

AGENDA ITEM NO 9

TITLE: ECDC ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND 'INVESTORS IN THE ENVIRONMENT' PROGRAMME

Committee: Operational Services Committee

Date: 21 March 2022

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[W157]

1.0 ISSUE

1.1 On 17 October 2019, Full Council passed a 'climate change motion', which declared a climate emergency. Subsequently, this Committee has agreed an Environment Plan in June 2020 and June 2021, both of which contain annual 'Top 20 Actions'. A full update on such actions, and a set of new actions, is scheduled to be put to this Committee in June 2022. The purpose of this agenda item today is two interlinked matters, both of which align to the ambitions set out in the Environment Plan, namely:

- Whether the Council should adopt an 'Environment Policy'; and
- Endorsement of a new 'Investors in the Environment' programme

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That the Committee:

- (A) Adopts the Environment Policy, as attached at Appendix A; and
- (B) Welcomes the commencement of an 'Investors in the Environment' (iiE) accreditation programme for East Cambridgeshire District Council, and asks all Members and Officers to contribute to activities that will help to achieve successful accreditation.

3.0 BACKGROUND/OPTIONS

3.1 Members will be well aware that the Council has an 'Environment Plan', which is updated each June and includes an annual set of 'Top 20' actions the Council commits to doing over the coming 12 months, as well as more medium-term targets around reducing our carbon emissions.

3.2 Taken as a whole, the Top 20 Actions are a mix of 'direct' action (such as tree planting; or energy saving measures in our buildings) and 'supporting/enabling' action (such as working with schools, lobbying government and preparing nature recovery strategies).

3.3 In progressing these activities, it has become apparent that it would be enormously helpful if a 'structured approach' to coordinating such activities was put in place, not only to assist in joining up all the activities, but help in communicating such activities

and, most important of all, providing clarity to all staff and Members about how it all fits together and how each individual can then play their part.

- 3.4 The internal officer-led climate board, in consultation with the applicable Member Champion (Cllr Huffer), therefore have agreed to sign up to a national-based 'Investors in the Environment' (iIE) accreditation programme. Such a programme is open to any organisation or business to join, and a small number, nationally, of local authorities have commenced the programme. We are the first local authority in Cambridgeshire to do so.
- 3.5 The programme gives the organisation the opportunity to be independently accredited as an 'Investor in the Environment', with a sliding scale of accreditation: Bronze, Silver and Green. At each stage of successful accreditation, the organisation is able to use logos and other material, to highlight the organisation's commitment to the environment.
- 3.6 By joining the scheme, the Council gained access to a large volume of material and helpful advice, none more so than creating a structure around which our activities can be coordinated, as well as lots of material to help engage and enthuse staff (and Members) across the organisation to get involved.
- 3.7 Whilst the activities of the programme are almost entirely 'inward looking' (i.e. making the Council, as an organisation, operate differently for the benefit of the environment), through the use of the accreditation scheme we can clearly highlight to our communities that we are committed to the cause and are 'doing our bit' as an organisation, and that such activities have been independently assessed.
- 3.8 We have only just begun the programme, but following our initial 'welcome' conversations, two immediate points arise:
 - (i) The Council is well placed, due to its recent activities and ongoing work programme, to achieve 'bronze' accreditation in the relative near future (during 2022), with 'silver' potentially achievable in 2023. The highest level of 'green' is certainly achievable in due course, but will require not only ongoing demonstration of progress, but also new and more challenging areas tackled (such as procurement of goods or other (what are known as) 'scope 3' carbon emission categories, something which we, and many organisations, do not presently do); and
 - (ii) An immediate and obvious missing element of our current framework is the lack of a formally adopted and well publicised 'environment policy'; and 'bronze' status cannot be achieved without this. This is discussed further later in this report.
- 3.9 Moving forward, and starting this month, a full engagement programme with staff and Members will commence, starting with an iIE led 'questionnaire' to both gauge current staff/Member views on, for example, their level of interest or commitment to assist, and what they think we should do, or do better. This will shortly be complemented with a new section on the internal staff 'intranet' system, which will

provide a location for information, activities and ideas, as well results of such surveys.

- 3.10 Shortly thereafter, we will pick one or two specific activities to focus attention on over the year. This could be, for example, our paper use (volume and source).
- 3.11 We are mindful that not all staff are 'office based', nor have easy access to the intranet or other material, so we will ensure alternative ways to communicate and engage with such staff will be put in place.
- 3.12 Overall, it is hoped Committee Members welcome the commencement of this accreditation process, and it will be crucial that Members play a key role in not only promoting the scheme, but actively contributing to its success.

Environment Policy

- 3.13 An immediate benefit of joining a structured programme such as iiE is the ability to 'self-check' whether there any clear and obvious activities that, for whatever reason, we haven't undertaken to date. On day one of the iiE programme, the iiE support team were very impressed with the activities and commitments we have already undertaken, and said we were clearly not 'starting from scratch'. However, it was highlighted very early that the Council did not have a single, simple, formal 'Environment Policy' in place. It was identified that we had a good range of topic specific policies and action plans, and also wider programmes (such as waste minimisation), but no single 'strategic' policy from which all such activities should stem from.
- 3.14 It is therefore proposed to immediately address such a deficiency, and therefore attached at Appendix A is a recommended Environment Policy for the Council.
- 3.15 If agreed, we will make sure such a policy is prominently located on our external website, and that all staff and Members become aware and familiar with it (as part of the wider iiE engagement programme).

