

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

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| TO: | POLICY COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 9 MARCH 2020 | | |
| TITLE: | READING CLIMATE EMERGENCY STRATEGY 2020-25: ENDORSEMENT OF DRAFT FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | CLLR PAGE | PORTFOLIO: | STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT |
| SERVICE: | DEGNS | WARDS: | BOROUGHWIDE |
| LEAD OFFICER: | PETER MOORE | TEL: | 0118 937 4275 (x74275) |
| JOB TITLE: | HEAD OF CLIMATE STRATEGY | E-MAIL: | peter.moore@reading.gov.uk |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to invite the Committee to endorse the Draft Reading Climate Change Partnership's 'Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25' for the purposes of public consultation. An accelerated timeline was agreed for the strategy subsequent to Reading's Climate Emergency Declaration in February 2019, and the public consultation is a necessary step in completion of the strategy to an accelerated timescale.

1.2 Appendices to this report are:

- Appendix 1: Consultation Draft 'Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25'

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That the Committee endorses the Reading Climate Change Partnership's Draft 'Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25' for public consultation;

2.2 That the Committee notes and endorses in particular those actions within the action plans at section 5 for which RBC is identified as a delivery partner;

2.3 That the Committee notes the proposal for RBC to manage the consultation process on behalf of the Reading Climate Change Partnership and to initiate a six week period of consultation from 13th March 2020 to 24th April 2020;

2.4 That the Committee notes the proposal to bring a final draft of the Strategy to its meeting in June with a view to formal adoption of the Strategy.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 The Council declared a climate emergency in February 2019 and committed to the goal of achieving a 'carbon neutral Reading by 2030'. Reports were subsequently taken to all key Committees in the summer of 2019 committing then to embed the action required to work towards this goal in the relevant services, activities and plans

of the Council. In November SEPT Committee received an update on the Council's own carbon reduction plans and progress with strategy development.

- 3.2 The Climate Emergency Declaration required officers to ensure that the revision of the Reading Climate Change Strategy, which is produced by the Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP), reflected the urgency of the Declaration, and the process was therefore brought forward by 6 months. The Council is an active partner in RCCP and Council officers have been supporting the Partnership in developing the draft Strategy, with the intention of publishing a consultation draft in mid-March, finalising it by the end of May and bringing the final strategy back to the Policy Committee for adoption in June.
- 3.3 RBC has previously agreed to manage the consultation process on behalf of the Partnership. It was therefore considered appropriate to give the Policy Committee the opportunity to endorse a draft version of the Strategy for the purposes of public consultation, prior to that period of consultation. It is envisaged that the final strategy will then be formally adopted by the Council (in parallel with other partners) in June 2020 and launched at a high-profile 'Reading Climate Summit' in July 2020.
- 3.4 The Council has reduced its own emissions by 62.5% since 2008/09. The main vehicle through which this has been achieved is the Council's corporate Carbon Plan, the current iteration of which covers the period 2015-20. Officers have started the process of reviewing the Plan in parallel with the wider Reading Climate Emergency Strategy to cover the same period (2020-25) and a draft RBC Carbon Plan will be brought back to the Policy Committee in June alongside the final version of the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy. The Carbon Plan will take forward the Council's own commitment to delivering on the wider aspirations of the strategy and will show how the Council is leading by example.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position

The current Reading Climate Change Strategy, covering the period 2013-20, was due for review in 2020. The original timeline envisaged a review in the latter part of the year but the Climate Emergency Declaration led to a commitment to accelerate the process by six months, requiring the Strategy to be completed in the first half of 2020. Reports on the climate emergency, which were taken to all key Committees in the summer of 2019, specified a target date of April 2020 for completion of the Strategy.

4.2 Options Proposed

To meet the accelerated timescale, and to ensure that residents and other stakeholders have the opportunity to comment on the strategy before it is finalised, the draft Strategy needs to be issued for consultation in mid-March, subsequent to endorsement of the consultation draft by the Policy Committee. As such it is proposed that, subject to the approval of the Policy Committee, the draft strategy be published for consultation on 13th March for a six-week consultation period until 24th April.

4.3 Other Options Considered

The other options considered were:

- Discontinue the Strategy and rely on individual partners to develop their own plans
- Produce the Strategy to the original timeline

Neither of the above are considered realistic options in the light of the Climate Emergency Declaration and subsequent public commitments to accelerate the Strategy review process.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The consultation draft Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 contributes to all six corporate aims as follows:

