

Cabinet

10 February 2021

A Corporate Environmental Statement, Management System and Governance

Ordinary Decision



Report of Corporate Management Team

**Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and
Climate Change**

**Councillor Brian Stephens, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for
Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To set out a statement of environmental ambitions for the County Council.
- 2 To approve the adoption of a nationally recognised environmental management system and accreditation through Investors in the Environment to ensure robust processes and performance management discipline are integrated into driving improvements.
- 3 To consider strategic governance arrangements, that will help lead in the corporate coordination of environmental activity in fulfilment of these ambitions, especially those linked to climate change.

Executive summary

- 4 The County Council has a wide variety of plans and strategies related to the environment, for example Climate Change Emergency Action Plan, Single Use Plastics, Cycling and Walking Strategy, Sustainable Procurement, as well as commitments made in the Local Plan and County Durham Vision. It is now timely to consider how these plans work together and to set out a summary statement of it the Council's environmental aspirations, encompassing existing and future plans, within which initiatives, targets and benefits can be identified and addressed.

- 5 This report provides for consideration an overarching environmental statement that fulfils this. It is set out in a few pages and the ambitions contained in it will be reflected in the Council's values and its relationships, both internally and externally. The statement is set out in Appendix 2.
- 6 It is important to recognise that the development of a variety of important environmental plans, some of which are nationally recognised as developing best practice, has continued at pace. The introduction of an overarching statement will provide immediate and long-lasting benefit by reinforcing an overall and unifying commitment.
- 7 An effective environmental policy is dependent on a clear and practical delivery mechanism and an Environmental Management System (EMS) is an established process for achieving this.
- 8 The nationally recognised Investors in the Environment (IiE) management system has been developed to record, monitor and improve all environmental aspects of organisational operations leading to an auditable, externally verified accreditation. By adopting this system, the Council will achieve and measurable demonstration of environmental performance.
- 9 It is recognised that the Council's greatest environmental challenge is that of reducing its carbon emissions, and through a partnership approach fostering a reduction in emissions across the County. The report to Cabinet in February 2019 detailed an ambitious Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP). Significant progress has already been made against this plan and an annual progress report will shortly be published. There is an opportunity to align the work of the CERP with the EMS through a common governance framework.
- 10 Overseeing the implementation of the EMS and the CERP will be the responsibility of a senior-officer level Net Zero Carbon Board under the leadership of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change. This board will be supported by operational and policy workstreams from across the organisation to ensure delivery is achieved.
- 11 The board will also play a pivotal role in relating corporate activity to externally based initiatives that are being developed through the recently re-established Environment and Climate Change Partnership. This comprises county-wide external stakeholders working with the Council to achieve environmental outcomes and operates under the auspices of the County Durham Strategic Partnership.

Recommendations

12 Cabinet is requested to:

- (a) endorse a new corporate Environmental Statement and agree to implement it across all Council services (Appendix 2);
- (b) agree to the introduction of an Environmental Management System to manage and record progress, and accreditation through the national Investors in the Environment (IiE) accreditation scheme;
- (c) support the establishment of a cross-service mechanism to drive the delivery of the Environmental Statement along with the existing Climate Emergency Response Plan and other key environmental commitments through the introduction of a corporate Net Zero Carbon Board.

Background

- 13 The County Council's work and reputation in tackling environmental issues is excellent, with national recognition in its work for example ranging from carbon reduction, fly tipping, environmental cleanliness waste management and horticulture.
- 14 Much of the success has arisen from bespoke policies, and action plans in delivering a plethora of projects and initiatives. These plans might range from example Climate Change Emergency Action Plan, Single Use Plastics, Cycling and Walking Strategy, Sustainable Procurement. Part of the Local Plan and County Durham Vision also express aspects of the Council Vision.
- 15 The establishment of a single overarching policy statement regarding the environment will provide recognition and co-ordination of initiatives as being inter-connected and part of an overall environmental purpose.
- 16 Increasingly it is recognised, that delivering environmental objectives is a corporate responsibility. Nowhere is this more evident than in the delivery of the Climate Change Emergency Response Plan approved by Cabinet in February 2019 and involving all service groupings across the County. There is a need to enshrine this corporate working in our internal governance arrangements and additionally have mechanisms in place to monitor and review performance, benchmarking against others where necessary.
- 17 This report therefore sets out:
 - i) an over-arching environmental statement which sets out Council ambition;
 - ii) an outline of an environmental management system proposed to be adopted as a tool for assessing and improving environmental performance.
 - iii) an outline of internal governance intended to deliver on the foremost challenge of carbon reductions;

Environmental Statement

- 18 To date environmental management and reporting has developed across a number of separate fronts. Bringing these together into a single management system will provide for a more holistic view of progress. As a result, a new policy and delivery document has been produced to embed environmental performance and improvement activities it into existing strategic management and decision-making processes.

