

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee 25 March 2021 Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy Consultation results and recommended changes to final draft

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Portfolio Holder: Cllr R Bryan, Highways, Travel and Environment

Local Councillor(s): County Wide

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Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee consider the outcomes of the consultation and amendments to the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Action Plan and recommend its final approval to Cabinet & Full Council.

Reason for Recommendation:

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Dorset Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency in 2019 and established an Executive Advisory Panel to strategically guide the Councils response. A draft Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Action Plan was produced and approved for public consultation by Cabinet in October 2020.

- 1.2 A public consultation exercise on the Strategy and Action plan started in October 2020 and closed on 20th January 2021. The analysis of the consultation results highlighted an overall high level of agreement for the Councils strategy and action plan. Further consideration of over 12,000 text responses highlighted a number of key issues for each area of the strategy.
- 1.3 The results of the consultation were discussed with the Executive Advisory Panel on 25th February 2021, together with suggested changes to the Strategy and Action plan.
- 1.4 This paper sets out the findings of the consultation exercise and proposed changes to the Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Action plan for approval by Cabinet.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 A costed action plan was presented to Cabinet, 6th October 2020, detailing 187 actions to 2050 requiring an estimated budget in the region of £127 million. The plan highlighted many actions could be taken forward with existing budgets, but an additional revenue requirement, in the region of £2.6 Million for 2021/22, was required.
- 2.2 In January 2021 Dorset Council secured £19 million in grant funding from the governments Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and the Low Carbon Skills Fund. This will allow several significant revenue and capital actions within the plan to be brought forward into financial year 2021/22 specifically those related to the decarbonisation of the Dorset Council estate. It is anticipated these actions alone will reduce Dorset Council Carbon footprint by at least 10%, by April 2022.
- 2.3 The costed action plan identified eight capital projects principally related to Dorset Council moving towards a carbon neutral estate, shifting to electric vehicles and generating renewable energy.
- 2.4 Alongside this paper, Cabinet will also be considering the 2021/22 Capital Programme at the 6th April Cabinet meeting. A number of the capital projects in the climate and ecology action plan are included as capital bids in the proposed capital programme for 2021/22, and there is an indication of the additional capital investment required in 2022/23 and beyond. This proposed investment of the Councils capital resources would complement the decarbonisation grant funding recently allocated by Government.

- 2.5 The draft action plan detailed 187 actions. Approximately 100 of these actions will be taken forward within existing budgets through teams across the Council leading on specific areas of the plan, such as transport and waste services. A further 87 actions were identified as requiring additional resources, and the most significant of these will be fully funded by the Decarbonisation Grant and allocations within the Dorset Council Capital bids referred to above. The Action Plan milestones will therefore be updated to account for not only the changes identified through the consultation but also to take account of the additional grant funding, decision on the capital programme and Dorset Council's final budget for 2021/22.
- 2.6 In future years it is anticipated that an ongoing revenue stream would be established to support the strategy to include recycling of any savings achieved from public sector decarbonisation programme and retro fit measures.
- 2.7 Going forward the plan also identifies the need for ongoing financial support from external funding sources and the Council will continue to bid for these funds as they arise. It is recognised that there is a direct relationship between resources applied to this activity and funds secured.

3. Climate implications

- 3.1 The specific purpose of this report and delivery of the strategy is to present Dorset Council's overall approach to the climate and ecological emergency. The overall principle behind the strategy is to set out key areas where Dorset Council will need to take action to directly reduce carbon emissions from its own operations to become a carbon neutral Council by 2040 and by working in partnership to help Dorset residents and organisations achieve a wider carbon neutral Dorset County by 2050.

4. Risk Assessment

- 4.1 Having considered the risks associated with this report, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Low

- 4.2 Due to the known high level of public interest in the Climate Change Agenda and the previous commitment to provide opportunity for the public to comment on the draft strategy to not include key findings from the public consultation in the final document presents a medium level of reputational risk.

5. Equalities Impact Assessment –

- 5.1 An EqIA is being developed for the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy but requires input from the results of the public consultation and then screening against the final strategy document

6. Appendices

Appendix A – Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy & Action plan - Consultation Response Report

Appendix B – Summary of key consultation comments and recommendations for changes

7. Background Papers

Cabinet Papers 6th October 2021 – Draft Climate and Ecological Emergency strategy

