

Cabinet

28 March 2023

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy, 2023-25 Refresh

For Decision

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

Local Councillor(s): N/A

Executive Director: A Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: The Council has identified the challenges of climate and ecology amongst its key priorities within the corporate plan; and adopted a climate and ecology strategy in July 2021. The strategy was noted as a living document that would evolve as action, technology, and policy progresses. Following its adoption there has been significant progress in delivery, science and policy, so we committed to a refresh of the strategy in order to ensure that it remained fit for purpose. Owing to the continuing relevance and suitability of much of the content of the 2021 strategy, the refresh aims to be a light touch rather than a rewrite from scratch by repurposing, reframing and tightening its existing content. Its broad aims are threefold:

- a) To give a clearer strategic articulation of the 'three pillars' of the climate, ecological and resilience challenges and workstreams, in order to emphasise the importance and interdependencies of nature recovery and climate adaptation work alongside our efforts on decarbonisation.
- b) To provide an updated narrative on the updates to national policy, in which to situate our activity.
- c) To provide a shorter articulation of our approach through a more concise set of 'missions' that more clearly articulates our direction and

identifies a clear subset of short-term priorities for the next couple of years in particular.

A draft of the strategy was considered by Place and Resources Overview Committee on 9 February 2023.

Recommendation:

That cabinet:

Reviews progress made in refreshing the Dorset Council Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy and approves the refreshed strategy and action plan.

Reason for Recommendation: To ensure that the strategy remains fit for purpose by being responsive to latest policy and progress, and concisely communicates our direction and ambition.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council has identified the challenges of climate and ecology amongst its key priorities within the corporate plan. The challenges remain vast, and the evidence on the case for action have only strengthened over the last couple of years – with 2022 witnessing the highest global emissions on record and the UK’s hottest year on record. Yet they also present unprecedented opportunities to make our food and energy systems more secure, our homes and transport healthier and cheaper to run, and a means to create new skilled jobs and industries. Cleaner, greener systems for how we power, heat, feed and transport ourselves will enable us to nurture prosperous, stronger, healthier communities.
- 1.2 Achieving this requires complex systems changes and action at scale, with a role for all stakeholders. The Council is setting an example through its efforts to tackle its own organisational impacts, but also will continue to play a critical systems leadership role through our spheres of influence.
- 1.3 Dorset Council adopted a climate and ecology strategy in July 2021 in response to its 2019 climate & ecological emergency declaration. The strategy was developed using the guidance of an Executive Advisory Panel and shaped by the input of a public consultation exercise (which indicated a very high level of positive net agreement with most elements of the strategy).

- 1.4 The strategy set a clear direction and ambition for the local area; and committed to (a) become a carbon neutral council by 2040 through an operational programme to cut emissions we directly control; and (b) help Dorset become carbon neutral by 2050, through a facilitation programme using our influence through policy, services and partners. These were accompanied by interim targets which frontloaded these reductions.
- 1.5 The strategy was noted as a living document that would evolve as action, technology and policy progresses. Following its adoption there has been significant progress in our delivery of the strategy through an extensive programme of work. This has been reported to Council in regular progress reporting, most recently in [Autumn 2022](#) and [Spring 2022](#). The Council's emissions have declined by over a quarter since 2019, meaning we are well on track for a Carbon Neutral Council by 2040. Dorset's have declined by just under a fifth since 2018, but the inclusion of newly available data for waste and agriculture for the latter means emissions need cutting faster to reach net zero by 2050.
- 1.6 Following adoption there has also been major progress in the science and policy context, including:
- [The IPCC's 2021/22 Sixth Assessment Report](#), a large-scale synthesis by leading volunteer scientists on behalf of governments. It goes well beyond 2014's assessment, confirming as fact that humans are responsible for warming since 1850, that we will exceed 1.5C in 20 years on current trends, that it is causing a major increase in extreme weather, and that it will significantly threaten human health in coming decades.
 - [Government's 2021 Net Zero Strategy](#) now sets a clear pathway for the UK to meet the next three national carbon budgets to 2037 (for a 78% cut), towards reaching net zero by 2050. It gives clarity on their ambition for all sectors, with commitments including scaling up heat pumps and ending the sale of gas boilers, fully decarbonising energy by 2035, and ending the sale of new fossil-fuelled cars and vans by 2030.
 - [Multiple other detailed Government strategies](#), policy and legislation have also been released on transport, energy, hydrogen, food and industry – providing greater clarity on the national framework for decarbonisation.
 - [The Environment Act](#) become law in November 2021. It sets a new national environmental framework for environmental protection, including biodiversity, water quality, clean air and waste. There has also been significant progress towards implementation of linked emerging policy, such as Biodiversity Net Gain, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and the

new agri-environment regime for funding farming (the Environmental Land Management Scheme) – most of which will take significant steps forward in 2023. Government has also finalised its long-term environmental targets (subject to Parliamentary approval), and outlined its intentions for regulatory, designation and public body reform.

