

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

<b>TO:</b>	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
<b>DATE:</b>	30 JUNE 2021		
<b>TITLE:</b>	REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR READING CLIMATE CHANGE PARTNERSHIP		
<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	COUNCILLOR PAGE	<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT
<b>SERVICE:</b>	DEGNS	<b>WARDS:</b>	ALL
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 included a commitment to review the governance arrangements for the Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP) to ensure that they remain fit for the purpose of delivering the Strategy over the next five years. This review has now been concluded by the Partnership and the conclusions reflected in a new Partnership Agreement which is now being presented to the Council and other partners for their endorsement and signature. Under the new Agreement, for which Committee approval is required, the Council will continue to act as 'host' and accountable body for the Partnership, a role which it has performed since the inception of the Partnership.

1.2 The appendices to this report are as follows:

- Appendix 1 - Partnership Agreement for Reading Climate Change Partnership
- Appendix 2 - table illustrating how the Partnership Agreement aligns with requirements of the Council's Constitution

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That the Committee:

- Confirms the Council's willingness to continue to act as host and accountable body for the Reading Climate Change Partnership
- Endorses the Partnership Agreement attached at Appendix 1
- Authorises the Director for Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services to sign the Partnership Agreement on behalf of the Council
- Confirms the appointment of the Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transportation to the Reading Climate Change Partnership Board

#### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25, which was endorsed by the Policy Committee in November 2020, included a commitment to review the governance arrangements for RCCP to ensure that they remain fit for the purpose of delivering the Strategy over the next five years, and set a target for this review to be completed within six months of the Strategy being published i.e. by May 2021.

3.1.1 The Partnership Board therefore commissioned a governance review at its meeting in December 2020, appointing Prof Tim Dixon (Co-Chair of the Partnership) and Peter Moore (Head of Climate Strategy at RBC) to act as a review team. The aims of the review were agreed by the Partnership Board in December 2020 as follows:

*Aim: 'To develop an operating model and governance arrangements for RCCP which maximises our ability to deliver Reading Climate Emergency Strategy objectives by supporting:*

- *Improved engagement (including via Theme Groups and wider networks) through a more inclusive and diverse partnership*
- *Improved transparency, accountability and clarity around roles, responsibilities and relationships between various entities within the partnership 'family'*
- *Improved delivery capacity within the partnership and partner organisations*
- *Improved ability/capacity to secure resources/funding (whilst being mindful of need not to cannibalise funding from existing partners)*
- *Clearer identity for the purposes of wider communications and engagement'*

3.1.2 The review team presented three broad options (summarised in section 4 below) to the Partnership Board in February 2021, accompanied by a detailed options appraisal and seeking a decision 'in principle' on the preferred option.

## 4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 **Current Position:** the Partnership has an existing governing document but this is limited in scope and dates back to 2009 when the Partnership was a sub-group of the now disbanded Local Strategic Partnership. This document also does not align fully with the requirements for Partnerships hosted by the Council as set out in the Council's constitution. A review was therefore overdue.

4.2 **Options Proposed:** the review team presented three broad strategic options to the Partnership Board in February 2021 and the Board expressed a preference for the option based on 'a refinement of the existing model' (i.e. an unincorporated Partnership retaining its operational independence but still hosted by RBC), with changes to its constitution to better address the aims of the review. It was agreed that these changes should be reflected in a new Partnership Agreement to serve as the governing document for the Partnership going forward.

4.3 **Other Options Considered:** the two strategic options considered but rejected by the Partnership Board in February 2020 were (i) re-constitution of the Partnership as a new stand-alone legal entity (e.g. charity or Community Interest Company) and (iii) an alternative hosting arrangement with transfer of assets/contracts etc from the Council to a new, third-party host.

## 5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The recommendations in this report align with Corporate Plan priorities as follows:

- **Healthy Environment:** the recommendations are designed to ensure that RCCP is well placed to deliver the actions and aspirations set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy as a key part of Reading's response to the climate emergency.

- Thriving Communities: the review of governance arrangements for RCCP includes a specific objective to create ‘a more diverse and inclusive partnership’ and proposals for broader and more inclusive representation on the Partnership Board.
- Inclusive Economy: the recommendations are designed to ensure more effective delivery of the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy which will support development of Reading’s low carbon economy which offers the potential for more inclusive economic development via more skilled employment opportunities.

## **6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers) and endorsed the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 in November 2020. While the recommendations in this report have no direct environmental or climate implications, they are designed to support more effective delivery of the actions within the Strategy and thus to make a positive contribution towards the goal of a ‘net zero carbon Reading by 2030’.

## **7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way". The recommendations in this report take forward a specific commitment within the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy, which was the subject of extensive public consultation from March-June 2020.

## **8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was not considered relevant to the governance review as it was primarily a matter for the Reading Climate Change Partnership rather than the Council, although the aims of the governance review did include an aspiration to create ‘a more inclusive and diverse partnership’ and the composition of the Partnership Board has been amended and expanded to reflect this.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Reading Climate Change Partnership is not a separate legal entity so legal liability for the Partnership ultimately rests with the Council by virtue of the Council agreeing to serve as host and accountable body. The proposed Partnership Agreement therefore sets out the respective obligations of the Partnership and of the Council as host, based on a good practice template for partnership governance developed initially by Manchester City Council. The Partnership Agreement is not legally binding but seeks to establish the necessary clarity in the arrangements for the effective operation of the Partnership.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The Partnership Agreement attached at Appendix 1 sets out the financial arrangements (see section 8) for RCCP. This confirms the existing funding mechanism for the Partnership under which it receives ring-fenced feed-in-tariff income from solar panel investments made previously (in the region of £20,000 per annum). The Agreement does not create any new costs or liabilities for the Council, and the risks to the Council associated with hosting the Partnership are considered low. The Agreement confirms in writing, for the first time, provision for the Partnership to maintain a financial reserve to cover its potential liabilities (e.g. in relation to the employment of staff), further protecting the Council from any notional financial risk arising from its role as host and accountable body.

## 11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Documents that have been relied upon to a material extent in drafting this report are as follows:

- *The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25*, Reading Climate Change Partnership, November 2020
- *Partnership Governance Framework and Guidance*, Manchester City Council, December 2013