

TITLE: ECDC ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN (JUNE 2022 EDITION)

Committee: Operational Services Committee

Date: 13 June 2022

Author: Richard Kay, Strategic Planning Manager

[X11]

1.0 ISSUE

1.1 On 17 October 2019, Full Council passed a 'climate change motion', which declared a climate emergency and agreed a number of actions to take place. One such action was to task this Committee with the preparation of an 'Environment and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan' (*Environment Plan*). The first such Environment Plan was adopted in June 2020, a second in June 2021, and the third, fully refreshed, Environment Plan is brought to Committee today.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That the Committee:

- (A) Approves the Council's third Environment and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, dated June 2022 (as attached at Appendix A); and
- (B) Approves the establishment of a full time, permanent, Climate Change and Natural Environment Officer.

3.0 BACKGROUND/OPTIONS

3.1 On 17 October 2019, Full Council approved a wide-ranging Motion relating to climate change matters and which, in short, had the effect of this Council declaring that there is a climate emergency.

3.2 The Motion agreed a number of specific actions which should take place, including a commitment to the preparation of an Environment and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. In June 2020, this Committee adopted such an Environment Plan, and further committed to an annual update of it.

3.3 This report is intended to meet that commitment for an annual update.

3.4 The updated Environment Plan (third edition, for 2022/23) is broadly similar in structure to the original 2020/21 version, but of particular note are the following additions or amendments:

- Section 2 has been updated to report on Carbon Dioxide (and equivalent) (CO₂e) emissions for year 2020/21. Those emissions are showing a continued steady decline from the baseline year of 2018/19, but highlight

once again the dominance of our 'fleet vehicles' (i.e. our waste collection vehicles and open space maintenance vehicles) as our main source of CO₂e emissions;

- In June 2021 the Council agreed a set of carbon reduction targets, the first milestone of which was a 20-33% reduction by 2025/26. Using 2020/21 data, we have achieved around a 5% reduction to date;
- In section 5, there is a review of the 'top 20' actions committed to in June 2021, together with a proposed new set of 'top 20' actions for June 2022-June 2023. Some brief headlines on these actions are set out later in this report.

3.5 The document continues to both act as a strategy, to guide us in the early years of the journey to net-zero carbon and enhancement of our natural environment; as well as a short-term action plan, so we can continue to make progress towards the longer-term vision.

3.6 It is also two pronged: it seeks to mitigate climate change, doing our bit to address this global problem; and it seeks to boost the natural environment, here in East Cambridgeshire.

3.7 The Environment Plan is predominantly 'inward looking', in that it focuses on what we can do, as an organisation, to make a difference. But part of those commitments are about how we can show leadership and use our coordination skills to help others make a change, for the benefit of our climate and natural environment.

Top 20 Actions: review of 2021/22 and new for 2022/23

3.8 Section 5 of the Environment Plan sets out both a review of last year's 'top 20' actions (and our progress with them) as well as a new set of 'top 20' actions for 2022/23.

3.9 Of last year's actions, it is pleasing to report a great many successes, with the majority of the actions completed in full, and progress towards finalising any outstanding actions underway. Particular highlights include:

- The opening of the Jubilee Tree Maze, designed by children, on 30 May 2022.
- Establishment of 20 orchards across the district over winter 2021/22.
- Committing to become an 'Investors in the Environment' organisation.
- Strengthening our partnership working, such as with schools, local environment groups, parish councils and many others

3.10 The new set of actions for 2022/23, include the following proposals:

- ***Recognising those who go above and beyond*** with their commitment to the environment, whether that be a local school (eco-school accreditation) or a local business, community group or individual (new East Cambs Green Awards).

- **Directly cutting the Council's carbon emissions**, through installation of solar panels, reducing our paper use, and upgrading our public toilets to be more energy efficient.
- **Helping others reduce their emissions**, both through grant funding to retrofit homes to become more energy efficient, installing electric vehicle charge points in public car parks and potentially helping to run a 'climate café'.
- **Supporting nature recovery in the area**, through grants, linking youth clubs to nature sites, re-running the free fruit trees for orchards programme, and working with the Local Nature Partnership to develop grass roots green champions and funding streams.

3.11 Through delivery on the new actions, we will also continue to strengthen our engagement activities, especially with schools and the youth sector.

Staffing resources and skills base

3.12 In June 2021, this Committee considered whether or not additional staffing resource was needed to help deliver on the actions and ambitions we set ourselves in the annual Environment Plans. Following discussion at that meeting, the Committee agreed "*the addition of a new Climate Change and Natural Environment Senior Officer to the establishment on a part-time, temporary basis*", with the intention that such a post be reviewed in a year to determine what long-term arrangements, if any, should be put in place.

3.13 Thus, and as a reminder, over the past 12 months the preparation of the Environment Plan and the monitoring/coordinating/delivering the actions it contains, has primarily been via four means:

- First, myself, as the Strategic Planning Manager, in the 'service lead' role, combining duties with wider planning policy related duties;
- Second, continuation of a monthly climate officer group comprising senior officers across the Council, with the role of such a group to share relevant activities, contribute ideas, and embed the principles of carbon reduction / environmental improvement within their service areas;
- Third, technical carbon footprint data work has been commissioned on a cost-recovery basis from Peterborough City Council (this work of collecting the data and then converting all our 'in scope' activities, such as electricity, gas and fuel use, into Co2e emissions takes about 5 working days, but requires technical expertise we don't have in-house); and
- Fourth, from October 2021, Emma-Jane Danielsson has undertaken the part time, temporary *Climate Change and Natural Environment Officer* role, as described above (with the contract due to end in October 2022).

