



**Sustainability Strategy
Task Group**

January 2023

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Task group members

Councillor Mark Hofman
Councillor Peter Jeffree
Councillor Rabi Martins
Councillor Sara-Jane Trebar

Chair, Councillor for Nascot Ward
Councillor for Park Ward
Councillor for Central Ward
Councillor for Vicarage Ward

Officer support

Jodie Kloss
Laura MacMillan

Senior Democratic Services Officer
Democratic Services Officer

Witnesses

Susheel Rao
Alan Gough

Sustainability Officer, Watford Borough Council
Director of Partnerships, Watford Borough Council

Proposed recommendations to present to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. To increase the target for the number of households who commit to making one change to live more sustainably to be more challenging; potentially to 50% of households.
2. Any off-setting required to meet the targets should be within Watford as much as possible.
3. The delivery plan for the Sustainability Strategy should be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review and discussion.
4. The Sustainability Strategy's delivery plan and accompanying documentation should include a risk register.
5. The updates on progress against net zero carbon targets should be published with and without the impacts of aviation and shipping.
6. To strengthen the consideration of the sustainability impacts in council decision-making processes, including having regard to the targets in the strategy.
7. A communications plan and behavioural change campaign will be required to ensure residents and businesses engage with the targets and feel part of the solution.

Background to the task group

Watford Borough Council has declared a climate emergency and an ecological emergency. The Sustainability Strategy is a pivotal document for the council to ensure its response as an organisation and a place leader meets the urgency of the climate and ecological emergencies.

The council's existing Sustainability Strategy expires in March 2023. There is a programme of work to renew this strategy with an updated and refocused document to come into force at that time. The development of the strategy includes an engagement exercise with residents and groups in late 2022 which will help to shape the focus.

A proposal was made by the Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Transport that a scrutiny task group be established to ensure that non-executive councillors could feed into the strategy.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish the task group at its meeting on 22 June 2022 and confirmed the membership and chair in October 2022, as set out above.

Overview of the task group's programme of work

The task group met three times in November and December 2022. At the initial meeting, members received a high-level overview of the strategy and the associated programme. It was agreed that the task group would focus on certain key areas within the strategy. These were: targets, leading by example, people power and governance.

Following the first two meetings, the work of the task group paused while the consultation exercise took place. The task group then reviewed the high-level outcomes of the consultation exercise alongside their conclusions and recommendations. The meetings took the form of presentations from the programme's lead officers at Watford Borough Council followed by discussions, questions and consideration of conclusions and recommendations.

The areas of the strategy that the task group focused on were:

- Targets contained in the strategy
- Governance
- Leading by example
- People power

Additional work was carried out by Democratic Services to inform the task group's work and to produce this report

Conclusion, recommendations and comments

Summary of the task group's response to the Sustainability Strategy

The Sustainability Strategy is an ambitious and vital strategy which will provide the requisite focus to deliver a more sustainable town. The Climate and Ecological Emergencies are urgent issues which require timely action by the council as an organisation and as a place leader.

The targets are largely stretching and will require a whole-organisation and whole-borough commitment to ensure delivery by 2030. It is imperative that Watford contributes to the global response, but it is also clear that there are areas over which the council, as well as local businesses and residents, have no control and where a realistic approach is needed. This interconnectedness is reflected in the requirement for off-setting to be part of the response.

Achieving the targets will be challenging; it is vital that the council continues to work with residents to encourage and enable them to make changes to live more sustainably. Ongoing communication, listening, and engagement will remain fundamental to the success of the strategy.

Recommendations

To increase the target for the number of households who commit to making one change to live more sustainably to be more challenging; potentially to 50% of households.

The target in the strategy is for 25% of Watford households to pledge at least one action towards achieving net zero by 2028. These actions might be making changes to their diet, transportation or energy usage in the home.

