

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: Monday, 13 March 2023

Report author: Sustainability Officer

Title: **Watford's Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency 2023-2030: Strategy and Delivery Plan**

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and an ecological emergency in 2021. In March 2020 it approved the Sustainability Strategy pt 1 which runs to March 2023. As such Watford's Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency 2023-2030 has been developed alongside its associated Delivery Plan.
- 1.2 The Environmental Strategy sets the targets across 4 topics: achieving net zero, nature and ecological restoration, responsible resource use and adapting to change. In addition there are two overarching themes: Leading by example and people power. The delivery plan sets out the actions required between 2023 and 2025 to move us towards achieving those targets.
- 1.3 The draft strategy went out for public consultation from 7th November to 9th December, and the revised strategy has taken into account the comments raised. Each target was reviewed against the comments received, and adapted if appropriate. In addition, the governance section was made clearer and how we would consult with stakeholders during the timeframe of the strategy was clarified.
- 1.4 Attached as appendices as designed documents are:
 - Watford's Environment Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency – 2023-2030
 - Watford's Environment Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency – 2023-2030 - Summary
 - Watford's Environment Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency – Delivery Plan 2023-2025
- 1.5 There are both financial and staff resource implications in taking forward the delivery plan, and in meeting the targets of the strategy by 2030. External funding will be required to achieve this, along with collaboration with stakeholders in the borough. There are also risks in not taking forward this strategy.

1.6 By taking forward an effective strategy and delivery plan the council is meeting its commitment to addressing the climate and ecological emergency.

1.7 It is recommended that the strategy and delivery plan are approved.

2.0 Risks

2.1

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
<i>Reputational risk in not delivering the actions</i>	<i>Negative media reporting. Erosion of trust.</i>	<i>Implement delivery plan. Ensure robust reporting and review.</i>	<i>Treat</i>	<i>2 x 2 = 4</i>
<i>Reputational risk in not seen to be addressing climate and ecological emergency effectively</i>	<i>Negative media reporting. Negative interactions with interested parties</i>	<i>Engage with stakeholders through critical friends' panel.</i>	<i>Treat</i>	<i>3 x 2 = 6</i>
<i>Insufficient resources for delivering the plan</i>	<i>Actions in the plan not delivered. Staff disillusionment</i>	<i>Ensure sufficient resources. Ensure priority for council</i>	<i>Tolerate</i>	<i>2 x 3 = 6</i>
<i>Impact of financial constraints on delivering the plan</i>	<i>Actions in plan not delivered. Negative media reporting. Erosion of trust. Staff disillusionment</i>	<i>Ring fence available resources. Explore funding opportunities throughout plan. Lobby government for funding</i>	<i>Tolerate</i>	<i>2 x 3 = 6</i>

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 That Watford's Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency 2023-2030 full document and summary document attached as appendices 1 and 2 be approved.

- 3.2 That Watford's Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency – Delivery Plan 2023-2025 attached as appendix 3 be approved.
- 3.3 That authority for the allocation of the Sustainability Reserve be delegated to the Director for Partnerships in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Sustainability.

Further information:

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4.0 Detailed proposal

4.1 Background

- 4.1.1 The council declared a climate emergency in July 2019, and declared an ecological emergency in January 2021. The council produced its sustainability strategy in 2020 – Sustainability Strategy 2020 to 2023; Road to net zero part 1. Associated with the strategy is an Action Plan, actions within which are being progressed.
- 4.1.2 In November 2022 the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Strategy went out to consultation. Following the consultation, the results were reviewed and informed the final strategy. This included reviewing and updating the targets and renaming the strategy to Watford's Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency.
- 4.1.3 The strategy has approximately 55 targets within it and it runs from 2023 to 2030. To enable more frequent review of actions, the strategy sets out the targets, and a separate delivery plan sets out the actions to be taken over a 2 year period. The Strategy is attached as appendix 1.

4.2 Strategy Consultation

- 4.2.1 The consultation ran from 7th November to 9th December and received the following responses:
- 357 responses on CommonPlace

- 238 people engaged with through focus group meetings and face to face meetings
- 79 responses on Snap Survey.

4.2.2 Overall, the responses were generally positive, with greater engagement in some areas of the strategy:

- Nature and ecological restoration received the greatest amount of positive comments
- The overview section and net zero carbon section received the greatest amount of responses
- Governance received the least amount of responses, with adapting to change and resource use also low.

4.2.3 Other key points which came out of the consultation are:

- The targets need to be reviewed to ensure that all targets are SMART;
- It would be helpful to have interim targets for more areas;
- We need to ensure that businesses are engaged, and that they are referenced throughout the strategy;
- To successfully implement this, we will need effective engagement and education;
- It would be beneficial to have some form of ongoing consultation, with the suggestion of a small 'critical friend's panel' or similar made up of 8-15 people with a good representation of the Borough.

4.3 Changes resulting from the consultation

4.3.1 There were 3 areas where changes were made following the consultation: the name; reviewing each target against comments, and making appropriate changes; and updating the text in the governance section to ensure it set out clearly our intentions.

4.3.2 Following discussion with the Mayor, the name of the strategy was changed to:

Watford's Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency.

