



Committee	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Date	22/02/2024
Subject	REVIEW OF EAST SUFFOLK COUNCIL'S ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY
Cabinet Member	Cllr Rachel Smith-Lyte, Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment
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Key Decision?	No
Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN

Purpose/Summary

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide information to assist the Committee to understand and review the Environmental Impact theme of the new Our Direction 2028 Strategic Plan.
- Provide information to assist the Committee to understand and review the deliverability of the Council's strategy for the environment.

Recommendation(s)

That Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Having considered the report, make any recommendations as required.

Strategic plan

How does this proposal support Our Direction 2028?

Environmental Impact	This report relates to the delivery of the environmental impact theme of Our Direction 2028.
Sustainable Housing	This report indirectly relates to the delivery of priorities within the Sustainable Housing theme of Our Direction 2028.
Tackling Inequalities	This report indirectly relates to the delivery of priorities within the Tackling Inequalities theme of Our Direction 2028.
Thriving Economy	This report indirectly relates to the delivery of priorities within the Thriving Economy theme of Our Direction 2028.
Our Foundations / governance of the organisation	This report indirectly relates to governance for the delivery of Our Direction 2028.

Justification for recommendations

1. Background

1.1. The previous ESC Strategic Plan

The Council's previous Strategic Plan set out its vision to deliver the highest possible quality of life for everyone who lives, works in or visits the district. Within the theme of Caring for our Environment, the Council committed to lead by example, seeking environmental benefit in everything we do, working with communities for biodiversity and optimising the use digital solutions to reduce environmental impacts; to minimise waste, promote reuse and maximise recycling; to explore opportunities to invest in renewable energy solutions as a council and encourage others to do the same; and to use our influence and regulatory functions to protect our natural environment and coastline. This strategy was superseded by 'Our Direction 2028' in November 2023.

1.2. New ESC Strategic Plan: Our Direction 2028 (appendix A).

As reported at Full Council on 22 November 2023 and outlined within the accompanying papers:

The East Suffolk Plan 2019-23 was East Suffolk Council's first ever Strategic Plan. In nearing the end of its cycle, consideration was given to what was achieved as part of the Council's annual Strategic Plan report 2023, along with what was achieved over the whole lifetime of the Plan, considering what a new Plan could build on, accelerate and change focus on.

1.3. The new strategy 'Our Direction 2028' was drafted in response to these lessons. Our Direction 2028 is the Council's blueprint for success over the next four years. Our Direction 2028 is a strategic-level document and therefore it sets the path we are embarking on together, collaboratively, over the next four years. It establishes an ambitious approach, creating a golden thread and setting targets to help us deliver what we aim to achieve by 2028. Our Direction 2028 sets out a vision and four associated themes, under which several priorities have been defined.

1.4. Our Direction 2028 is the key document for the Council in setting the direction of East Suffolk Council for the next four years. Following on from significant consultation and further development and finalisation of Our Direction 2028, the Strategic Plan was presented to Council for its approval at Full Council on 22 November 2023.

1.5. Our strategic focus of the environment.

The Our Direction 2028 vision is 'Our aim is to promote a bright, green, open, free, and fair future for all East Suffolk'. Our Direction 2028 has four core themes which includes an 'Environmental Impact theme' which set its vision as 'delivering positive climate, nature, and environmental impacts through the decisions we make and actions we take'.

