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# Environment Strategy – Operational Review

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Scrutiny Commission
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	25 April 2024
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Stuart Gourley
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	17 April 2024
<b>Report Author:</b>	Jenny Graham

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide information to assist the Scrutiny Commission in reviewing progress in implementing the Council's Environment Strategy Delivery Plan.

## 2 Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Scrutiny Commission note:

- (a) The Annual Progress Report on the Environment Strategy (Appendix A) which was reported to the Executive in November 2023
- (b) The changes that have occurred and lessons learnt since the original Delivery Plan was published.
- (c) The approach that is being taken in the current review and re-prioritisation of the Delivery Plan.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	<p>The Delivery Plan is made up of many projects and actions. Most will require funding of some description (capital, revenue, grant, staff resource etc.). Funding is already in place in existing budgets for a number of the work streams.</p> <p>The Council's Project Management Methodology (PMM) process is used for relevant projects and forward planning will seek the required additional funding through the budget setting process.</p>

	<p>There are a number of opportunities to bid for funding from external sources. These will be maximised wherever possible, and the correct approval sought from the Section 151 Officer where required.</p>
<p><b>Human Resource:</b></p>	<p>There are no direct HR implications as a result of this report.</p> <p>The Environment Delivery Team has been established to help deliver the projects within the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan. Many other teams, however, also deliver elements of the Plan.</p> <p>Individual projects may identify HR implications, all of which will be dealt with through the PMM process and any appropriate bids for additional staff resource.</p>
<p><b>Legal:</b></p>	<p>There are no direct Legal implications as a result of this report.</p> <p>The Delivery Plan includes projects which may have legal implications. These will be dealt with on a project-by-project basis through the PMM process.</p>
<p><b>Risk Management:</b></p>	<p>Where relevant, each project included in the Delivery Plan will assess and manage its own risk.</p> <p>As a result of the Internal Audit, the assessment and management of risk will feature at each of the Environment Delivery Project Board meetings.</p>
<p><b>Property:</b></p>	<p>There are no direct property implications as a result of this report.</p> <p>The Delivery Plan includes projects which will have significant impacts on Property. These will be dealt with through the PMM process. There are regular meetings between the Energy &amp; Carbon Team and the Property Team to liaise over projects.</p>
<p><b>Policy:</b></p>	<p>The Delivery Plan includes actions to ensure that the Environment Strategy informs and shapes relevant Council policies and plans across the organisation. This is already happening and with relevant training of staff and Members this influence and understanding will become more effective.</p>

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		This will need to be dealt with on a project-by-project basis through the PMM process to ensure delivery does not have a negative impact on equalities.
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		This will need to be dealt with on a project-by-project basis through the PMM process to ensure delivery does not have a negative impact on equalities.
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>	X			The purpose of the Delivery Plan is to have a positive impact on the environment in numerous ways. It seeks to deliver the Environment Strategy which has a primary target of achieving net zero by 2030 and has a vision which can be found in section 4 of the <a href="#">Environment Strategy</a> . As the projects within the Delivery Plan are implemented there will be consideration in the detailed planning stages as to whether there are unintended negative environmental impacts that require mitigation.

<p><b>Health Impact:</b></p>	<p>X</p>			<p>There are many projects and activities within the Delivery Plan that have positive health outcomes. Some are more direct impacts than others. The links between health and the environment have been significantly strengthened through the cross team working in the first few years of delivering the Environment Strategy. This is important for the Council's desire to embed the 'health in all policies' principles.</p>
<p><b>ICT Impact:</b></p>		<p>X</p>		<p>There is not a significant ICT impact from the Environment Strategy and its Delivery Plan. If certain projects have a significant ICT requirement this will be highlighted to the relevant Boards and managed through the PMM process.</p>
<p><b>Digital Services Impact:</b></p>		<p>X</p>		<p>There is not a significant impact on Digital Services from the Environment Strategy and its Delivery Plan. If certain projects have a requirement that involves Digital Services this will be highlighted to the relevant Boards and managed the PMM process.</p>
<p><b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b></p>	<p>X</p>			<p>This work makes a significant contribution and is guided by the priority: Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency</p> <p>The purpose of revising the Delivery Plan is to ensure that resources are focused and reflect this priority.</p>
<p><b>Core Business:</b></p>	<p>X</p>			<p>Through projects set out in the Delivery Plan, the Council will see some of its core business processes improved as the Environment Strategy continues to have an impact.</p> <p>For example, the development of a Social Value Policy that includes environmental factors is having an impact positively on our procurement outcomes and how they can align with the Environment Strategy and bring environmental benefits. Also,</p>

