
Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	2 November 2023
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Stuart Gourley
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	24 October 2023
Report Author:	Jenny Graham
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4450

1 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is:

- (a) to present the annual progress report on the Environment Strategy covering the third year of the delivery of the Strategy from July 2022 to July 2023, and
- (b) to seek Executive's agreement to the actions proposed in support of the newly declared ecological emergency.

2 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Executive:

- (a) note the Annual Progress Report on the Environment Strategy (as included in Appendix C) and agree its publication on the Council's website, and
- (b) consider and agree the following actions which were set out in support of the declaration of an ecological emergency (at the Full Council meeting held on 5th October 2023):
 - Ensure the Environment Strategy and the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan emphasise the importance of ecological protection alongside Net Zero. *This will be achieved through an update of the Environment Strategy and associated Delivery Plan as set out in the new Council Strategy.*
 - Work with local authorities and other partners in the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Berkshire ensuring the opportunities for biodiversity protection and recovery in West Berkshire are maximised.
 - Introduce a 'Sustainability impact assessment tool'. This will ensure ecological, climate and other sustainability priorities such as health and

wellbeing are at the forefront of the decision making and project planning processes within the Council.

- Develop a Green and Blue Infrastructure framework for the Council to highlight our priorities for ensuring the environment is managed for biodiversity and our residents.
- Work with residents and campaign groups to encourage action for nature, by promoting relevant initiatives using council communication channels and public education opportunities.

The above actions will form part of the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan. Monitoring of progress will be included in the Annual Progress Reports published each autumn.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	There are no direct funding implications as a result of this report. Projects and actions already underway are funded by existing budgets. Teams across the Council will use the budget setting process to plan for future programmes and secure funding for them.
Human Resource:	There are no direct HR implications as a result of this report.
Legal:	There are no direct Legal implications as a result of this report.
Risk Management:	A high-level risk register has been developed for the Environment Strategy. This is kept up to date and the Environment Delivery Project Board is used to keep it under review.
Property:	There are no direct property implications as a result of this report.
Policy:	This annual report aims to demonstrate how the Environment Strategy is being delivered and will play a part in informing and shaping relevant Council policies and plans across the organisation. This is already happening and with relevant

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	training of staff and Members this influence and understanding will become more effective.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		No impact directly as a result of the annual report. Across the Delivery Plan 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 Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		No impact directly as a result of the annual report. Across the Delivery Plan 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 upon the lives of people with protected characteristics.
Environmental Impact:	X			<p>The purpose of the annual report is to demonstrate the delivery of the Environment Strategy which seeks to have a positive impact on the environment in numerous ways. It has a primary target of achieving net zero by 2030 and has a vision which can be found in section 4 of the Environment Strategy. 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> <p>The proposed actions in support of the newly declared ecological emergency will result in improving West Berkshire's environment through developing suitable frameworks, plans, assessment tools and engagement and education opportunities.</p>