- Securing the economic success of Reading and provision of job opportunities: the draft strategy highlights the opportunities of pursuing ‘clean growth’ and developing Reading’s low carbon economy
- Ensuring access to decent housing to meet local needs: the draft strategy includes ambitions to improve the energy efficiency of both public and private housing and to tackle fuel poverty
- To protect and enhance the lives of vulnerable adults and children: the draft strategy notes that climate impacts are expected to be more severe for the more vulnerable in society, and proposes action to reduce these vulnerabilities
- Keeping Reading’s environment clean, green and safe: the draft strategy includes a number of ‘natural solutions’ to climate change (e.g. increasing tree cover) which will enhance the natural environment and greenspaces as well as helping mitigate and adapt to climate change
- Ensuring that there are good education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading: the draft strategy includes actions to educate the community about climate change, how to tackle it and the benefits of taking action
- Ensuring the Council is fit for the future: those draft strategy actions which relate to the Council will help us reduce energy use and the costs associated with it.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The decision recommended fulfils a central commitment of the Climate Emergency Declaration by bringing forward a new Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and setting out the pathway for Reading to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 The process of developing the draft Reading Climate Emergency Strategy has involved a wide range of stakeholders, with theme groups of 6-8 key stakeholders meeting regularly to shape each of the six themes within the strategy. These theme groups arose out of a public meeting at the Civic Centre attended by 120 people at which the invitation to join the theme groups was opened to all. The proposed consultation process will provide further opportunities for stakeholders and the wider public to influence the strategy and a consultation report will be included when the final strategy is brought back to the Committee for adoption in June. Advice has been taken from RBC consultation and communication experts to refine the proposed consultation questions.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Initial screening suggests that an Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the issues raised by climate change, which is the subject of the strategy, are universal and apply to the whole population regardless of race, disability, gender, sexuality, age or religious belief. That said, in taking forward specific actions proposed in the strategy it will be for the relevant lead partners to ensure that equality impacts are considered and assessed appropriately. The Reading Climate Change Partnership will also reflect on the responses to consultation on the strategy and if this suggests that there is concern about equality impacts, a full assessment will be conducted if required.

- 8.2 As a general observation, research suggests that climate change will impact disproportionately on the most vulnerable in society. In this context, action to tackle climate change should have an overall positive impact for vulnerable people.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 As the Council is managing the consultation process on behalf of the Reading Climate Change Partnership, the main legal implications at this stage arise from the requirements associated with public consultation. Other action proposed within the Strategy for which the Council is identified as a delivery partner can be delivered within its current legal powers though there is explicit recognition within the Climate Emergency Declaration and the draft strategy that some changes in Government policy and legislation may be required to support Reading in achieving the ambition of net zero carbon by 2030.

- 9.2 It should be noted that the proposed consultation period will in part coincide with the pre-election period. As the Council is merely managing the consultation process on behalf of the Reading Climate Change Partnership, legal advice considers the consultation to be acceptable and within the remit of normal Council business due to the work undertaken to date and the envisaged timescales. That said, restrictions around promotional activities by RBC (as opposed to other partners with the Reading Climate Change Partnership) will apply during the period leading up to the Local Elections.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Capital and revenue commitments: the specific actions identified for the Council within the draft strategy can be delivered within the revenue and capital budgets agreed as part of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (2020-23). The Council has identified capital funding of over £7 million over the next three years for investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, an increase from an annual budget of some £250,000 which had previously existed for energy efficiency projects. In the two full financial years since the climate emergency was declared (2019/20 and 2020/21), the Council has committed c.£34 million to capital projects in transport, waste and energy which will contribute directly to carbon reduction. However, notwithstanding this investment, a number of actions involve pursuing external funding where we currently lack the resources to deliver them.

- 10.2 Strategy actions for which no funding has currently been identified: the Climate Emergency Declaration recognised that the ambitious aim of delivering a net zero carbon Reading by 2030 could not be achieved without additional resource and powers from central government. The draft Strategy therefore necessarily includes action which is required to reach this goal but for which funding has yet to be identified. To this end, the Strategy includes the clear statement that 'Some of the actions included in the action plans below, and the scale and pace at which they can be progressed, will be subject to the prevailing national policy context and/or the provision of additional powers and resources by central government, as made clear in Reading's climate emergency declaration. This does not mean we are not committed to them - on the contrary, we see them as key to achieving the net zero target - it is simply to reflect the reality that the partners in Reading alone cannot solve some of the bigger challenges we face'.

- 10.3 Value for money and financial risks: it has been well established since the publication of the Stern report into the economics of climate change in 2006 that the costs of inaction far outweigh the costs of action on climate change. In the context of climate change, which presents unprecedented risk and catastrophic consequences for our way of life and human wellbeing on a global as well as local scale, the action outlined in the strategy can be considered good value for money. Those actions which require further policy changes or investment by RBC will, however, be further tested for

value for money at the appropriate time. At the project level, each RBC project will be subject to a business case with the aim of ensuring that revenue savings produced by the investment cover the debt financing charge including Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) on the life of the asset.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 In producing the consultation draft strategy, the following have been referred to:

- Committee on Climate Change - various reports
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - various reports
- UK Government data on carbon emissions
- Reading Vision 2050
- Reading Climate Change Adaptation Plan
- Reading Local Plan
- Reading Local Transport Plan
- Reading Means Business on Climate Change: the Reading Climate Change Strategy 2013-20