1.6. Within the Environmental Impact Theme there are eight priority topics:

- a. **Continued commitment to net zero by 2030.**
- b. **Supporting sustainable transport.**
- c. **Restoring ecosystems and biodiversity.**
- d. **Support, promote and implement green tech.**
- e. **Work in partnership to manage coastal adaptation and resilience.**
- f. **Focus on reduction, re-use and recycling of materials.**
- g. **Encourage food self-sufficiency.**
- h. **Preserve and maintain the district's beauty and heritage.**

1.7. ESC's ongoing net zero commitment

On 24 July 2019 (Full Council agenda item 9(a)), the Council resolved unanimously to:

- Declare a climate emergency
- Set up a cross party Task Group, commencing by October 2019, to investigate ways to cut East Suffolk Council's carbon and harmful emissions on a spend to save basis, with ambition to make East Suffolk Council (including all buildings and services) carbon neutral by 2030.
- To work with Suffolk County Council and other partners across the county and region, including the LEP and the Public Sector Leaders, towards the aspiration of making the county of Suffolk carbon neutral by 2030.
- To work with the government to:
 - a) deliver its 25-year Environmental Plan, and
 - b) increase the powers and resources available to local authorities in order to make the 2030 target easier to achieve. The Environment Task Group was formed as a cross-party Task Group

1.8. As we have pledged to become a carbon neutral council by 2030 – which also means we will look for environmental benefit in everything we do – this includes radical changes to our vehicle fleets, business mileage usage plus energy used by council buildings and leisure centres to ensure they contribute to our carbon neutral aims. We have also implemented digital solutions to further minimise our carbon footprint.

ESC declared a climate emergency to reinforce our commitment to the environment. This commitment was reinforced by the environment being a key principle of the previous and current strategic plans, underpinning our work as an authority.

As ESC produces less than 1% of Suffolk's carbon emissions, our focus has been on our most powerful role – engaging with the public and using our powers, duties and networks to encourage climate positive behaviours.

Our focus on restoring nature and increasing biodiversity has also been a key area of work, as this plays a fundamental role in the response to climate change, so is closely interlinked.

1.9. Legislation related to this theme

There are a number of pieces of Government legislation and policy in place to support the delivery of East Suffolk's climate aspirations and objectives, which are:

- UK Climate Change Act 2008: Legally binding 2050 net zero target.
- Biodiversity Net Gain: mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) to be delivered by all development, introduced through the 2021 Environment Act and came into force in January 2024 and phasing through stages of implementation starting with smaller developments.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies: Associated with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) delivery to be prepared by Suffolk County Council with a supporting role for district councils.
- Building Regulations: Part L changes deliver a 30% improvement on energy efficiency above previous 2013 standards. Future Homes Standard would represent 75-80% improvement.
- Transport: Ban on combustion engines in new cars from 2035. 'Decarbonising Transport' (2021) understood that decarbonisation will be informing next round of Local Transport Plans (prepared by SCC).

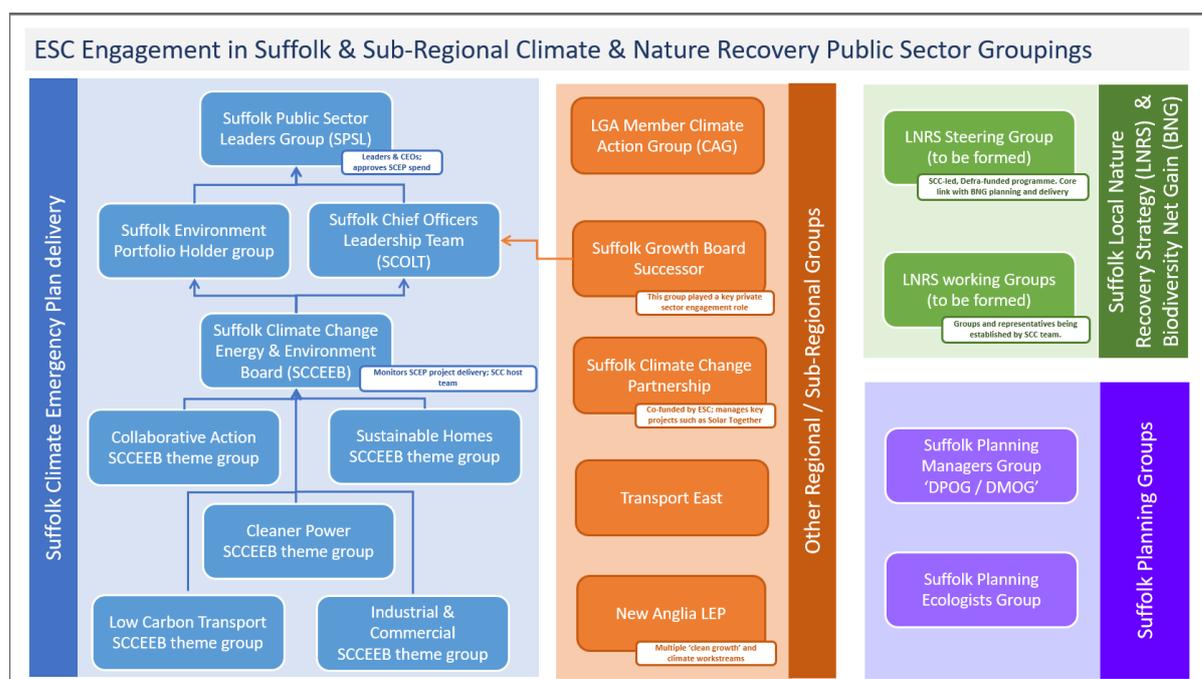
1.10. There are further pieces of Government legislation and policy in place to support the delivery of East Suffolk's climate aspirations and objectives, key examples of which are:

- Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006.
- Environmental Protection Act 1990.
- Potential 2023 Procurement Act secondary legislation.
- Habitats regulations 2010.
- Water Resources Regulations 2015.
- Environmental Permitting Regulations 2016.
- 25 Year Environment Plan.

1.11. Collaborations and partnerships with other organisations.

There are a range of groups working across the district and County addressing the climate change and nature emergencies. These are shown below. ESC is either an active

member of these groups or is indirectly involved.



1.12. As an ambitious council, despite limits to the resources, funding and powers available to District Authorities, East Suffolk Council publicly committed to collaborate with other local and national organisations to urgently address climate change.

Examples include working with partners to address important national issues such as low carbon transport and decarbonising private homes.

East Suffolk Council supports the 2030 net zero target for Suffolk as a whole by tackling emissions from the wider sectors of transport, business, industry and households. To do this we are an active partner in the delivery of the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, such as by helping households install energy reduction measure use through the 'Warmer Homes' programme, co-funding the Solar Together scheme and supporting business to decarbonise through our net zero grant programme. East Suffolk Council is also committed to supporting the delivery of HM Government's 25 year Environment Plan.

1.13. Delivering the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan

East Suffolk Council has been working with other authorities since 2007 as part of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership.

In 2019, all Suffolk authorities declared a climate emergency and a net zero target of 2030 was set. The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group (SPSL) gave approval to develop the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, which was published in 2021. SPSL then approve annual funding for projects to deliver a programme of work to tackle the climate emergency in Suffolk, which is now being delivered.

The Suffolk Climate Change Energy & Environment Board (SCCEEB) and its subgroups were formed to deliver the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan and report to SPSL via the portfolio holders and Suffolk Chief Officers Leadership Team (SCOLT) groups.

1.14. Enabling community action: The Greenprint Forum.

The Greenprint Forum's important work also helps support the delivery of our environment core programme, plus the wider Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan in addition to the independent work of its member groups and organisations.