				the planned introduction of a Sustainability Assessment Tool for projects, schemes and events will improve our core business and ensure we are more aligned to our priorities across all we do.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		X		At this stage it is not envisaged that there will be any data impact.  Some projects within the plan may do, but this will be governed through PMM and the monitoring arrangements put in place.
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	<p>There are a number of activities that are carried out focused around consultation and engagement. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Environment Advisory Group Open Forum</li> <li>- Town and Parish Council Climate Forum</li> <li>- The online ‘Green Hub’ as part of the Council’s website</li> </ul> <p>Engagement around the review of the Delivery Plan will happen using the above forums and other targeted consultation and engagement. This will importantly include internal consultation and engagement through (but not limited to) the Environment Delivery Project Board. Further engagement happens through the delivery of other specific projects.</p>			

## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The report provides information to assist the Scrutiny Commission in reviewing progress in implementing the Council's Environment Strategy Delivery Plan. It covers what has been publicly reported through the Annual Progress Reports (APR), highlights important changes that have happened, and lessons learnt in the first few years of delivery. It further goes on to describe the continuation of the journey of learning and improving which is helping to shape a revised Strategy and Delivery Plan that will be presented to the Executive later in the Autumn of 2024.
- 4.2 The APR is included in Appendix A and reports on projects completing, being launched and good progress being made on longer term project delivery. Overall, the highlights of progress are well summarised in the annual ‘roadmaps’ included in the APR (Appendix A).
- 4.3 A key element of the annual reporting on the Environment Strategy is to provide an update on the Council’s carbon footprint. Each year as the understanding of impacts

and data improves, the Council improves the quality and accuracy of reporting. When the latest figures for 2022/23 are compared to the baseline figures from 2019/20 a reduction of 15% in emissions is observed. The data for the emissions for the District are reported slightly differently using government data. They indicate an overall downward trend when you take account of the special circumstances of 2020 and the covid pandemic.

- 4.4 There have been a number of changes and lessons learnt since the first publication of the Environment Strategy (July 2020) and the Delivery Plan (July 2021) which have an influence on the future direction and organisation of this area of work for the Council. These are described in sections 5.15 to 5.20.
- 4.5 The Council has commenced a review of the strategy and that the Delivery Plan will need to change to remain fit for purpose over the longer term. We are therefore continuing with this work and suggesting some principles are applied as set out in section 5.23.
- 4.6 The Council is committed to continuous improvement as well as continually learning from best practice. The review will inform a revised Strategy and Delivery Plan (including pathway options to achieve net zero) which will be considered by Executive in Autumn of 2024.

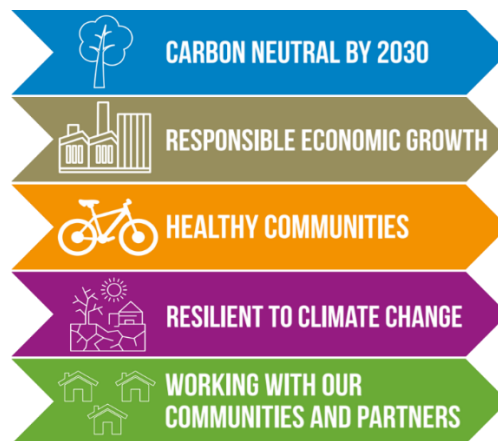
## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

- 5.1 This report provides information to assist the Scrutiny Commission in their operational review of the progress in implementing the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan. It provides the latest published information on progress and outlines the key changes and events that have led to a process of review and re-prioritisation. Other important and relevant information is included to assist this Scrutiny Commission review such as the Internal Audit of the Environment Strategy which was reported in 2023.

### Background

- 5.2 The Council unanimously declared a climate emergency in July 2019. The publication of the Council's Environment Strategy followed in July 2020. This was then supported by the development of a Delivery Plan which was first published in July 2021.
- 5.3 The Delivery Plan was arranged around the strategic objectives of the Environment Strategy. These are:



**Figure 1: Strategic Objectives of the Environment Strategy**

- 5.4 Progress with the implementation of the Strategy is reported annually to the Executive and much of this is focused on the delivery of actions set out in the Delivery Plan.
- 5.5 The Delivery Plan is kept up to date on a monthly basis and is available on the Council's website. There are many teams across the Council who contribute to the delivery of actions in the Delivery Plan. An Environment Delivery Project Board meets bi-monthly where representatives from many teams attend and provide updates and discuss the development of the Delivery Plan.

