

Environment and Climate Change Task Force – Updated Proposal

Proposed title of group: West Suffolk Environment and Climate Change Taskforce

Purpose of group: To make recommendations to Cabinet on West Suffolk Council's future role in protecting and enhancing the environment, both in the way in which it carries out its operations and through specific initiatives.

The review will consider how best to continue to embed environmental considerations into future decision-making, alongside wider social and economic factors. This will be brought together in an informed and considered action plan.

The review will be evidence-led and the recommendations will take account of the key features of West Suffolk as a predominantly rural area, including the existing activities and commitments of partners in these areas.

As set out at the Council meeting on 19 September 2019, the Taskforce recommendations will be the first part of the Council's response to declaring a Climate Emergency across West Suffolk.

Background: A significant amount of West Suffolk Council's activities already actively protect and enhance the environment. However a number of recent reports and events have highlighted the importance of considering further measures to enhance environmental stewardship, not least in the area of carbon emissions and climate change. This includes the recent government target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The review will build on the existing ambitions of the council to ensure we continue to "encourage and invest in ambitious growth that all can access and benefit from, and that is good for local people and the environment", as set out in Strategic Framework. This will require recognising the wider national and global objectives that guide how we operate. We already work with partners to develop our existing shared ambitions, such as those of the Green Suffolk programme through the three existing Suffolk partnerships:

- Climate change
- Waste
- Flood risk management.

The areas of focus for improving environmental stewardship include the following, drawn from 'A Green Future' the Government's 25 year Environment Plan:

- Clean air
- Clean and plentiful water
- Thriving plants and wildlife
- A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought
- Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently

- Enhanced, beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment
- Mitigating and adapting to climate change
- Minimising waste
- Managing exposure to chemicals
- Enhancing biosecurity

The potential for West Suffolk Council to take action splits roughly into five areas:

Internal

1. **Mitigate** the current environmental impact of council activities that deliver services to the communities
2. Put in place measures to **adapt** as far as possible to effects of climate change (such as more extreme weather conditions)

Largely External

3. **Actively support residents, communities and businesses** to make behavioural choices that mitigate or adapt to the impacts of climate change
4. **Investment in energy infrastructure**
5. **Protect and monitor** components of our environment as part of the statutory duties of a local authority

Our internal activities also serve to set an example to our communities.

The role of the Taskforce will be to make recommendations to Cabinet on areas of potential future focus, in response to the evidence of current and future environmental challenges and existing activities.

Terms of reference (ToR):

1. To **review** the evidence base relating to:
 - a. the current priorities for environmental protection and enhancement in West Suffolk and the associated actions that could be agreed by Cabinet to respond to these priority issues
 - b. the long term protection of specific aspects of West Suffolk's natural and built environment and enhancing the health and resilience of our communities when facing environmental threats
This will build upon the statutory obligations and the ambitions already agreed on a national and local level
2. Use the evidence to **identify** the priority areas on which to focus whole-council action at a given time, recognising that there is finite resource, and activities to make West Suffolk greener in the long term cannot all take place at once. This can characterise the amount of focus and actions for:
 - a. The council-wide policy framework
 - b. Specific service areas or public campaigns
 - c. The Council's purchasing decisions, including energy
 - d. Working with specific partner organisations and neighbouring local authorities

- e. Understanding the role of the council to influence and lead behavioural change across West Suffolk

3. To **develop and appraise options** for:

- a. The actions the Council would have to take to be net-zero carbon by 2030; and
- b. How best to address findings from 2 above; and
- c. How environmental considerations can best be included in future council processes, policies and decision making, (including investment decisions) which could include developing an Environmental Policy Statement.

These options will be appraised in terms of their deliverability, affordability and practicality, including their impacts and wider implications.

4. To **make recommendations** to Cabinet for how to take forward the preferred options from 3 above.

Timescale: The Taskforce will take a staged approach to evidence gathering, engagement and focus on key topics, due to the scale of the issues and the importance of engagement with partners and stakeholders. Terms of reference will be presented to Cabinet in July 2019. In order for the Taskforce to shape the direction of the Local Plan and Strategic Framework, initial findings and feedback will be presented to Cabinet in autumn 2019. Final Recommendations will be made to Cabinet in 2020 in order to ensure that community and member feedback can be fully taken into account.

Governance:

Governance arrangements along the lines of the following are proposed. Feedback from Cabinet members on these proposals is particularly welcomed:

The Chair and Taskforce members will be appointed by the Leader of the Council. It is anticipated that the Taskforce will be run in such a way as to include a wider group of Members and other stakeholders.

Taskforce meetings shall be scheduled to take place at College Heath Road in Mildenhall or West Suffolk House in Bury St Edmunds, however members are welcome to join meetings via videoconference or Skype to reduce Member journeys required.

Meetings will be 'paperless' where it is possible for Members to access the relevant reports and information online. Papers will only be sent to members when specifically requested.

Quorum:

The quorum level for the Taskforce shall be 4.

Access to Information:

As a non-decision making body, the normal Access to Information Rules do not apply to the working group.

Officers should endeavour to make clear to members of the Taskforce where matters under discussion are confidential, and should be treated by Members privy to the information as such.

Officer support:

The Corporate Policy Team will provide research and policy development support to the Taskforce. The taskforce will be supported by the Democratic Services Team and a range of other teams who will provide evidence and advice, for example, Growth, Energy and Environment, Waste and Operations and Procurement.

Consultation and engagement:

The Taskforce will take evidence from Councillors and external stakeholders, including partners, stakeholders, community groups, residents and businesses as it considers appropriate. This evidence gathering is likely to include a survey of environmental attitudes.