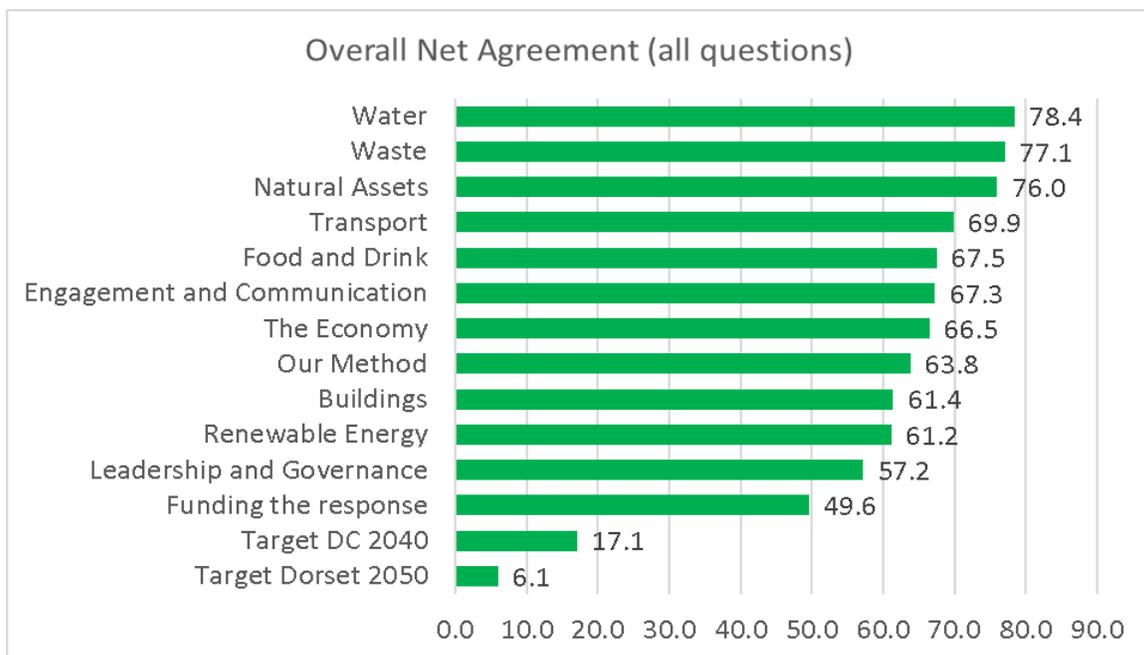
8. Background

- 8.1 Dorset Council declared a climate and ecological emergency in May 2019 and established an Executive Advisory Panel to oversee the development of the Councils approach. A draft Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 28th July which set out 8 key areas for action to ensure that Dorset Council becomes Carbon Neutral by 2040 and supports the whole of Dorset Council Area becoming carbon neutral by 2050. Critically this also set a carbon budget detailing the necessary reductions in carbon emissions against key target dates to meet the 2040 target.
- 8.2 The areas for action were further researched and developed into a detailed costed plan which sets timescales for delivery of actions to meet the key carbon budget reduction targets. Both the draft strategy and action plan were agreed by Cabinet 6th October 2020 for public consultation.

- 8.3 The consultation took the form of an on-line survey consisting of qualitative questions to gauge opinion on how strongly the consultees agreed or disagreed with each element of the strategy and action plan. Sections covered - our approach, carbon targets, each of the eight areas for action and associated detailed action plan and the actions related to governance, finance, communications and monitoring / reporting. Additional open text boxes were available for each section to capture additional comments.
- 8.4 The consultation was supported by a comprehensive communications plan aimed at maximising the response. This utilised a range of methods including
- Residents Newsletter
 - Media coverage
 - E-bulletins
 - Social Media
 - Radio Advertising
 - Direct Emails
 - Webinars
 - Internal Comms
- 8.5 Key stakeholders such as, Parish and Town Councils, young people and key organisations were specifically targeted. Webinars were held for Dorset Council, Town and Parish Councils in November 2020.
- 8.6 In addition, a short-simplified survey was also launched for use on mobile phones. This survey aimed to engage a wide audience and encourage further uptake of the full survey. A revised version of the short survey is still running and to date we have received 1495 responses. Detailed analysis has not yet been undertaken as the survey is still live however initial indications are
- 84% of respondents are over 21
 - Tackling Climate change is Vital or Important = 87.3%
 - Dorset Council to be Carbon Neutral by 2040 is a Great or Reasonable Idea (agree) = 92%
 - What proportion of Dorset's Carbon Footprint are Dorset Council responsible for = 12% (correct answer is 1%)

9. Consultation Results and Implications

- 9.1 The Consultation started on Thursday 29 October and closed on Wednesday 20 January 2021. The survey received 1,519 overall responses. In total over 12,000 text comments were received, many of which were substantial. A detailed report on the consultation and results is attached as Appendix A. Full results will also be published on the Councils Website, www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
- 9.2 The answers to the **quantitative** questions were analysed to calculate the level of Net Agreement for each question. Net agreement adds together all agrees and then subtracts all disagrees. A positive outcome indicates overall agreement and vice versa.
- 9.3 Overall, the results indicated a very high level of positive Net Agreement with most sections of the strategy.



- 9.4 In most cases positive net agreement was very high with an average of 58.5% positive Net Agreement. The two areas where this was lower were the Dorset Council target for carbon neutral Council by 2040 and Dorset County Carbon Neutral target by 2050, which had positive Net Agreement scores of 17.1% and 6.1% respectively.