### **Annual Progress Report**

- 5.6 The latest Annual Progress Report (APR) sets out progress in delivering the Environment Strategy from July 2022 to July 2023 and reports on the implementation of the Delivery Plan. Each of the 3 APRs to date are available on the Council's website. The 2022-2023 report is included in Appendix A for ease of reference.
- 5.7 This APR reports on projects completing, being launched and the progress being made on longer term project delivery. The highlights of the year can be found in Section 3 of the Annual Progress Report.
- 5.8 There are two key strands of action:
- reducing the Council's own carbon emissions with actions from across the organisation contributing to this; and
  - engaging with key stakeholders and encouraging and facilitating action in local communities to help reduce carbon emissions within the District.
- 5.9 The importance of climate change has been strengthened through the development of a Climate Change Service the Environment Department in 2023 to bring greater focus and visibility of the climate agenda. And to help develop improved processes to ensure that the impact on the environment and consequences for climate change are more fully considered and assessed in Council decisions.
- 5.10 Externally, carbon reduction in the District is being addressed by continuing to build relationships with local residents, community groups, schools and businesses. This includes the West Berkshire Town and Parish Climate Forum and The Sustainable Business Breakfast. There are also infrastructure projects that will help with the

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District's journey to net zero such as the rolling out of public electric vehicle charging points.

- 5.11 The Council has secured external funding for projects including the Low Carbon Skills Fund to decarbonise 4 schools and a leisure centre with high emissions, and the Rural Prosperity Fund which will be used to help community halls improve their energy efficiency and reduce their carbon emissions.
- 5.12 A key element of the annual reporting on the Environment Strategy is to provide an update on the Council's carbon footprint. Each year, as the understanding of impacts and data increases, this improves the quality and accuracy of reporting. When the latest figures for 2022/23 are compared to the baseline figures from 2019/20 a reduction of 15% in emissions is observed. The reported data for each year since the baseline was set is included in an appendix to the Annual Progress Report and shows the impact that the Covid pandemic had on the Council's emissions and what has happened since.
- 5.13 The data used for monitoring the District emissions across West Berkshire comes from central government. There is a 2-year lag in the publishing of this data meaning we are reporting 2021 figures in this latest report. The reductions reported last year (2020 figures) were caveated due to them reflecting a year affected by lock-downs and restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As expected, the 2021 figures have increased but are still lower than the 2019 figures indicating an overall downward trend when you take account of the special circumstances of 2020.
- 5.14 Overall, the highlights of progress are well summarised in the annual 'roadmaps' included in the APR. The latest roadmap can be found in section 3 and figure 1 of the APR (Appendix A to this report) and all 3 roadmaps are included in the first Appendix to the APR.

### Changes and lessons learnt since first Delivery Plan

- 5.15 There have been a number of changes since the first publication of the Environment Strategy (July 2020) and the Delivery Plan (July 2021) which have an influence on the future direction and organisation of this area of work for the Council. Some of the key changes are listed below:





**Figure 2: Key changes since the publication of the Environment Strategy and Delivery Plan**

5.16 The change in Administration did not change the ambition of the Council’s work around climate change mitigation. The new Administration in their Council Strategy have committed to:

*Review and update the Council Environment Strategy and Delivery Plans in 2024, so that we can confirm further initiatives with timescales and their expected impact. The new strategy will include increasing biodiversity.*

5.17 The Environment Strategy is subject to a review to establish its future focus to meet the ‘net zero by 2030’ objective. The Ecological Emergency will be reflected in the review linking with the Environment Act of 2021 and the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain in connection with new development. The review will take account of the significant financial challenges being faced by the Council and will consider investment opportunities to secure grant funding.

5.18 After nearly 4 years of implementing the Environment Strategy, significant learning has taken place. Some of the highlights of this learning are listed below:

- (a) The links to health across all the strategic objectives of the strategy have become very clear and the development of close working with the Council’s Public Health team has become established as a result. This links with the ‘Health in All Policies’ work the Council is advocating.
- (b) The Council is keen to engage with others and there is enthusiasm for engagement and working together to meet the climate and ecological objectives. The Town and Parish Council Climate Forum meets every 5-6 weeks and the Council’s Green Hub has been developed as part of its website.
- (c) The original Delivery Plan contains actions that are diverse and not written in a consistent way which causes some difficulty in reporting and monitoring.

