Whilst it was acknowledged that there has been a lot of change since the original adoption of the strategy in 2021, it was considered by the Member Working Group that the basic principles and core priority for the organisation to be carbon net zero by 2050 remained appropriate and relevant.
- 4.2 As such the review was undertaken on the basis that it would update the content rather than wholesale change of the strategy. With that in mind engagement was limited to internal stakeholders. This engagement was overseen by the Member Working Group.
- 4.3 Following engagement, the scope of the review was focussed on updating the language and tone, to make it less technical, ensuring it was strategically aligned and more focussed on delivery and outcomes and aligned to the actions, as well as reviewing the name to ensure it reflected the purpose and activity promoted by the strategy.

- 4.4 Consideration was also given to the structure of the Strategy itself and whether closer synergy between the monitoring report and the strategy should be established, specifically by developing the 10 themes more comprehensively to provide a better context for the activities delivered through the action plan.
- 4.5 It was also acknowledged that there were no other milestones included within the original strategy. The overarching strategic objective to be a net zero Council by 2050 remained key, however it is recognised that as the Council's knowledge and understanding of this subject area has developed it is clear that there are many other co-benefits that can be achieved through the delivery of this specific objective and that in order to succeed in these endeavours, shorter term commitments should be made to retain focus and on track with the overall objective.
- 4.6 Finally, the original strategy didn't contain a mechanism for review, which is an important element, particularly as the topic area is changing so quickly in terms of social attitudes and technological advancements.

5 Conclusion of the Review

- 5.1 As such the strategy has been stripped back, with the presentation and content more aligned to other key Corporate Strategies across the organisation. The strategy has a stronger focus on the 10 themes and the strategic aims, objectives and outcomes used within the annual monitoring framework, have been refined and now each include a clear commitment for context.
- 5.2 Whilst there has and remains a focus on becoming a net zero Council by 2050, it has been recognised that there are many, many other co-benefits to promoting a sustainable and environmentally conscious Council and district and whilst it is tempting to include targets that focus on pure reduction in carbon, it is considered that activity-based pledges provide a more rounded approach and outcome.
- 5.3 Reducing the Council and district's carbon footprint is important, but figures alone can very one dimensional and don't allow the Council to fully develop the role of community steward and leader in this area of work.
- 5.4 Therefore, we have made a number of commitments as part of the delivery of our action plan. These pledges relate to specific priorities which we will deliver within the next 10 years, aligning with the life of the strategy, as part of the journey to delivering a net carbon zero council by 2050. As well as these pledges we will also continue to develop, deliver and monitor actions identified within our action plan.
- 5.5 It is considered that in order to deliver against these 10-year pledges that the strategy itself will have a 10-year lifespan, but that the action plan will be reviewed annually in conjunction with the Member Working Group and signed off by Prosperous Communities Committee to ensure the Council's response to this area of work remains relevant and flexible.
- 5.6 The strategy before you is designed to be more engaging, accessible and flexible, allowing the Council to respond more quickly to external change, including advancements in technology and social change.
- 5.7 The narrative within the strategy provides an improved and more relevant context to the Council's corporate priorities and allows the Council to build on the successes already achieved in this area of work,

- both in terms of organisationally, but also in relation to enabling and influencing actions of the wider district, both community and business.
- 5.8 With this in mind it was also considered appropriate to rename the strategy, removing the specific reference to Climate Change and instead relying on the terms Environment and Sustainability Strategy, which better reflects these broad areas of work the Strategy covers and better promotes the approach the Council wishes to encourage as opposed to referring to a specific symptom of the global challenges we face.

6 Recommendations

1. Members adopt the updated 10-year Environment and Sustainability Strategy, noting the changes that have been made.
2. Members agree that the Environment and Sustainability Strategy Action Plan will be assessed annually as part of the annual monitoring report to ensure it is up to date and reflective of current thinking.
3. Members delegates authority to the Head of Policy and Strategy in consultation with the Chair of Prosperous Communities Committee to make minor editorial modifications to the Strategy where updates to data or legislation occur, that does not fundamentally change to the core objectives of the strategy.