- 9.5 The 12,000 **qualitative** text comments were very wide in detail, depth and issue, many supporting, restating or further clarifying actions already set out in the strategy and action plan. There was overall strong support for the strategy and action plan, further supporting the quantitative results. There were a number of very similar responses suggesting a shared approach from organisations. The most common critical comments were highlighting the need for the strategy to have a stronger tone and language, be more ambitious, assertive and to have more urgency. Many seeking the Council to put in place and enforce policies to support a rapid shift to a zero carbon Dorset, such as zero carbon standards for new housing. Particular attention was drawn to the need for the carbon neutral targets to be sooner than 2040 and 2050. There was a trend of approx. 10% of respondents disagreeing with the strategy, action plan and targets from a Climate Change denial point of view.
- 9.6 For each open text question, the comments have been studied and “coded” depending on what issues were raised. The coded comments were tabulated based on the amount of times those individual issues have been raised. This is a standard method for identifying the most commonly occurring issues, for each section of the strategy & action plan.
- 9.7 A tolerance of 5% or above of comments received for that question was used to identify and select topics that should be considered for further analysis. These topics were then considered against what is already covered in the Strategy and Action Plan and what merits inclusion in the final document.
- 9.8 A number of relevant partner organisations provided detailed topic specific responses which has been particularly helpful, the salient points from these responses have been included where possible and included in the overall qualitative response coding.
- 9.9 Throughout the qualitative response’s there was a number of key reoccurring themes that crossed through several of the topic areas and as a result have been considered separately – the results of which are below.
- 9.10 *Targets* – The lowest level of positive net agreement was around the target dates of 2040 and 2050 although when the results from the short survey are included the level of support dramatically increases. Some respondents questioned the urgency of the targets and suggested that the dates should be moved forward.

- 9.11 The targets of 2040 and 2050 were felt by Dorset Council to be realistic within available resources and existing technology. When considering the target dates, it is important to note:
- There is a clear intention to achieve these targets earlier if at all possible.
 - The strategy sets a number of interim targets for 2025, 2030 and 2035 as a carbon budget and the intention is to achieve an 80-90% reduction in emissions 10 years before these dates, reflecting the difficulty and expense of tackling the last 20%.
- 9.12 The target dates will remain as 2040 Dorset Council itself and 2050 for the wider Dorset Area (in line with Government targets)
- 9.13 *Overall Language* – There was a number of reoccurring comments suggesting that the language used in the Strategy and Action Plan should be made more bullish.
- 9.14 This point was made by the EAP prior to the draft Strategy and Action Plan being published for consultation and as a result the overall tone and language of the strategy was reviewed prior to the consultation and where possible further clarification was included.
- 9.15 It is important to note that this is the start of the process and the strategy sets out the areas for action to begin to move in the right direction and as a result are less well defined. The action plan aims to identify more specific actions, with targets and time scales, but initially many of these are smaller exploratory actions. At this stage it is therefore difficult to be definitive about several of the actions to be taken until further work has been undertaken. Many of the proposed actions will be interdependent with advances in technology, the influences and actions of central government and other agencies and need to be considered alongside other Council priorities. The action plans will be living documents, regularly monitored and updated as things progress.
- 9.16 *Monitoring and reporting* – Progress against the strategy will be closely monitored and reported. Overall respondents told us they wanted to receive full updates every 6 months and be kept up to date with developments as they occur through a range of media.
- 9.17 It is intended that the Action plan is subject to central monitoring similar to the key objectives and performance indicators delivered by individual services to provide a robust and transparent method of monitoring and reporting progress.

Appendix A, shows the analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative results.

Appendix B shows the consideration given to topics mentioned by more than 5% of individual respondents and the analysis of it, if it is included already or if it is suggested it should be (excel spreadsheet).

10. Strategy and Action Plan Update

- 10.1 The results of the consultation were presented and discussed at the Climate and Ecological Emergency Executive Advisory Panel on 25th February 2021.
- 10.2 The very high level of Positive Net Agreement indicates that significant changes are not required to the strategy and action plan. However, from the analysis of the 12,000 text box responses several opportunities have been identified to further improve the strategy and action plan (Appendix B).

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 A robust draft Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Action plan was developed by Dorset Council in 2020 and presented to the public for consultation. A successful consultation exercise has been undertaken, supported by a strong communications strategy delivered by the Councils Communications Team. The consultation received an excellent response from the public, community groups and organisations.
- 11.2 Overall, the consultation highlighted an overwhelming net positive response to the draft strategy and action plan as well as highlighting some areas for improvement. The Strategy and Action plan has been updated to take account of these views as well as additional funding recently secured by Dorset Council. The strategy and action plan will be a living document which will evolve over time as actions progress, technology advances and government support strengthens. Progress will be regularly monitored and reported, and action plans updated as progress is made.