- Government's latest 5-yearly climate risk assessment was published in 2022. It identifies 61 risks, including 8 urgent ones: natural habitats, soil health, natural carbon stores, agriculture, supply chains, the power system, heat impacts on health & productivity, and overseas impacts. Government recognises that adaptation so far hasn't been sufficient and commits to boost it in the third National Adaptation Programme due in 2023.

1.7 In view of the significant progress in our action and on the scientific and national policy context, we committed to a refresh of the strategy in order to ensure that it remained fit for purpose. Owing to the continuing relevance and suitability of much of the content of the 2021 strategy, the refresh aims to be a light touch that builds upon the existing strategy, rather than rewriting it from scratch. Its broad aims are threefold:

- a) To give a clearer strategic articulation of the 'three pillars' of the climate, ecological and resilience challenges and workstreams, in order to emphasise the importance and interdependencies of nature recovery and climate adaptation work alongside our efforts on decarbonisation.
- b) To provide an updated narrative on the updates to national policy, in which to situate our activity.
- c) To provide a shorter articulation of our approach through a more concise set of 'missions' that more clearly articulates our direction and identifies a clear subset of short-term priorities for the next couple of years in particular.

1.8 The appended refreshed strategy and action plan aims to provide a basis towards reaching these aims, updating the narrative and retaining much of the ambition of the 2021 strategy whilst making it more concise. The strategy has also been retitled to the 'Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy' to ensure its clearer alignment to the associated priority within the Council's Corporate Plan.

2. **Financial Implications**

2.1 A costed action plan presented to cabinet on 6 October 2020, highlighted that significant additional revenue and capital would be required to deliver the council's ambitions and strategy over its lifetime to ensure action continues with urgency and at the scale required. Dorset Council allocated £10 million capital over 5 years in the 2022/23 Dorset Council budget. This additional funding will help to strengthen work already underway to reduce our operation carbon footprint in some key areas to include building retrofit, electrification of the fleet, and electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Potentially enabling a further 5-6% reduction in emissions over the next 5 years.

2.2 There will undoubtedly be a requirement to re-align existing operations and resources to accelerate the actions required to deliver against the ambitions of the strategy and action plan. The scale of change required is significant, and to ensure that the ambitions contained within the strategy and action plan are fulfilled, a programme of this scale will need to access additional resources from a variety of sources. Maximising opportunities for external funding and partnership working are key and over the past year Dorset Council has been extremely successful at drawing in external funding streams contributing to reducing carbon emissions. Dorset Council will need to ensure it is 'opportunity ready', all of this work will require the right evidence and resources to draw in funds for both the operational and county-wide areas of focus, all of which will be through competitive processes.

3. **Environmental Implications**

3.1 Ensuring that our Climate and Ecology Strategy remains fit for purpose is critical to ensuring our strategic direction and delivery to respond to successfully steer the Council and wider Dorset in decarbonisation, nature recovery and adaptation.

4. **Well-being and Health Implications**

4.1 There are no specific health and wellbeing implications of this report. However, (a) the impact of climate change poses numerous health and wellbeing risks to the residents of Dorset, and there will need to be significant consideration in how Dorset will start to manage the adaptation required to mitigate these impacts; (b) cleaner, greener systems will provide wider health and wellbeing co-benefits, such as improved air quality, healthy diets, improved access to high quality natural environment and active travel amongst others.

5. **Other Implications**

- 5.1 There are no other specific implications contained in this report. As previously noted, the strategy has wide ranging implications, opportunities, and co-benefits for the way the council delivers services and works with others across the county.

6. **Risk Assessment**

- 6.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Medium

Failing to ensure a fit for purpose climate and ecology strategy entails (a) high risks associated with vulnerability to worsening climate impacts (including to Council services and budgets); (b) risks of missed opportunities in failing to seize the transition to cleaner, greener systems (including economic, health and wellbeing opportunities); and (c) reputational risks owing to known high level of public interest in the climate change agenda and the previous commitment.

7. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 7.1 An initial scoping exercise is currently being undertaken to highlight any specific impacts that need to be considered through the delivery of the strategy and action plan.
- 7.2 Further work will also be undertaken to finalise the design and visual aspects of the strategy and to ensure availability of fully accessible versions.

8. **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – NECE Strategy refresh Final Draft
- Appendix 2 – NECE Action Plan Final Draft
- Appendix 3 – Extract of draft minutes of Place and Resources Overview Committee on 9 February 2023

9. **Background Papers**

- [Dorset Council Climate Emergency Strategy and action plans](#)
- [November 2022 Progress Report](#)
- [June 2022 Progress Report](#)