1.15. What resources are available?

As this is a very broad area of work, resources and funding come from a wide range of sources. Most Service Areas are working on environment and climate-related projects utilising their existing teams in addition to delivering statutory duties and services. Examples within our core programme include:

- **Operations:** Overseeing the delivery of the range of services delivered by East Suffolk Services LTD (ESSL), ranging from waste & recycling, grounds and habitat management and decarbonising the fleet and our built assets.
- **Housing:** Delivering the low carbon ESC developments and retrofitting our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) properties.
- **Communities:** Delivering the leisure centre decarbonisation programme and supporting communities through the ES Forum to address climate and environment issues in their local area.
- **Economic Development:** Giving direct funding support to enable low carbon businesses, supporting delivery of the East Suffolk Clean Hydrogen Strategy and delivering exemplar sustainable regeneration projects.
- **Planning & Coastal Development:** Engaging with major renewable energy projects, delivering biodiversity net gain, developing innovative Planning guidance such as our Sustainable Construction Supplementary Planning Document (2022) and East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy aims plus delivering resilience and adaptation to climate risks on our coast.
- **Environmental Services & Port Health:** The wide range of duties delivered, ranging from addressing air quality, fly tipping and waste incidents and the work of the climate change and sustainability team.

1.16. What funding is available?

The majority of the existing work addressing climate change and the environment is delivered within existing budgets. Ringfenced reserves have also been utilised, which were put in place to deliver the previous ESC strategic plan priorities.

However, it should be noted that much of the discretionary work related to climate and environment is not funded through core funding and is therefore dependent on significant external funding from public and private services. Therefore, the work of Economic Development's funding team is essential alongside other officers delivering funding bids across the organisation.

1.17. What other Local Authorities are doing? (benchmarking)

Although most local authorities are addressing the nature and climate emergencies,

there is a large variation between how they are responding. District councils, vary significantly in their district's emissions profile, alongside geographic and socio-economic variations. For example, ESC is situated in one of the driest regions of the UK, with one of Europe's fastest eroding coastlines, which presents a unique set of issues. This means that it is challenging to benchmark progress.

However, when reviewing other district and borough authorities' responses, it is clear that ESC is ahead of the curve in its strategic approach. A key example of this is Climate Emergency UK's 2023 ranking of East Suffolk Council's climate change response.

Most councils have now declared a climate emergency, and 85% have formulated climate action plans. One in five LAs do not have a climate action plan. Following a detailed review covering a range of ESC's work addressing climate change and wider environmental challenges **ESC was ranked the 12th best district council in the country** on its response. Details can be found on Climate Emergency UK's website here: [Council Climate Action Scorecards | Climate Emergency UK \(councilclimatescorecards.uk\)](https://councilclimatescorecards.uk)

We are also benchmarking data such as our recycling rates which are included in our public Environment KPI dashboard.

In addition, ESC has been a very active collaborator alongside other local authorities across Suffolk and is an active participant in a number of county and regional delivery groups. These include the Suffolk Climate Change, Environment and Energy Board and Suffolk Climate Emergency Programme. This is a fundamental part of our response, as addressing a macro challenge such as climate change requires effective partnership working across sectors. Data on Suffolk's progress addressing the climate emergency can be found on the public dashboard here: [Suffolk Observatory – Environment – Suffolk Climate Emergency Dashboard](#).

2. Answers to Overview & Scrutiny Committee questions.

2.1. Committee question 1: Are there any differences between the previous strategy for the environment and the new one in Our Direction? If so, what implications will there be of these changes in direction?

There are a number of points of synergy and divergence when comparing the previous and current strategic plans. The environment priorities in the previous ESC strategic plan and current Our Direction 2028 Environmental Impact priorities are compared in the tables below:

	Previous ESC Strategic Plan Environment Priorities	Included in new plan's Environment Impact priorities?
1	Lead by example, seeking environmental benefit in everything we do, working with communities for biodiversity.	No
2	Optimising the use digital solutions to reduce environmental impacts.	No
3	Minimise waste, promote reuse and maximise recycling.	Yes: 'Focus on reduction, re-use and recycling of materials'.

4	Explore opportunities to invest in renewable energy solutions as a council and encourage others to do the same.	Yes, technically: 'Support, promote and implement green tech'.
5	Use our influence and regulatory functions to protect our natural environment.	No.

Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact priorities.		Included in Previous ESC Strategic Plan Environment Priorities?
1	Continued commitment to net zero by 2030.	No (this was a separate strategic commitment).
2	Supporting sustainable transport.	No.
3	Restoring ecosystems and biodiversity.	Yes.
4	Support, promote and implement green tech.	Yes, technically: 'Explore opportunities to invest in renewable energy solutions as a council and encourage others to do the same.'; Optimising the use digital solutions to reduce environmental impacts.
5	Work in partnership to manage coastal adaptation and resilience.	No
6	Focus on reduction, re-use and recycling of materials.	Yes 'Minimise waste, promote reuse and maximise recycling'.
7	Encourage food self-sufficiency.	No.
8	Preserve and maintain the district's beauty and heritage.	No.

The potential implications of delivering the new Environmental Impact priorities are listed in the table below:

Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact priorities		Implications
1	Continued commitment to net zero by 2030.	No new implications – this continues to be reliant on external funding.
2	Supporting sustainable transport.	No significant new implications beyond limited additional officer resources and funding if work is to be expanded.
3	Restoring ecosystems and biodiversity.	No significant new implications unless a significant expansion of activities is required / new projects are initiated.
4	Support, promote and implement green tech.	No significant new implications based on the scope of the priority as currently outlined in the document.

5	Work in partnership to manage coastal adaptation and resilience.	No significant new implications anticipated beyond predicted increase in coastal impacts from climate change.
6	Focus on reduction, re-use and recycling of materials.	No significant new implications anticipated based on the Our Direction 2028 priority description, beyond incoming national requirements.
7	Encourage food self-sufficiency.	This is a new priority so may require modest additional resource and funding to realise depending on scale of ask.
8	Preserve and maintain the district's beauty and heritage.	Work in progress - this is a new priority and any significant new implications will depend on how this is defined further and how it can be addressed by existing and future plans and policies.

2.2. Committee question 2: Who has been consulted on the Our Direction Environmental Impact theme, or are there any plans for consultation?

As reported at Full Council on 22 November 2023 and outlined within the accompanying papers:

Whilst the Our Direction 2028 themes were initially developed by the GLI group, including an initial set of priorities, much has happened in way of consultation with all Members, Officers, residents, and stakeholders to further develop and finalise the themes and priorities outlined in Our Direction 2028.

This consultation included:

- **All Member briefing and ongoing discussions across all political groups.**
- **Strategic Plan discussion at Overview & Scrutiny Committee in September 2023.**
- **Corporate Leadership engagement sessions.**
- **Online CEO staff briefings.**
- **Staff engagement roadshows.**
- **Press release and launch of an online survey for residents and stakeholders to complete.**
- **Letters sent to key stakeholders asking for feedback.**

Feedback from staff and Members included clarification questions, suggested improvements in language, merging of and additional priority suggestions, alongside a significant number of ideas for action in terms of how the Plan can be subsequently delivered over the next four years.

Feedback from residents and stakeholders included a total of 380 online survey responses, with 89% of these responses coming from residents in the district.

Interestingly areas of the survey also aligned with internal staff and Member feedback regarding additional priorities, clarification of language and ideas for action in terms of

delivering this Plan. This feedback has been addressed as part of the finalisation of Our Direction 2028.

2.3. Committee question 3: What plans are there for meeting each of the eight objectives in the Our Direction Environmental Impact strategy?

It should be noted that most of the Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact priorities are being delivered in some form. As the plan was recently approved by Full Council, work is now taking place to define the scope and action plan for delivering these priorities.

The first step, which is currently underway, is to establish the internal governance and leadership of each Our Direction 2028 themes. Current chairs of the strategic plan delivery teams are being consulted on their recommended ways forward, which will be considered and agreed upon by the relevant Members and senior officers.

When the governance approach has been agreed, these groups will then agree the scope, create and seek approval for the detailed action plans.

Existing work addressing these priority areas through statutory duties and services plus our discretionary projects continue but with renewed vigour under the new Our Direction 2028 strategic plan.