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- (d) The number of actions within the existing Delivery Plan is unmanageable and not necessary with many that could be classed as business-as-usual activities.
- (e) Teams have developed awareness of funding opportunities and gained experience in bidding for money. An example is the Low Carbon Skills Fund application which was successful on the third attempt.
- (f) There is a need to focus on reducing carbon emissions but the Environment Strategy is very broad, with not all projects resulting in carbon benefits.

### Review and re-prioritisation of the Delivery Plan

5.19 Work to start looking at how the Delivery Plan could be re-prioritised started in summer 2023. Prior to this, assessment work had been carried out looking at the carbon impacts of relevant projects where this could be estimated and modelled.

5.20 Initially criteria were selected by the Portfolio Holder at the time and some initial scoring and sifting of actions took place. From that point there have been many iterations of the work and a further change in Portfolio Holder.

5.21 It has become clear as this process has progressed and been informed by the changes and lessons learnt outlined above, that quite a significant change to the Delivery Plan is needed for it to be fit for purpose going forward. We are therefore continuing on this journey of review and re-prioritisation and are suggesting the following principles could lead to a more focused Delivery Plan:

- (a) Reduction in the overall number of actions through recognising those which are business as usual activities
- (b) Consolidation of actions and projects where there was overlap and repetition
- (c) Clarity and simplification of actions so it can be easily understood what they will deliver and how this can be monitored
- (d) Entries in the Delivery Plan to either be a 'Broad Action' or a 'Specific Task' to help with the mix of high-level approach and specific action that exists at the moment
- (e) Recognise the common threads that run across everything the council aims to do in order that these activities are not explained multiple times or cause unnecessary actions to be in the plan. These common threads of either elements that should be considered in everything or approaches that impact on all we do are suggested to be:
  - Net Zero
  - Health and Wellbeing
  - Communications
  - Partnerships
  - Education and Community Engagement

- (f) Re-organise the actions so they can be more sensibly grouped under ‘themes’. The suggested themes below are influenced by the original themes set out in the published Environment Strategy:
- Energy Efficiency and Renewables
  - Natural Environment
  - Sustainable Travel
  - Waste and Recycling
- (g) Use information relating to carbon impact, delivery timescales, cost and ability to deliver (level of influence or control) to help prioritise the actions and tasks.

5.22 This is a process that officers are part way through and will continue to develop in collaboration with the Portfolio Holder.

### Next steps

5.23 An important focus of the operational review is to keep the Council on track to reach the target of net zero by 2030. Each project would provide information about how much carbon reduction we can expect, and each piece of feasibility work helps to build a picture of what is possible and how much it will cost. We will focus on continuous learning informed by best practice. The revised Strategy and Delivery Plan (including potential pathways to achieve net zero) will be presented to Executive in autumn of 2024.

## 6 Other options considered

- 6.1 An alternative option could be to carry on with the existing Strategy and Delivery Plan without a period of review. This would, however, ignore the key changes and lessons learned since the Environment Strategy was approved and would not serve to reflect the current situation.
- 6.2 The Delivery Plan could remain in its current form with minor changes to selected actions and incorporate the actions related to the Ecological Emergency. This option, however, would not respond to the issues that have been identified with working with the current format and how the actions are organised. It is therefore considered appropriate to deliver something that is more fit for purpose through a greater refresh of the Plan.

## 7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The challenge of our locally declared Climate and Ecological Emergency is significant. This report has outlined the progress to date and the learning and challenges we have experienced along the way.
- 7.2 The journey of continuous improvement and learning is important and the next steps in this journey are the review and re-focus of the Strategy and Delivery Plan and the development of the pathway to net zero for the Council.

7.3 Progress in these next steps will be reported to the Executive later in the year with appropriate engagement taking place along the way.

## 8 Appendices

Appendix A – Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report July 2022 – July 2023

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### Corporate Board’s recommendation

Corporate Board considered the report on the Delivery Plan prior to it being reported to the Executive and their comments were taken into account.

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### Background Papers:

The Environment Strategy was approved by the Executive in July 2020 – the papers relating to that decision can be found [here](#) and the [published strategy](#) is on the website along with the Annual Progress Reports.

[Executive Report seeking approval for the first version of the Delivery Plan](#)

### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council’s position  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Wards affected:** The Environment Strategy and Delivery Plan have impacts across the District

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### Document Control

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<b>Version:</b>		<b>Date Modified:</b>	
<b>Author:</b>			
<b>Owning Service</b>			

### Change History

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Change ID</b>
1			
2			

## Appendix A

# Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report