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<p>Health Impact:</p>	<p>X</p>			<p>The projects and activities within the Delivery Plan that have a focus on carbon reduction will have health benefits through a reduction in air pollution. Some projects delivered to date are not purely focused on outcomes that reduce carbon and seek to improve health and wellbeing as a key benefit.</p>
<p>ICT Impact:</p>		<p>X</p>		<p>There is not a significant ICT impact.</p>
<p>Digital Services Impact:</p>		<p>X</p>		<p>There is not a significant impact on Digital Services.</p>
<p>Council Strategy Priorities:</p>	<p>X</p>			<p>The main Council Priority to which the projects and actions within the Delivery Plan contribute is tackling the climate and ecological emergency. They do this in many ways but will have a key focus on achieving net zero and enhancing biodiversity.</p>
<p>Core Business:</p>	<p>X</p>			<p>As a result of projects delivered the Council will see some of its core business processes improved as the Environment Strategy starts to have an impact.</p> <p>For example, the implementation of the Social Value Policy that includes environmental factors is having a positive impact on our procurement outcomes and how they can align with the Environment Strategy and bring environmental benefits.</p>
<p>Data Impact:</p>		<p>X</p>		<p>It is not envisaged that there will be any data impacts.</p>
<p>Consultation and Engagement:</p>	<p>The Environment Advisory Group have received a presentation on the main aspects of the Annual Progress Report and are kept up to date with key projects throughout the year.</p> <p>Various teams across the Council have contributed to and been consulted on the report. This has included officers who attend the Environment Delivery Project Board.</p>			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Annual Progress Report for the Environment Strategy. It specifically covers the period from July 2022 through to July 2023. It is, however, part of the continuous story of how the Council is addressing climate change and environmental issues in West Berkshire.
- 4.2 A second purpose of the report is to ask the Executive to consider and agree actions in support of the ecological emergency. These actions were set out at the time of the new declaration being agreed by Full Council on 5th October 2023.
- 4.3 The Annual Progress Report is included in Appendix C and sets out actions and achievements under each strategic objective of the Environment Strategy including case studies and examples from the communities across West Berkshire. The report also looks forward to key projects on the horizon demonstrating the momentum that exists and the significant investment being made in planning some of our larger infrastructure projects.
- 4.4 An important part of the report is to provide an update on the Council's carbon footprint and also to report on the carbon emission data for the District. The Council's carbon footprint shows a reduction for the reporting period and an overall reduction of 15% when compared to the 2019/20 baseline. Due to the lag time in data reporting for the District's emissions, the latest figures show an increase from 2020 to 2021. This was anticipated last year as the results reflect the change from a year severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic through to a year which saw the lifting of lockdown restrictions and a return to more 'normal' living. The increase has not resulted in emissions returning to pre-Covid levels which indicates an encouraging overall downward trend.
- 4.5 *Relevant for Operations Board only:* The report follows a similar format to the previous APRs having had positive feedback. The version of the report in your pack is partly designed but not complete. Following any feedback from Operations Board and the finalisation of certain sections (currently being drafted), the document will be fully designed in the corporate style ready for the Executive meeting.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The year we are reporting on through this Annual Progress Report has been another busy one with some projects completing, others being launched and good progress being made on longer term project delivery. The highlights of the year can be found in Section 3 of the Annual Progress Report (Appendix C).
- 5.2 There are two key strands of action:
 - reducing the Council's own carbon emissions with actions from across the organisation contributing to this,
 - engaging with key stakeholders and encouraging and facilitating action in local communities to help reduce carbon emissions within the District.
- 5.3 Within the Council, the importance of climate change has been strengthened through the development of a Climate Change Service within the Environment Department. This has included the creation of Service Lead for Climate Change role to lead this new

service. This brings greater focus and visibility of the climate agenda across the organisation. It will help to 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. Proposals to deliver a solar farm were granted planning permission and the detailed planning for the construction phase is well underway. Updates on the solar farm project are available through our [dedicated webpage](#). Detailed planning of rolling out rooftop solar PV on more Council properties also continues with delivery anticipated in phases over the next three years.

- 5.4 Externally, carbon reduction in the District is being addressed by continuing to build relationships with local residents, community groups, schools and businesses. The West Berkshire Town and Parish Climate Forum continues and has covered a range of topic areas to help encourage an inform communities regarding actions they could take. A number of initiatives have taken place linking with businesses aimed at promoting green business and our Sustainable Business Breakfast provided lots of ideas of other support that could be provided as well as a great networking opportunity. There are also detailed plans being developed for infrastructure projects that will help with the District's journey to net zero such as the rolling out of public electric vehicle charging points.
- 5.5 There have been a number of ways in which the Council has been successful in achieving external funding for projects. Two examples of these are the Low Carbon Skills Fund which will enable detailed plans to be made for decarbonising 4 schools and a leisure with high emissions, and the Rural Prosperity Fund which will be used to develop a fund aimed at helping community halls improve their energy efficiency and reduce their carbon emissions.
- 5.6 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 our understanding of impacts and data improves, we endeavour to improve the quality and accuracy of our reporting. This year we have reviewed our methodology for reporting the Council's carbon footprint and made appropriate adjustments. This is explained in section 4 of the Annual Progress Report. Our baseline is taken from the time the declaration of a climate emergency was made and the Environment Strategy was developed. 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 show the impact that the Covid pandemic had on the Council's emissions and what has happened since.
- 5.7 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. It was expected that the 2021 figures were likely to increase, which they have. However, they are still lower than the 2019 figures indicating an overall downward trend when you take account of the special circumstances of 2020.
- 5.8 Section 6 of the Annual Report provides the opportunity to look ahead to the next year (July 2023 – July 2024) and beyond, particularly with the publication of the new Council Strategy. One direction that the Council Strategy promotes is acknowledging the

ecological emergency. This is something that was formally acknowledged and declared by the Council at their meeting on 5th October 2023. It was stated at that meeting that the Executive would be asked to consider a set of actions in support of the work to address the ecological emergency. This report provides the opportunity to formally propose those action to the Executive for their consideration and agreement. The actions are set out below and it is proposed that they form part of the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan:

- Ensure the Environment Strategy and the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan emphasise the importance of ecological protection alongside Net Zero. *This will be achieved through an update of the Environment Strategy and associated Delivery Plan as set out in the new Council Strategy.*
- Work with local authorities and other partners in the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Berkshire ensuring the opportunities for biodiversity protection and recovery in West Berkshire are maximised.
- Introduce a 'Sustainability impact assessment tool'. This will ensure ecological, climate and other sustainability priorities such as health and wellbeing are at the forefront of the decision making and project planning processes within the Council.
- Develop a Green and Blue Infrastructure framework for the Council to highlight our priorities for ensuring the environment is managed for biodiversity and our residents.
- Work with residents and campaign groups to encourage action for nature, by promoting relevant initiatives using council communication channels and public education opportunities.