2.4. Committee question 4: How will progress of deliverability be measured and by whom?

As reported at Full Council on 22 November 2023 and outlined within the accompanying papers:

To govern the direction of the Strategic Plan as a steering document, work has been undertaken to evolve the current governance framework to continue to provide oversight of overall performance and delivery against the Strategic Plan. This achieves several aims:

- **Oversees the programme of work feeding into each theme.**
- **Steers the activities of the Council to ensure they are delivering to the plan.**
- **Monitors progress of delivery to the key priorities within each theme.**
- **Monitors, understands, and challenges performance.**
- **Monitors risks which may compromise delivery of strategic objectives.**

Governance arrangements will include the development of an annual action plan that will contain the high-level programme of work that the Council will undertake to deliver against its strategic themes and how we will monitor to ensure the Council is moving in the right direction.

The governance arrangements will also continue to include clear Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) at a strategic level, that will be regularly monitored, reported and available to internal and external stakeholders.

Progress against this action plan will be reported annually in the form of an annual report.

Organisationally, to ensure the “golden thread” of the Strategic Plan runs throughout the organisation, annual service planning linked to the themes of the strategic plan, and its underlying governance structure, will be in place and complimented by service-level performance and appraisals.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1.** The issues covered in this report have the potential to have a significant impact on the council’s finances, depending on whether or not actions that address these issues to be addressed by existing budgets, with the need for additional external funding to be sourced to deliver these priorities.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1.** As a Planning Authority, ESC does have a statutory duty to ensure at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain is delivered by developments in the District.

5. Risk Implications

The Council’s Corporate Risk Register already identifies the issues addressed in this report as areas of corporate risk. These main areas of risk are:

- 1. Reputational;** an inability to effectively meet our own carbon neutrality commitments could impact on the council’s ability to engage effectively with those it needs to influence through leadership; in turn risking the wider prize of Suffolk-wide carbon neutrality.
- 2. Financial;** an inability to tackle the council’s consumption of energy in the course of its pursuit of carbon neutrality could mean that future financial benefits of reduced Grid dependency are not realised.

6. Options

- a. Continue to move forward with the development and delivery of Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact theme.**
- b. Recommend changes in approach to the development and delivery of Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact theme.**

7. Recommendations

That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, having considered the information in this report, provides feedback on the Council’s approach to the development and delivery of the Our Direction 2028 Environment Impact theme.

8. Reasons for Recommendations

The environment and responding to the nature and climate emergencies continues to be a key pillar of the Council’s strategic direction. Due to its importance, we will continue to give regular updates on the Council’s work to address delivery of this core theme - these will be provided to Cabinet, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and other key groups where appropriate.

As the need to react to environmental challenges continue, the delivery plan will continue to play a significant role. This is a broad and significant challenge for all Local Authorities, which can only be addressed through open, active and productive collaboration, both internally and with key partner organisations. On its own, East Suffolk cannot solve the challenge but can play an important role in finding solutions.

The recommendation to the Committee to consider the progress to date developing the governance and plan for delivering Our Direction 2028 and offer feedback is put forward with the aim of ensuring we are delivering on the ambitions set out in the Council's strategic plan. This will help ensure we are responding to both the challenges and opportunities for our communities.

Areas of consideration comments

Section 151 Officer comments:

Not Applicable

Monitoring Officer comments:

Not Applicable

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion/EQIA:

Not Applicable

Safeguarding:

Not Applicable

Crime and Disorder:

Not Applicable

Corporate Services implications:

(i.e., Legal, Finance, Procurement, Human Resources, Digital, Customer Services, Asset Management)

Not Applicable

Residents and Businesses consultation/consideration:

Not Applicable

Appendices:

Appendix A	Our Direction 2028
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Background reference papers:

Date	Type	Available From
22 Nov 2023	Full Council papers	CMIS > Meetings (Item 9 refers)