19 The new statement encompasses key emerging issues including the climate emergency, single use plastics and critical declines in biodiversity. It will enable issues to be prioritised, focussing on aspects of activity where the council can have the greatest impact whilst being broad enough to capture the range of environmental impacts and issues that the Council is facing.

20 The key ambitions are that:

Durham County Council recognises the importance of striving for and maintaining a high-quality environment and our responsibility towards it as being an integral part of our organisational duties and core values. It therefore commits to:

- *Take opportunities to improve environmental outcomes;*
- *Reduce the environmental impact of our operating methods and consumption of resources;*
- *Regularly monitor and continually improve our environmental performance;*
- *Ensure environmental impacts are understood within our decision-making processes and practices;*
- *Take a lead role on critical issues such as climate change, single-use plastic reduction, declines in biodiversity;*
- *Raise awareness of and encourage environmentally positive behaviours and best practice;*
- *Work with and support others to protect and improve our natural environment.*

21 A copy of the full environmental statement, including sections detailing responsibilities and principles is included in Appendix 2.

Environmental Management System (EMS)

22 An effective environmental policy is dependent on a clear and practical delivery mechanism and an Environmental Management System (EMS) is an established process for achieving this. Investors in Environment (IiE) is one such system, nationally recognised accreditation scheme providing independent audit and advice which is utilised by Business, Industry and Local Authorities alike.

23 A specialist independent assessor has carried out an audit of council activities and plans for the environment against a nationally recognised environmental standard; 'Investors in the Environment'.

- 24 The audit, which involved interviews with 35 strategic managers, assessment of a variety of existing plans and strategies, also made a series of recommendations which are being utilised for improvement plans. Whilst this is the most important aspect of the work, their assessment has also revealed that we are currently at a Silver (middle standard: (Bronze low, Silver progressing, Green achieved highest standard). This can perhaps be taken as good news, recognising that the Council is already achieving a lot, but also highlighting that there is scope for further improvement.
- 25 Based on the value and benefits of this one-off audit, it is suggested that the system be adopted, and consistent with policy there is a strive for further improvement. Managing the implementation of the EMS will be the responsibility of a cross-service environmental management workstream of technical leads reporting to the Net Zero Carbon Board.

Governance

- 26 Overseeing the implementation of the new policy will be the responsibility of a senior-officer level Net Zero Carbon Board under the leadership of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change. It will be supported by operational workstreams of internal technical leads, including an environmental management workstream, to ensure delivery is achieved.
- 27 The board will also play a pivotal role in relating corporate activity to externally based initiatives that are to come forward from the recently established Environment and Climate Change Partnership. This comprises county-wide external stakeholders working with the Council to achieve environmental outcomes and operates under the auspices of the County Durham Strategic Partnership.
- 28 The Net Zero Carbon Board will not have decision making powers, but will be instrumental in fulfilling Council vision, policy and plans in this area, with reports to Cabinet, Council and Scrutiny Boards as appropriate.

Conclusion

- 29 This report seeks to provide a single overarching environmental policy statement, which links together both existing and future plans and strategies, expressing the Councils broad commitment to this important issue.
- 30 It outlines new internal governance arrangements to further drive and coordinate a corporate approach to reducing carbon emissions and introduces an environmental management system (Investors in

Environment) as an important tool to ensure systems are in place to deliver on the ambitions.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

It will improve our compliance on environmental issues.

Finance

£6,000 revenue budget allocation for liE registration fees going forward on an annual basis.

Consultation

35 interviews have taken place with key internal services and managers have been engaged throughout the process. The resultant environmental statement, support for a management system, and initial plans are all in furtherance of this statement.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

No issues. In the unlikely event that individual actions will have issues, they will be addressed as part of the project.

Climate Change

The policy and liE will complement our work on climate change and will reduce climate impacts that are outside the scope of our carbon management plan. For example, reduced resource use and improved waste disposal will lower carbon emissions produced in raw material extraction but are outside the formal scope of our carbon management plan.

Human Rights

No Issues.

Crime and Disorder

No Issues.

Staffing

There will be some staff time required from across the Authority to deliver the work, notably with Low Carbon Economy and Service Performance management teams.

Accommodation

No Issues.

Risk

The proposal reduces risk of environmental consequences.

Procurement

The Procurement team has been involved and will continue to be engaged with the project.