3.14 The intention is to maintain the first three elements above, but there is a need to determine how to proceed with the fourth element. The main options are:

Option 1: End the *Climate Change and Natural Environment Officer* role arrangements in October 2022, when the contract reaches its end, and simply rely on the first three elements described above;

Option 2: Continue with the part time role, but extend for further year (or more);
or

Option 3: Upgrade the post to a permanent, full time post, and recruit accordingly.

- 3.15 To help consider the above options, the funding for the current part-time post is sourced from the £100k p.a. climate change funding agreed by Council (funding which was set up to specifically assist in delivering the ambitions of the Environment Plan). Thus, if option 1 is chosen, there would be greater £ remaining in the funding pot for spend on activities, whereas Option 2 (c£20k, including on-costs) and Option 3 (c£40k, including on-costs) would clearly have a greater demand on the £100k pot available.
- 3.16 To further assist in this consideration, it is worth reviewing the activities the part-time post holder has undertaken to date, with a few months still remaining of her contract:
- Managed the successful community orchard programme over winter 2021/22
 - Established the East Cambs eco-schools accreditation programme, with several schools lined up to commence activities and aim to achieve accreditation from Sept 2022.
 - Re-invigorated the Partnership Forum, a forum bringing together external bodies, all with a common goal of helping the local environment.
 - Assisting East Cambs CAN with the establishment of a community-wide climate and environment website for East Cambridgeshire, which is hoped to be launched soon, as well as updated our ECDC environment based webpages.
 - Established ECDC's commitment to Investors In the Environment (iiE) accreditation programme, and is the lead officer coordinating activities across all staff as we seek the Bronze, Silver and Green award levels.
- 3.17 Turning to the Options, Option 1 would, of course, mean activities such as above would be much harder to achieve, and would like have to come to an end or be done at a much slower pace.
- 3.18 Option 2 would likely mean such activities, which all have a common theme around engaging and enthusing others (staff, the young and the wider community to 'do their bit'), would continue.
- 3.19 With option 3, the above activities would continue, but the proposal is that the additional time capacity available would enable the Council to bid for grants and, where applicable, the post holder would manage some of those grants we successfully receive. The volume of environment related grants available is considerable, and appears to exponentially grow year on year, ranging from public sector based grants (e.g. government departments, government agencies), charity based grants (e.g. lottery, environment based charitable bodies) and from

private companies (i.e. private businesses, usually large national/international companies, launching grant schemes which, in turn, help communicate their commitment to the environment or help offset their carbon emissions).

- 3.20 However, bidding for these grants takes time, and then, when successful, it takes officer time to ensure they are delivered. Being frank, we bid for very few such grants presently. As such, if the *Climate Change and Natural Environment Officer* role was made full time, that capacity to bid would exist, and we would hopefully secure far more grants than ECDC currently achieves, thus helping to deliver more in the local area. Of course, it would mean ECDC has less of its £100k annual fund available to spend directly; but overall, the aim would be that the volume of grants achieved would more than compensate for that reduction.
- 3.21 There is one further consideration. The provisions set out in Environment Act 2021 are being phased in over the coming year or so, and there is much within it which will create new duties on local councils. For example, local councils will have new legal responsibilities around:
- waste and recycling;
 - updated air quality duties;
 - mandating biodiversity net gain through the planning system;
 - preparing Local Nature Recovery Strategies;
 - a legal requirement to not only have a duty to assist in *conserving* biodiversity (which was already a duty in the 2006 Act) but now also duty to consider actions it can take to *enhance* biodiversity;
 - publication of a “Biodiversity Report” within three years, updated at least every five years, setting out what action the Authority has taken over the period to promote Biodiversity; and
 - street tree (felling of) consultation.
- 3.22 Much of the detail on the above is yet to be published, but the underlying message is that additional capacity will be needed within local authorities to tackle these new duties, and it is possible that the *Climate Change and Natural Environment Officer* could have a role in fulfilling some of those duties. It is probable, but not yet confirmed, that Government will compensate local authorities with a ‘new burdens grant’ to cover implementation of above, and, if so, such grant(s) could be put towards the funding of the *Climate Change and Natural Environment Officer* post, meaning a greater retention of the £100k funding pot we have, which can then be utilised for other actions.
- 3.23 For the avoidance of doubt, therefore, none of the Options 1-3 are proposing to involve a financial saving or additional cost to ECDC; it is more a question of where the funding already budgeted for (i.e. the £100k pa funding) should be directed.
- 3.24 In the opinion of officers, it is recommended that the current temporary and part time post be agreed to be made full time and permanent, with recruitment taking place over Summer/Autumn.

4.0 ARGUMENTS/CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The updated Environment Plan recommended to Committee is deemed ambitious, yet realistic. It provides a clear set of updated short-term actions, medium term targets and long-term vision and ambitions.
- 4.2 The Environment Plan is founded on robust evidence base, an analysis of the realistic options available and a clear targeting of those areas which will deliver the greatest impact.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS / EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 There are no immediate direct financial implications arising from the recommendations. However, delivering the actions it proposes will require investment, most of which are available from existing resources. Where resources are not presently available (e.g. for significant capital expenditure), these will be a matter for a future decision.
- 5.2 Equality Impact Assessment has found no direct positive or negative impacts.
- 5.3 An Environmental Impact Assessment has found no direct benefits arising from approving the Environment Plan, but indirectly there will be considerable benefits, should the actions it proposes be taken forward.

6.0 APPENDICES

- 6.1 Appendix A: Environment and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (June 2022)
Appendix B: Equality impact assessment

<u>Background Documents</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Contact Officer</u>
	Room 12, The Grange, Ely	Richard Kay Strategic Planning Manager (01353) 616458 E-mail: richard.kay@eastcambs.gov.uk