6 Other options considered

6.1 There is a commitment to report on an annual basis on progress delivering the Environment Strategy. The pattern of reporting is to look at achievements and actions from July one year through to the end of June the following year. This aligns with the approval of the Environment Strategy in July 2020. Within this the Council's carbon footprint data is captured for each financial year with the most relevant period being reported in the Annual Progress Report. The District's data, which comes from central government and the new Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), is reported per calendar year and, again, the most up to date published position is included in the APR.

6.2 Alternative options would be:

- (a) To not report on progress in delivering the Environment Strategy.

Response – Given there is a commitment to report to the Executive, this is not an option. Not to report on such an important area as carbon reduction and our journey to net zero after the Council declared a climate emergency, does not serve anyone well.

- (b) To report the Council's carbon footprint figures only and the District emission data from DESNZ.

Response – This minimal reporting of figures and data may be all that is required to report progress. However, this does not present the full picture and would not provide the overview of projects, activities and policy development that all contribute to the efforts to minimise environmental impacts. A full report enables the Council and the communities of West Berkshire to demonstrate the wide range of work happening across the District and serves to inspire others through interesting case studies.

7 Conclusion and looking ahead

- 7.1 The annual report demonstrates the actions that have taken place to progress our work on delivering the Environment Strategy over the last year. It is part of the ongoing story of how the Council is responding to the challenges of climate change and protecting our environment.
- 7.2 The Council's carbon emissions and those recorded for the District are decreasing overall and heading in the right direction towards the net zero goal. There is a long way to go and the delivery of some of the larger projects currently in the planning phase will help with meaningful progress in the coming years.
- 7.3 Actions will continue to be delivered through focusing on the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan which is kept up to date throughout the year and published on the [Council's website](#). The new Administration have started to look ahead and consider how to best prioritise the Delivery Plan so that resources are focused on those actions that will provide the best outcomes. Part of the Annual Report is dedicated to looking ahead to the next 4 year period under the current Administration and plans to engage a wider audience through the Environment Advisory Group Open Forum, to bring the ecological emergency more to the forefront and to encourage greater working together across Town and Parish Councils, businesses and community groups.
- 7.4 Against a backdrop of other challenges, for example the cost of living, it remains important to keep the momentum for delivery under the climate agenda and to play our part in contributing to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and championing ecological protection and enhancement locally in West Berkshire.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment
- 8.2 Appendix B – Data Protection Impact Assessment
- 8.3 Appendix C – Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report July 2022 – July 2023

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.

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

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

Wards affected: This is not an item for decision, but the Annual Progress Report includes actions and projects being delivered throughout the District.

Officer details:

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Appendix A

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) - Stage One

What is the proposed decision that you are asking the Executive to make:	To approve the Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report.
Summary of relevant legislation:	
Does the proposed decision conflict with any of the Council's priorities for improvement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes • Support everyone to reach their full potential • Support businesses to start develop and thrive in West Berkshire • Develop local infrastructure including housing to support and grow the local economy • Maintain a green district • Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships 	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If yes, please indicate which priority and provide an explanation
Name of Budget Holder:	There are a number of budget holders relating to various actions and projects within the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan.
Name of Service/Directorate:	Environment Department, Place Directorate
Name of assessor:	Jenny Graham
Date of assessment:	19.09.2023
Version and release date (if applicable):	

Is this a ?		Is this policy, strategy, function or service ... ?	
Policy	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	New or proposed	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Strategy	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Already exists and is being reviewed	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Function	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is changing	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Service	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

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(1) What are the main aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the proposed decision and who is likely to benefit from it?

Aims:	To approve the Annual Progress Report of the Environment Strategy
Objectives:	The overall objective is to report against the third year of delivery of the Environment Strategy and its aim of achieving net zero carbon for the Council’s activities and supporting the District on its pathway to net zero..
Outcomes:	Carbon reduction is linked into the Council strategy framework and influences plans, policies and decisions across the organisation. Local communities, businesses, schools and other organisations across West Berkshire are engaged in climate action and contributing to the district achieving net zero as soon as practicable.
Benefits:	Reduced carbon emissions and the associated environmental and public health benefits.

(2) Which groups might be affected and how? Is it positively or negatively and what sources of information have been used to determine this?

