

Forest Heath District Council

(This report is a key decision. This report has been subject to appropriate notice of publication under the Council's Access to Information Rules)

Report of the Cabinet Members for Environment and Waste and for Planning, Housing and Transport

CABINET

25 JUNE 2013

CAB13/095

DEVELOPING A WEST SUFFOLK SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY (Key Decision Reference: MAY13/02)

1. Summary and reasons for recommendation

- 1.1 To achieve a shared approach to policy, service delivery and meet statutory obligations, Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils have developed a draft Sustainability Strategy.
- 1.2 Once adopted this will replace existing strategies covering Sustainability and Fuel Poverty. A copy of the revised Strategy is provided at Appendix 1 which will be subject to stakeholder consultation prior to adoption.
- 1.3 Following stakeholder consultation, the revised draft Strategy will subject to Cabinet approval prior to adoption by the Council.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- i) **Approve for stakeholder consultation, the proposed West Suffolk Sustainability Strategy presented in Appendix 1; and**
- ii) **Receive for approval, the revised draft Strategy following the consultation.**

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3. How will the recommendations help us meet our strategic priorities?

3.1 The two Councils in West Suffolk are now working together towards a shared policy and service delivery model. Revising and consolidating both Councils' existing Sustainable Development and Fuel Poverty Strategies to develop a single West Suffolk Sustainability Strategy takes account of changes to national legislation, policy and guidance since these strategies were adopted. There has therefore been a need to review and develop a strategic approach for West Suffolk, acknowledging the similarities and differences that exist in the locality.

4. Key Issues

4.1 Increasing demands for resources such as land, food, energy and water necessitate a better balance between our economic and social needs without compromising the needs of others or, the state of the environment. The changing climate may also have significant implications, both positive and negative, for residents and businesses alike.

4.3 Forest Heath District Council has a long history of working to balance the needs and pressures that we all bring to bear on our natural resources. Of note in the mid-1990s, it developed plans in response to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio Earth Summit) in 1992. The resulting Agenda 21 plan went some way to try to address environmental issues by engaging with local communities and agencies.

4.5 Since then, the Council has demonstrated that it can be a leader in its field as well as setting an example to others in the wider community:

- developing and adopting its carbon management plan which has helped to improve energy efficiency and cut carbon emissions by 33%;
- Investing in 185kWp of solar photovoltaics installed on public buildings.
- Increased the separation and collection of recyclable waste streams from Council offices for recycling and composting.

4.6 Both Councils in West Suffolk hold as core principles within their current corporate visions some of the key features that make a sustainable society:

- Ensuring adequate housing provision

- Encouraging strong and diverse economic activity
 - Supporting prosperous and environmentally-responsible communities
 - Promoting fair, diverse and healthy communities.
- 4.7 An example of how effective partnership working can deliver benefit to West Suffolk is Forest Heath District Council's participation in the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership. Since 2009, the Partnership has provided services to cut energy and resource use and improve local resilience. These services have identified potential annual savings to 300 Suffolk businesses of more than £1.8 million and supported communities to draw in around £200,000 of external funding.
- 4.8 The Partnership provides great value for money for West Suffolk especially for small/medium sized enterprises and local communities which are in a better position to reduce their costs through improved resource efficiency and resilience. Through its approach and strong reputation for delivering projects in support of the key objectives, the Partnership has been able to draw in significant levels of external funding (to date more than £1.5 million) to deliver initiatives that achieve results.
- 4.9 An example where this approach has been successful is the Greener Business Grant offered to West Suffolk Businesses and administered by the Councils on behalf of the West Suffolk Partnership. This grant is aimed at improving the energy and water efficiency of small and medium sized businesses. To date, over 40 local businesses have made improvements supported by one off grants totalling £27,000. This support is predicted to deliver annual savings to the businesses of over £45,000 resulting in lifetime CO₂ savings in excess of 3,300 tonnes.
- 4.10 Both Councils in West Suffolk are now working together towards a shared policy and service delivery model. There has therefore been a need to review and develop a strategic approach, acknowledging local similarities and differences.
- 4.11 The review has identified that efficiencies and consistency can be gained by bringing together a series of existing strategy or policy statements into one. Once adopted, the West Suffolk Sustainability Strategy will replace:
- The Forest Heath Fuel Poverty Strategy
 - The St Edmundsbury Affordable Warmth Strategy
 - The Forest Heath Sustainable Development Strategy
- 4.12 The draft West Suffolk Sustainability Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to help minimise the adverse effects that society's activities have on the natural environment whilst ensuring economic and social stability.
- 4.13 The draft Strategy (Appendix 1) forms part of a wider policy and delivery framework. It supports the aims and objectives set out in both Councils' corporate priorities and plans. It also complements, without duplication, emerging local planning policy, the Council's and the Local Enterprise Partnerships economic policy, in particular the New Anglia LEP in its role as the Green Economy Pathfinder, the Suffolk-wide Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Suffolk Community Strategy's environmental policies.

5. Other options considered

- 5.1 Not taking action – this would leave the Council open to challenge that it is not addressing its statutory responsibilities, for example under the Home Energy Conservation Act, or responding to new statutory arrangements, for example under national planning policy, Health and Well Being or Local Economic Growth.
- 5.2 Bringing together existing strategies into one reflects the new shared way of working that has been adopted by the two authorities.

6. Community Impact

6.1 Crime and Disorder Impact *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

- 6.1.1 No crime and disorder impacts have been identified arising from consolidating the current strategies into one.