The 2021 census demonstrated that Watford is a young town; 55% of residents are aged under 40, compared to 49% across England and Wales¹. Data consistently shows that young people are more likely to be concerned about environmental issues than older people.² There is also evidence that during and Covid 19 pandemic, people were increasingly more likely to make lifestyle changes to reflect these sustainability concerns, which was driven by Generation Z and millennials.³

¹ 2021 ONS census results

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationandhouseholdestimatesenglandandwales/census2021>

² 2021 ONS survey on climate anxiety

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/threequartersofadultsingreatbritainworryaboutclimatechange/2021-11-05>

³ Deloitte study on lifestyle changes during the pandemic <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/press-releases/articles/four-out-of-five-uk-consumers-adopt-more-sustainable-lifestyle-choices-during-covid-19-pandemic.html>

The task group also noted that the pandemic had demonstrated how significant behavioural changes across all areas were possible to reflect an urgent issue. The increase in the level of this target, potentially to 50%, would therefore reflect these trends.

Any off-setting required to meet the targets should be within Watford as much as possible.

The strategy notes that 'The Council will seek to offset GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions within the UK, using recognised and accredited providers. It will also ensure that its own tree planting can be recognised as carbon offsetting.'⁴

It is anticipated that by 2030, the council will have reduced its GHG emissions by 75% with the remaining 25% being offset. Off-setting will be achieved through tree-planting and photovoltaic energy generation.

Tree-planting and other off-setting measures have other net benefits to the local environment, such as improving air quality and biodiversity and reducing flooding risks. The aim should therefore be for these measures to be taken within Watford, with a focus on the areas where tree cover is lowest, wherever practicable.

The delivery plan for the Sustainability Strategy should be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review and discussion.

The strategy is a high-level document setting the context, priorities, targets and governance of the sustainability agenda in Watford. It will be underpinned by a detailed delivery plan which will set out how the targets will be achieved.

The task group has only had sight of the draft strategy and made recommendations on that document. A number of other areas were discussed which related to the delivery of the strategy, and these would benefit from further discussion as part of the scrutiny function.

It is further noted that the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Forum will also retain working oversight of the delivery plan and other routine reporting mechanisms will be followed.

The Sustainability Strategy's delivery plan and accompanying documentation should include a risk register.

The task group understood that the intention was for the strategy documentation to include a risk register. This was strongly supported to ensure that the momentum of delivery was maintained. It was also important that the risks of inaction in the climate and sustainability agendas were well documented and communicated.

⁴ Sustainability Strategy, p. 12

The updates on progress against net zero carbon targets should be published with and without the impacts of aviation and shipping.

Reducing the carbon emissions of the borough as a whole is particularly challenging; the strategy rightly recognises that there are areas that the council has little influence over. With appropriate actions in place, the overall level of emissions in the borough can be reduced by 50%. The methodology used to calculate carbon emissions, used by many local authorities, includes a fair share of aviation and shipping emissions which contribute a huge amount of emissions to the overall total. The result will be that progress against targets will be limited by factors outside of its control.

The task group therefore proposes that progress against the net zero carbon targets be reported including and excluding the impacts of these sectors. This will mean that the council and residents will have a better sense of the progress being made locally and it will demonstrate the impact of flying and other transportation to the overall climate agenda. The task group noted that this could provide an opportunity to produce an education piece around the impact of flying.

To strengthen the consideration of the sustainability impacts in council decision-making processes, including having regard to the targets in the strategy.

Meeting the targets will require a whole-organisation approach including a commitment to ensure that sustainability implications are carefully considered in decision-making. The council's committee reports currently include sustainability implications and it is suggested that this is strengthened to include reference to the targets.

Such consideration should also be made from the outset of any project or policy proposals. Internal consultative bodies who review proposals should provide effective challenge that proposals should be meeting sustainability targets. This is reflected in the strategy.⁵ The economic circumstances that the council is operating in are also recognised, and all factors will need to be taken into account.

A communications plan and behavioural change campaign will be required to ensure residents and businesses engage with the targets and feel part of the solution.

Adapting to living more sustainability is a challenge for the council and local residents and businesses. To this end, the council has a number of roles including leading by example, enabling more sustainable businesses and initiatives to operate in the borough and as a place-leader. Communications around opportunities, initiatives, ideas and funding could provide a useful resource for residents. Equally important will be listening to views and ideas, providing forums for discussions and ensuring that an effective feedback loop is created.