Appendix 2: Environmental Statement

Durham County Council's Environmental Statement

Durham County Council recognises the importance of striving for and maintaining a high-quality environment and our responsibility towards it as being an integral part of our organisational duties and core values. We will therefore:

- Actively identify and take opportunities to improve environmental quality and outcomes throughout our activities;
- Reduce the environmental impact of our activities, operating methods and production and consumption of resources;
- Regularly monitor and report on environmental indicators and continually improve our environmental performance;
- Ensure environmental impacts and sustainability are understood and embedded within our decision-making processes, policies, strategies, projects and working practices;
- Comply with and endeavour to exceed all relevant certification standards, accreditations and regulatory requirements;
- Take a lead role on critical issues such as climate change, single-use plastic reduction, declines in biodiversity and ensuring a green, inclusive and resilient Covid 19 recovery;
- Contribute to tackling other global challenges we face as defined by the UN Sustainable Development Goals;
- Raise awareness of and encourage environmentally positive behaviours and best practice among employees, members, partners, those we commission work to, residents and our communities; and
- Work with and support others to protect, improve and connect County Durham's natural environment and natural capital.

Responsibility

Durham County Council's Cabinet and Corporate Management Team have overall, collective responsibility for the Council's Environmental Statement. The Net Zero Carbon Board will oversee and review its implementation. All employees, including those that work within schools and arm's length organisations are to abide by its principles, including when determining any locally specific environmental guidelines and when working with partners.

Key Principles:

Climate Emergency

All service areas and staff are responsible for responding to the climate emergency in their area of work in order to meet or exceed emission reduction targets, raise awareness of the climate emergency and ensure that we are best able to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Sustainable Procurement

The Council's commissioning and procurement activity will be undertaken in an economically, environmentally and socially responsible manner, taking into account whole life impacts and benefits of the contract along with the environmental and ethical credentials of suppliers.

Resources

The Council will proactively seek to avoid and minimise unnecessary resource consumption as a key part of its decision making and operational practices. Where resources, such as energy, water, minerals etc are required, these will be managed sustainably and will be kept in use for as long as possible, abiding by 'circular economy' principles.

Waste

The Council will avoid and minimise waste by encouraging employees, members suppliers, businesses and our residents to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost.

Sustainable Design and Construction

The Council will adhere to sustainability principles to ensure that the location, orientation, construction methods and materials, ongoing maintenance, refurbishment, operation and demolition of its buildings and infrastructure minimises impact on the natural and built environment and maximises resource efficiency. All new buildings will need to meet the requirements of the County Durham Plan and comply with the standards set out in all other relevant internal policy and guidance. The Council will seek to achieve the same standards for major refurbishment projects where viable.

Natural Capital

The council will seek to protect and enhance natural capital, across its estate, highways, woodlands, green and blue spaces and within decision making, ensuring that net gains in biodiversity are achieved, the most environmentally beneficial management regimes are adopted and pollution is prevented.

Transport and Air Quality

The council will work to reduce the environmental impacts of staff travel and seek innovative, sustainable solutions to travel and travel avoidance around the county, including the adoption of smarter working practices. Where travel is necessary, we will work to reduce the impacts from our own vehicle fleet and the use of officers' cars for business travel, including supporting the uptake of electric vehicles, bikes and roll out of Ultra Low Emissions Vehicle charging

infrastructure. The Council will also seek to embed walking, cycling and public transport use into County Durham's everyday travel culture and will pay particular attention to the implementation of measures within Air Quality Management Areas.

Festivals and Events

The council will be leaders in festival and event environmental responsibility, ensuring that we, organisers, traders and attendees comply with standards relating to marketing and promotion, waste reduction, reuse and recycling, sources of power, travel, food, pollution prevention and protection of public amenity and biodiversity.

Culture

The council will involve staff and members in the implementation of this policy for greater environmental accountability and improved performance. Staff and members will be provided with relevant environmental training and will be engaged through regular communication, sharing of performance information and activity. We will also work with suppliers, contractors, sub-contractors and our partners to encourage their environmental performance and will actively engage with our residents and communities to encourage and facilitate environmentally positive behaviour. This policy will be reviewed at least once annually in consultation with staff and other stakeholders where necessary.



Durham County Council - Cabinet

Durham County Council – Corporate Management Team

Appendix 3: Indicators

Council Wide Indicators

Tracking impacts across the whole of the authority:

- Mileage/Transport
- Carbon emissions
- Water consumption
- Renewable energy generated
- Procurement impacts, initially looking at spend on consumables but working on key contracts as they come up for renewal.

Building specific indicators

Looking at impacts from key buildings-County Hall, Crook, Green Lane, and Spectrum 8:

- Waste generated-general, recycling, other
- Electricity use
- Gas use/heat generation
- Water use

Natural Capital

The Council owns and/or manages a variety of land including, for example, woodlands, parks, nature reserves, amenity open space, highways verges, grazing land, playing fields etc. Whilst not currently available, this EMS will identify actions to better understand:

- The natural capital assets, benefits and services provided by our estate; and
- How our estate in its entirety and its management currently benefit biodiversity and how this can be enhanced.