Group Affected	What might be the effect?	Information to support this
Age	None	Progress with delivering the aims of the Environment Strategy for West Berkshire would be unlikely to have any more impact on a person with a protected characteristic than on anyone else.
Disability	None	Progress with delivering the aims of the Environment Strategy for West Berkshire would be unlikely to have any more impact on a person with a protected characteristic than on anyone else.
Gender Reassignment	None	Progress with delivering the aims of the Environment Strategy for West Berkshire

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		would be unlikely to have any more impact on a person with a protected characteristic than on anyone else.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	None	Progress with delivering the aims of the Environment Strategy for West Berkshire would be unlikely to have any more impact on a person with a protected characteristic than on anyone else.
Pregnancy and Maternity	None	Progress with delivering the aims of the Environment Strategy for West Berkshire would be unlikely to have any more impact on a person with a protected characteristic than on anyone else.
Race	None	Progress with delivering the aims of the Environment Strategy for West Berkshire would be unlikely to have any more impact on a person with a protected characteristic than on anyone else.
Religion or Belief	None	Progress with delivering the aims of the Environment Strategy for West Berkshire would be unlikely to have any more impact on a person with a protected characteristic than on anyone else.
Sex	None	Progress with delivering the aims of the Environment Strategy for West Berkshire would be unlikely to have any more impact on a person with a protected characteristic than on anyone else.
Sexual Orientation	None	Progress with delivering the aims of the Environment Strategy for West Berkshire would be unlikely to have any more impact on a person with a protected characteristic than on anyone else.

Further Comments:

The Environment Strategy seeks to deliver a wide range of projects and actions. It is considered appropriate that a review of equalities takes place as part of the project development and project management stages of relevant actions and projects. This will ensure that, at a more detailed level, individual actions are in line with equalities legislation.

(3) Result

Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could contribute to inequality? Yes No

The proposed decision is to approve the Annual Progress Report so is not relevant to areas of inequality. However, as the projects included in the Delivery Plan will evolve there will need to be careful assessment on where investment goes to ensure that actions benefit as many people in the district as possible e.g. rural/urban decisions on infrastructure, sustainable transport solutions, environmental enhancements etc. This can be picked up through the Project Management Methodology associated with these projects individually and oversight through internal governance processes.

Will the proposed decision have an adverse impact upon the lives of people, including employees and service users? Yes No

The decision to approve the Annual Progress Report will not have an impact. However, as above, there will need to be careful consideration about the future projects that are progressed to deliver the Environment Strategy. There are views expressed in the original consultation on the strategy that would suggest some solutions to climate change are unpopular and may cause some adverse impact. This will need to be evaluated against the gains the majority may experience e.g. infrastructure will be desirable to some but not all, reducing car travel is difficult for some rural communities, businesses may not want to see green initiatives push up the cost of trading etc.

(4) Identify next steps as appropriate:

EqlA Stage 2 required	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not for the Annual Progress Report but need to be mindful of impacts of individual projects as they are progressed.
Owner of EqlA Stage Two:	
Timescale for EqlA Stage Two:	

Name: Jenny Graham

Date: 19.09.2023

Appendix B

Data Protection Impact Assessment – Stage One

The General Data Protection Regulations require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for certain projects that have a significant impact on the rights of data subjects.

Should you require additional guidance in completing this assessment, please refer to the Information Management Officer via dp@westberks.gov.uk

Directorate:	Place
Service:	Climate Change Service, Environment Department
Team:	Environment Delivery Team
Lead Officer:	Jenny Graham
Title of Project/System:	Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report
Date of Assessment:	19.09.2022

Do you need to do a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)?

	Yes	No
<p>Will you be processing SENSITIVE or “special category” personal data?</p> <p><i>Note – sensitive personal data is described as “ data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person’s sex life or sexual orientation”</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Will you be processing data on a large scale?</p> <p><i>Note – Large scale might apply to the number of individuals affected OR the volume of data you are processing OR both</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Will your project or system have a “social media” dimension?</p> <p><i>Note – will it have an interactive element which allows users to communicate directly with one another?</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Will any decisions be automated?</p> <p><i>Note – does your system or process involve circumstances where an individual’s input is “scored” or assessed without intervention/review/checking by a human being? Will there be any “profiling” of data subjects?</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Will your project/system involve CCTV or monitoring of an area accessible to the public?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Will you be using the data you collect to match or cross-reference against another existing set of data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Will you be using any novel, or technologically advanced systems or processes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Note – this could include biometrics, “internet of things” connectivity or anything that is currently not widely utilised</p>		

If you answer “Yes” to any of the above, you will probably need to complete [Data Protection Impact Assessment - Stage Two](#). If you are unsure, please consult with the Information Management Officer before proceeding.

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(July 2022 - July 2023)**