6.2 Diversity and Equality Impact *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

- 6.2.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken. Fairness and equality are fundamental to a sustainable society. This is reflected in the draft Strategy.

6.3 Sustainability Impact *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

- 6.3.1 A Sustainability Impact Assessment has been undertaken. The draft Strategy will be core to the West Suffolk vision to deliver a sustainable future for the area; achieving a balance between the social, economic and environmental concerns whilst meeting our statutory obligations and corporate priorities.

6.4 Other Impact *(any other impacts affecting this report)*

- 6.4.1 This work supports the Council's public health and wellbeing responsibilities.

7. Consultation *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

- 7.1 It is proposed to consult key organisations which may have a role to play in implementing the proposed Strategy. These will include internal (e.g. the Planning Service) and external stakeholders.

- 7.2 The draft Strategy was reviewed separately by Cabinet Planning and the St Edmundsbury Borough Council Sustainable Development Working Party on the 14th May 2013 with the following points raised:

- (a) include reference to drainage issues;
- (b) include reference to Housing (existing and new housing) and Fuel Poverty be linked together;
- (c) Affordable Warmth – include reference to acknowledge the difference between rural and urban areas relating to fuel poverty;
- (d) themes contained within the Strategy be reworded to include robust and conclusive aspirations;
- (e) the Strategy be consistent with the St Edmundsbury Vision 2031; and

(f) consider the cost-benefit analysis of delivering the Strategy.

The revised draft Strategy has, therefore, been amended to reflect these points.

7.3 The findings of the stakeholder consultation will be taken into account when a final draft of the Strategy is put forward for adoption.

8. Financial and resource implications *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 Staff and operational financial resources to deliver the proposed Strategy are already accounted for in the Council's revenue budget. However, there may be resource implications in the event of specific initiatives, particularly where they may involve improvements to assets. These will be assessed using an "invest to save" approach taking account of the wider benefits that may be gained by the Council and the community.

8.2 As referred to in 4.7 to 4.9 above, a sustainable approach can deliver financial benefits as well encouraging inward investment. A simple cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken in respect of the range of actions helping to achieve the strategic aims and incorporated within the draft action plan.

8.3 One action, tackling poor energy efficiency in vulnerable households, is for the Council to support inward investment from the new Energy Company Obligation, which requires energy suppliers to partially or fully fund insulation measures, by developing partnerships to promote and facilitate home energy efficiency. This could attract between £4m and £8m of inward investment into Forest Heath over the next 3-5 years, with some of this work being undertaken by local insulation companies so sustaining and creating jobs.

8.4 The delivered benefit would be to fuel poor households with estimated annual savings on household energy bills estimated between £300,000 and £600,000 in the Forest Heath area alone. The additional wider benefit would be to reduce the demand placed on local health services; NHS-supported research has shown that every pound invested in improving cold homes saves 42 pence of the NHS budget annually, a payback for every pound of around 2 years.

8.5 Therefore, the role of the West Suffolk Councils in promoting and facilitating home insulation, particularly to the benefit of those households in fuel poverty, is recognised both by Central Government and the energy industry as crucial to delivering the best outcomes.

8.6 Other actions to deliver the objectives set out in the Strategy, depending on whether a financial cost or benefit can be determined or is appropriate, are considered to generate value to the Council or to the wider community (or both) in excess of the cost of the Council to implement.

9. Risk/Opportunity Assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

9.1 Failure to deliver Local Authority responsibilities in providing a safe, sustainable environment is a corporate risk on the Council's Risk register.

- 9.2 Conversely, investing in this work brings inward investment through public sector finance as well as private sector economic growth. This is exemplified by the opportunities for so-called “green” jobs identified within the New Anglia LEP’s Green Economy Manifesto.

Risk area	Inherent level of Risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual Risk (after controls)
Public Health	Moderate	Implementing the proposed Strategy will help to ensure that existing and future communities in West Suffolk are protected from significant health and environmental risks.	Low
Statutory Responsibilities	High	The Council has statutory responsibilities to deliver services to support individuals, local communities and businesses in a range of ways including planned development, housing and cleansing. The proposed Strategy will help to ensure that appropriate resources and effort are being used.	Low
Economic	High	Not taking action could leave West Suffolk residents and businesses both disadvantaged in a rapidly changing economic climate and also exposed to environmental risks such as flooding, resource scarcity and energy insecurity.	Medium
Reputational	High	It is important that the Council delivers on strategic responsibilities to maintain and enhance health and wellbeing.	Low
Financial	Low	The proposed draft Strategy has no significant financial impact. Working in conjunction with others, including specific partnerships, has brought inward investment particularly to improve energy efficiency and increase uptake of renewable energy	Medium/ low

10. Legal and policy implications

- 10.1 The Council is required to meet certain statutory requirements, best addressed through a strategic approach to Sustainability. This is because of the interconnected nature of the issues and the solutions available; an example is domestic energy efficiency which requires a holistic approach to housing, health, climate mitigation and economic growth.
- 10.2 As a consequence, the draft Strategy enables the Council to respond to the Climate Act 2008, the Home Energy Conservation Act, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy as well as national policy on economic growth and housing. This work accords with the corporate visions of clean, green, safe and prosperous and meets the Council’s statutory responsibilities.

11. Wards affected

11.1 All wards.

12. Background papers

12.1 None.

13. Documents attached

13.1 Appendix 1 - Sustainability Strategy 2013 – 2018 (Draft)