4.3.3 A summary version of the strategy has also been produced, which sets out the targets across the themes and topics appendix 2.

4.3.4 The strategy also sets out how engagement with stakeholders will continue, both through existing forums such as the Sustainability Forum, and through a new climate critical friends' panel made up of 8-15 representative members.

4.4 The Delivery Plan

- 4.4.2 The delivery plan runs from April 2023 to March 2025, and will be reviewed annually. Every 2 years a new delivery plan will be developed, taking into account how the Council is progressing to meet its targets. The delivery plan is attached as appendix 3
- 4.4.2 Progress on actions will be reviewed and reported as part of the council's governance structure, as well as there being an annual report on emissions, resource usage and impact on the environment. The strategy sets out what is likely to be included in this.
- 4.4.3 Much of what is in the current delivery plan is already part of the service plans across the council. The intention is to embed the targets of the Environmental Strategy across the council, and therefore it is anticipated that future delivery plans will also contain much that is in service plans, and that those developing service plans will be mindful of the requirements of the Environmental Strategy.
- 4.4.4 There are cost implications to delivering the Delivery Plan, and delivering the strategy as a whole. As part of the work developing the strategy, the council commissioned APSE to develop a route to net zero. They estimated for the council to achieve net zero in its own buildings (excluding the Town Hall) the cost would be in the region of £5m and to achieve net zero for its leased assets would require an additional £12m. Therefore to achieve net zero, and to achieve our wider climate change and ecological emergency targets will require additional external funding.
- 4.4.4 The cost implications for the 2023-2025 delivery plan, excluding what is currently in agreed service plans is estimated to be £440k. This includes costing for fixed term staff resources for the duration of the delivery plan of 1 day/week of programme management support and continuing the role of assistant sustainability officer until the end of the delivery plan term.

5.0 **Implications**

5.1 **Financial**

- 5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that Council agreed to create the Sustainability Reserve of £500k in January 2022. This reserve will be utilised to support the delivery of the action plan.

5.2 **Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**

5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the Strategy and Delivery Plan follow on from the council's declarations of the climate and ecological emergencies in 2019 and 2021.

5.3 **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**

5.3.1 As this is a new strategy an equalities impact analysis has been undertaken. The analysis is attached as Appendix 4 to this report. The main conclusions of that analysis are:

- Implementing the strategy should have a long term benefit to all, especially the disadvantaged and those on low income as it will help to:
 - mitigate against energy and resource cost rises;
 - reduce pollution and congestion;
 - provide access to nature as well as green space;
 - prepare the borough for changes resulting for climate change.
- The potential negative impacts relate to costs of implementing changes, whether for individuals, within the council or within the borough. Other negative impacts relate to perceptions that some things are now off limits, without an alternative.

5.3.2 Overall, the strategy will have a positive impact both in the short and the longer term.

5.3.3 There are no human rights implications.

5.3.4 Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

5.4 **Staffing**

5.4.1 To implement the Delivery Plan 2023-2025 effectively there will be both training and staff resources required. One action is mandatory training for all staff, which has been discussed with HR. Other actions may require some training. As it is intended to embed the Environmental Strategy across the Council, there will be some staff resource requirements across all service areas.

5.4.2 Additional resource to the Sustainability team is required, with a cost as described in the financial section. The resource would be:

- 1 day per week programme manager – April 2023- Mar 2025
- Extension of Assistant Sustainability role – Nov 2023 – Mar 2025

5.4.3 In the financial costing, there has also been inclusion for communication and engagement support, including support for 2 days / week for at least 1 year.

5.5 **Accommodation**

5.5.1 There is no additional accommodation requirements anticipated at this time, beyond meeting rooms.

5.5.2 However, the Environmental Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-25 has implications for council owned property in the following ways:

- Moving to net zero carbon emissions will require decarbonisation of property assets.
- Maintenance and replacement regimes need to take into account the net zero requirements, such that low energy or resource options are used when replacing fixtures and fittings; also maintenance approaches will need to take into account their energy and resource implications.

5.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 It is not anticipated that this strategy will have a negative impact on community safety or on crime and disorder.

5.7 **Sustainability**

5.7.1 The delivery plan sets out how we will meet our targets for 2025 set out in the Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency 2023-2030. The Strategy addresses 4 sustainability topics: achieving net zero, nature and ecological restoration, responsible resource use and adapting to change.

5.5.2 To create a resilient future, we need to ensure we are working within the planetary boundaries, while maintaining a thriving Watford. To move towards this we need to address the following issues, moving towards having a positive or neutral impact in each area. The issues are:

- Greenhouse gas emissions;
- Biodiversity;
- Land use;
- Renewable energy / effective offsetting;
- Soil and waterway (including oceans) health;

- Water resources;
- Pollution;
- Material resource use;
- Climate change and adaptation.

5.5.3 The Environmental Strategy and delivery plan address all the above issues, and if implemented it is anticipated would have a positive effect on them overall.

Appendices

- Watford's Environment Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency – 2023-2030
- Watford's Environment Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency – 2023-2030 - Summary
- Watford's Environment Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency – Delivery Plan 2023-2025
- EqIA report

Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.