⁵ Sustainability Strategy, p. 24

Bibliography/background papers

- Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee – [New Scrutiny Task Group – Sustainability Strategy](#) – 22 June 2022
- Draft Sustainability Strategy
- Deloitte study on lifestyle changes during the pandemic
<https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/press-releases/articles/four-out-of-five-uk-consumers-adopt-more-sustainable-lifestyle-choices-during-covid-19-pandemic.html>
- 2021 ONS census results
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationandhouseholdestimatesenglandandwales/census2021>
- ONS report on climate anxiety
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/threequartersofadultsingreatbritainworryaboutclimatechange/2021-11-05>

The task group would like to thank their witnesses who generously gave time to assist with this review.

**Appendix:
Watford Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Scrutiny Task Group Scope and Terms of Reference**

Scrutiny review title	Sustainability Strategy
Scrutiny proposer	Cllr Ian Stotesbury, Portfolio Holder for Sustainability
Details of specific area for review	<p>Watford Borough Council has declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and an ecological emergency in January 2021.</p> <p>The current Sustainability Strategy is due to expire in March 2023. Officers are in the process of developing a new strategy to come into effect at that time. An engagement exercise with residents and groups is planned for summer 2022 which will help to shape the incoming strategy.</p> <p>A scrutiny task group is proposed to feed into the development of the new strategy.</p>
Why this has been proposed for review, including the council priorities it supports	<p>The new strategy will be the foundation to the council’s aim to achieve carbon net zero by 2030 and addressing the ecological emergency. The strategy will set out the roadmap to these goals and provide ways of measuring the council’s progress.</p> <p>The strategy will be fundamental in meeting these sustainability ambitions and is an area of priority for the council. It will be a cross-cutting document which sets out how different parts of the council will work with sustainability at the forefront. Member engagement in the process is crucial as they will be part of the delivery of the strategy as well as having roles as ambassadors to residents.</p> <p>It supports the priority of a creative, thriving and diverse town.</p>
Purpose / objectives of the review, including key questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure the soundness of the strategy in meeting its aims • To consider whether issues that members consider to be a priority are addressed in the documentation • To review the extent to which consultation feedback has been captured by the strategy • To determine whether any other issues raised in the public consultation should be further addressed in the strategy or by other means. • To secure ownership of the strategy by non-executive councillors and the strengthen residents’ understanding and buy-in • To consider the governance and monitoring of the strategy following implementation.

Any areas excluded from the scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raw data from consultation • Existing strategies that are linked to the Sustainability Strategy
Desired outcomes / indicators of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An understanding of the aspirations of the strategy. • Secure support for the roadmap to achieving net zero. • An understanding of the key areas for action under the strategy. • To secure wider ownership of the strategy by non-executive Watford councillors. • To review key aspects of the strategy supported by an understanding of the feedback received in the public consultation and of wider residents' views. • To make recommendations to Cabinet that contribute to the success of the strategy. These recommendations would be based on the consultation feedback and members' wider local understanding.
Timescale and key dates, including proposed meeting format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 June 2022 - scrutiny proposal to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee • Task group to meet 2 to 3 times between July and October • 16 November or 16 December 2022 (TBC) – draft report to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee • 6 February 2023- Sustainability Strategy to Cabinet
Key departmental lead officer	Susheel Rao, Sustainability Officer
Witnesses	None directly, feedback will be captured through engagement work
What activities need to be taken to achieve the outcomes	<p>Reviewing draft strategy</p> <p>Reviewing engagement feedback</p> <p>Reviewing examples from best practice</p>
Key policies / documentation / baseline information needed	<p>Draft strategy including outline delivery plan and resourcing</p> <p>Engagement feedback summaries</p> <p>Review of best practice examples</p>
Any other sources of evidence (e.g., site visit)	None
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust strategy required to meet commitment to achieving net zero and proposed route map • Insufficient response to ecological emergency

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Insufficient engagement with non-executive members and subsequent dissatisfaction with the strategy.• Loss of the opportunity to understand residents' views from the wider perspective held by ward councillors
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