4.0 ARGUMENTS/CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 By joining a nationally recognised accreditation scheme, the Council can benefit from national experience and best practice, as well as demonstrate via independent assessment its commitment to tackle climate change and boost the natural environment. Separately, by adopting an Environment Policy, the Council puts in place a strategic framework from which project and thematic activities and programmes can take place.
- 4.2 There is no statutory requirement to be either accredited or to have an Environment Policy. However, without them, the Council risks undertaking uncoordinated activities or perhaps it might fail to engage and enthuse its entire staff and Members to participate and contribute. Independent accreditation also provides crucial challenge back to the Council to check we are achieving what we set out to achieve. It will also help with wider engagement with our communities.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS / EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT/
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 There are no immediate direct financial implications arising from the recommendations. Being part of the iiE accreditation scheme involves an annual payment to iiE, with the sum based on the organisation's size and level of support needed. For the current year, the subscription fee (including on-going support) for ECDC was £899, and this was covered by existing budgets.

5.2 Equality Impact Assessment has found no direct positive or negative impacts.

5.3 An Environmental Impact Assessment has found no direct negative or positive implications arising from the recommendations; but the recommendations, if agreed, form part of our wider programme of environment related activities which should, when taken as a whole, lead to significant net benefits for the environment.

6.0 APPENDICES

6.1 Appendix A – Environment Policy

<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

East Cambridgeshire District Council

Environmental Policy

[Draft for consideration at Operational Services Committee, 21 Mar 2022]



The policy

At East Cambridgeshire District Council we recognise that we can affect the environment through: the services we provide and how we deliver them; our policies; our enforcement of laws and regulations; the choices we make when buying goods or commissioning services – as well as our role as a community leader. This policy will support the Council in its commitments to take action on urgent environmental issues facing the district and the wider world. This includes the increasing threats presented by dangerous climate change and loss of biodiversity and habitats.

In addition to fulfilling our statutory environmental responsibilities and complying with all legal and other requirements, including any voluntary commitments, we will use our powers and influence to further protect and improve the environment – challenging ourselves to make continual improvements in our performance.

We will:

- Annually update and implement our 'Environment Plan', which is a Strategy and Action Plan to boost the environment and help mitigate climate change.
- Target becoming at, or near to, net zero by 2034/35, and a truly net zero organisation by 2040, with annual updates towards those targets published. We want to reduce our actual emissions, not buy 'credits' to offset our emissions – and on that basis we will primarily use 'location based' reporting of our emissions, not 'market based' reporting.
- Working with partners, develop our understanding of the risks presented by climate change and ensure our services and infrastructure (such as our water management and flood prevention capacity) are adapted to protect the district and its residents.
- Prevent or minimise pollution to air, water and land (including noise pollution, litter, fly tipping and the impacts of car travel) and work to ensure that air quality in East Cambridgeshire meets all legal limits on air pollution levels.
- Protect and enhance the quality, extent and accessibility of East Cambridgeshire's 'green infrastructure' (open spaces, trees, waterways and natural environment) for people and biodiversity. Use the improvement of green infrastructure to help the district adapt to climate change and reduce carbon emissions.
- Contribute to the creation of a sustainable built environment through the planning process and achieving a high level of sustainability in our own development projects.
- Minimise energy and water demand across our estate and use all resources efficiently to reduce the environmental impacts of their consumption by our services and activities.
- Encourage the appropriate generation and use of renewable and low carbon energy, including through the installation of projects within our own estate.

- Minimise waste and the impact of its disposal by applying the 'waste hierarchy': maximising waste reduction, reuse, recycling or composting and energy recovery to minimise the amount sent to landfill.
- Reduce the environmental impacts of the goods we buy and the works and services we commission, and promote a circular economy.
- Use products and materials such as paper efficiently.
- Promote a culture of environmental awareness within the Council, including through the provision of training and ensuring that staff are aware of their role in implementing this policy.

We will convey this policy to all our employees and Council Members and make certain that they are provided with proper training and information to increase awareness of environmental matters.

A Council Member has, from January 2021, been designated as the 'Natural Environment and Climate Change Member Champion', overseeing the corporate implementation of this policy and help promote it within, and beyond, the organisation. Separately, the Strategic Planning Manager will act as the 'Natural Environment and Climate Change Officer Champion', coordinating the day-to-day delivery of activities under this Policy, and promoting the Policy throughout the organisation.

We will make this policy available on our website, in a location and format that is accessible and easy to find.

Implementing the policy

All staff are expected to implement this policy within the Council wherever it relates to their work and managers are expected to ensure it is implemented as relevant and appropriate.

We recognise the importance of effective communication in delivering this policy, as well as the potential of participation and dialogue to enhance progress.

We will communicate this policy within the Council and to our external stakeholders, enabling our staff and others to fulfil their role in delivering it by providing information and other support.

We will also encourage dialogue within the Council and with our stakeholders to foster debate, learning and greater environmental improvement. This will include the public, businesses, education and community organisations, and regulators.

We will encourage the public, schools and partners to take action too, through environmental information, advice and services.

Accountability

This Policy has been approved by the Operational Service Committee (21 March 2022) and will be regularly reviewed. The Council will publicise its environmental performance and progress each year, in its Environment Plan, to enable the people of East Cambridgeshire to hold us to account.