

Proposal to Establish a West Suffolk Environment and Climate Change Taskforce

Report No:	CAB/WS/19/016	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	23 July 2019
Cabinet Members:	Councillor John Griffiths Leader of the Council Tel: 07958 700434 Email: john.griffiths@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
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Decisions Plan: This item was not listed on the Decisions Plan; however it is not a Key Decision.

Wards impacted: All wards

Recommendation: It is **RECOMMENDED** that Cabinet:

- (1) agrees to the establishment of a Cabinet Taskforce to make recommendations on West Suffolk Council's approach to protecting and enhancing the environment and addressing climate change; and
- (2) approves the Terms of Reference for the Taskforce, attached as Appendix A to Report No: CAB/WS/19/016.

1. Background / Context

- 1.1 The first half of 2019 has seen unprecedented recognition of the impact of human activities on the environment, not only by public authorities but by businesses, communities and individuals.
- 1.2 West Suffolk Council's proposed response to this increased social awareness is to take a deeper, evidence-based look at the totality of our environmental impacts and the potential for us to use our role to bring about lasting change across our area. We therefore announced our intention at the Council's Annual Meeting in May 2019 to do this through an Environment Taskforce.
- 1.3 It is noted that at the Council meeting on 16 July 2019, the Council will be asked to consider a motion relating to declaring a Climate Emergency and calling on the Council to take specific action as a result. This agenda was issued prior to the Council motion and Cabinet may wish to take the outcomes of the motion into account when considering this paper.
- 1.4 In line with our Strategic Framework, West Suffolk Council continues to "safeguard and enhance the natural and built heritage and environment" in a number of ways. This is built into our ambitions for inclusive growth and our role as a local housing and planning authority, a regulator, an investor and local influencer. A number of West Suffolk's activities in this area are carried out in partnership with other organisations. A summary of current activity is included at Appendix B.
- 1.5 The creation of a new council gives a timely opportunity to review the range of activities currently being undertaken to protect and enhance the natural and built environment of West Suffolk. The aim of establishing a Taskforce is to explore how we can put in place further measures to enhance environmental stewardship, recognising the need for balance with other urgent social and economic priorities and the costs on businesses and taxpayers involved with taking action in this area.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 It is proposed that Cabinet establishes an Environment and Climate Change Taskforce to consider how best to continue to embed environmental factors across West Suffolk Council's activities.
- 2.2 The review will draw on activities we currently carry out; existing evidence; best practice from other areas; and research produced by other bodies, for example, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
- 2.3 In response to this evidence review, it is proposed that the Taskforce develops and appraises options for further action. This will include both specific proposals to directly address some of the issues and opportunities identified; and commissions for further work. This appraisal will also consider working with specific partner organisations and how to ensure any changes influence future council processes and decision making.



- 2.4 The proposed outputs from the Taskforce are expected to be delivered to Cabinet through a staged approach:
- Interim report in autumn 2019
 - Final recommendations in 2020

This timing allows an extended period over the summer and autumn 2019 for evidence gathering, recognising the scale of the issues and the importance of engagement with partners and stakeholders.

- 2.5 Draft Terms of Reference for the Taskforce are attached at Appendix A.

3. Alternative options

- 3.1 The alternative option is to not establish a West Suffolk Environment Taskforce. However, this could mean that West Suffolk would miss the opportunity to review and assess its existing activities and future opportunities in response to increased societal awareness of environmental issues.

4. Consultation and engagement

- 4.1 As well as receiving input from all Councillors, with their diverse experiences of working in their Wards, the Taskforce will take evidence from other stakeholders, for example, public sector partners, businesses, town and parish councils, third sector organisations and community representatives, in order to ensure a comprehensive range of views are taken into account.

5. Risks

- 5.1 Presentational risk: not being seen to respond to declaration of a Climate Emergency.

Mitigation: being clear we believe there is an issue but want to respond in an evidence and factual based way identifying through the Taskforce the issues for West Suffolk so we can take meaningful and sustainable action to best help tackle the challenge rather than taking a symbolic stand.

6. Implications arising from the proposal

- 6.1 Any new proposals developed as a result of the review will be subject to Equality Impact Assessments.
- 6.2 A financial appraisal will be completed to assess the cost implications of all new proposals.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 **Appendix A:** Draft Terms of Reference for the West Suffolk Environment Taskforce
- Appendix B:** West Suffolk Environmental Activity Summary

8. **Background documents** Not applicable

