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| Subject: | State of the Local Environment Report | | |
| Date of Meeting: | Cabinet January 19, 2012 | | |
| Report of: | Strategic Director, Place | | |
| Lead Cabinet Member: | Cabinet Member for Environment & Sustainability | | |
| Contact Officer: | Name: | Thurstan Crockett | Tel: 29-2503 |
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| Key Decision: | No | Forward Plan No: N/A | |
| Ward(s) affected: | All | | |

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 A State of the Local Environment (SOLE) report has been produced by the council's Sustainability Team, working to the City Sustainability Partnership (CSP). It provides a snapshot of the current state of the local environment in Brighton & Hove and of the city's impacts on the wider environment. The report has been developed using a wide range of existing data and information from the council and external organisations such as the Environment Agency. It will help focus work under the council's priority to create a more sustainable city by using a One Planet approach to improving the environmental performance of both the council and the city.
- 1.2 The report is intended to provide a key part of the evidence base to shape city commissioning priorities and plans, and specific commissions that address the issues highlighted. It is part of a suite of reports including the State of the City and health's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which gives us a comprehensive picture of the city in order to make decisions and assess progress in the future. It does not provide any explanations or policy prescriptions, just a presentation of the facts.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the State of the Local Environment report and, at Appendix 1, the key environmental issues highlighted by it and the plans in place to tackle these.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

3.1 In July 2010 The City Sustainability Partnership commissioned the production of the first State of the Local Environment report for Brighton & Hove. It contains some stark messages about the city's environmental quality and trends which need addressing for the city to become more sustainable:

- Our ecological footprint is high and our CO₂ emissions are reducing no faster than anywhere else
- The impacts of climate change locally are not well enough understood
- We produce significantly less renewable energy than leading cities
- Local air quality is getting worse at some roadside locations.
- The overall status of our groundwater is poor, due to over-use; and though its quality is good, it is at risk of deterioration.
- Bathing water quality worsened in 2010 and wastewater (including sewage) is still pumped out to sea (though from March 2013 new treatment facilities at Peacehaven will be operational)
- The amount of waste thrown away by households has increased, while the recycling rate fell in 2009
- Open and natural greenspace in the city will be in short supply (i.e. not in line with recommended standards) according to future population estimates
- The last assessments of our nature reserves indicated that none were being managed to their full potential
- The majority of our farmland is leased out and under intensive agricultural use; it is not clear how this land is managed under environmental stewardship
- Allotment waiting lists remain long, despite measures to provide more half plots

More detail is provided on these issues and the plans in place to tackle them, in Appendix 1.

3.2 Though performance against many indicators shows that there are some persistent and ongoing challenges, others are more positive:

*Sites of Special Scientific Interest are the country's very best wildlife and geological sites - we have two within the city. These are rated as being in "favourable condition" which means that the land is being adequately conserved for their special qualities.

*The demand for & interest in allotments in the city is high & the number of plots per 1,000 households is currently 22. The National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners suggests a national standard of 20 allotments per 1,000 households.

*Six of the city's 36 parks & recreation grounds of significance in the city were awarded Green Flags in 2011. This is in recognition for their environmental standards & the service they provide for their communities.

*One in eight of our residents uses a bus service regularly for journeys to work. Bus patronage has increased from 30.2 million journeys in 2001 to 41.1 million in 2009/10.

- 3.3 The SOLE was produced to provide the city with an honest snapshot of the environment locally and of the city's environmental impact, based on all the available data. The summary version – much of which also appeared in the State of the City report – is at Appendix 2, and the full report will be available on the council's website.
- 3.4 For the CSP, the reasons for producing the report were to:
- provide an evidence base to inform commissioning priorities and delivery programmes and to help prioritise action
 - provide us with a snapshot of the health of the environment and maintain baseline information in order to monitor direction of travel
 - identify gaps in information and explore options for data collection into the future, especially in the context of the Local Area Agreement indicators being abolished nationally
 - form an important part of raising environmental awareness across the city
 - bring together the evidence base for environmental quality in one place so it is easily accessible and clearly demonstrate our relative environmental performance
- 3.5 Developing the state of the local environment report has highlighted that there are some significant gaps and weaknesses in information and data for helping us understand our environmental impacts. This includes:
- renewable energy generation data is weak
 - data highlighting the links between the health and wellbeing of the population to the environment is weak and it is difficult to attribute due to many influencing factors
 - information describing the condition of the countryside and specific habitats is lacking
 - the way farmland is managed is not clear and there is no information about what happens with the produce that is grown locally and where its end destination is
 - construction, demolition and commercial waste data is largely not available due to commercial sensitivity
 - we lack data on how sustainable our local economy is
- 3.6 The summary report and the full report will be available on the council's website, with relevant links to the City Sustainability Partnership WebPages and the Brighton & Hove Strategic Partnership website. The summary report provides a useful and interesting overview for the public as well as partners and officers. The full report provides comprehensive information to highlight data and information available and can be used for needs assessments and general information to inform decisions, policy and commissioning plans. The report has been developed in such a way that it can be refreshed going forward to track direction of travel.
- 3.7 The report provides a snapshot and new data will constantly become available, although it should be noted that the CSP is not resourced to periodically update the report. For example, since the report was compiled there has been a review of the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study. This now reflects the

requirement up to 2030 (which has slightly lowered the additional open space requirement as the estimated future population has gone down).

- 3.8 Additional benchmarking information for some of the key issues highlighted in the report will be sought and where available included in the summary over the next few weeks.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Throughout the development of the report, officers across the organisation were engaged and consulted regarding information available, information to be included and how this was to be presented within the document. This includes the following internal service areas: performance team, housing, public health, environmental health, sports development, countryside, ecology, ranger service, arboriculture, transport, city clean, planning, property, planning conservation and economic development. The Environment Agency provided a significant amount of information and Southern Water were consulted on accuracy and content. The City Sustainability Partnership was engaged in the whole process and received regular update reports at the partnership meetings. The draft report was uploaded onto the consultation portal in June 2011 and CSP members were given the opportunity to comment and provide feedback.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Funding was provided through the City Sustainability Partnership to support the work to develop the SOLE report and action plans. Funding to support implementation of the plans within Appendix 1 will need to be considered within the financial plans for the Council and Partner organisations. The Council's budget proposals (Cabinet 8 December 2011) set out sustainability implications and include additional investment of £0.15m in sustainability initiatives in support of the One Planet approach. Funding options are being considered to meet plans to trial food waste collection.

Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley

Date: 14/12/11

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 The report itself is purely for noting, and there are no legal implications arising directly from it. However, there may be legal implications associated with the plans listed in Appendix 1, and these will need to be considered as and when authority is sought for implementation.

Lawyer Consulted: Oliver Dixon

Date: 16/12/11

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 An equalities impact assessment has been carried out on the City Sustainability Partnership and a report and checklist are being produced for the partnership to consider.

5.4 Sustainability Implications:

Sustainability means protecting and enhancing the environment, meeting social needs and promoting economic success. The city is not becoming more sustainable unless environmental performance improves. Previous Sustainable Cities Index reports by Forum for the Future have shown the city performing well overall for sustainability, but with environmental performance below many other UK cities: the latest index (2010) showed the city coming 2nd out of 20 for Quality of Life, 4th for Future Proofing, but 14th for environmental performance.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 There is some national study evidence of an increase in crime and disorder during heatwave periods and this needs to be considered as part of the work to improve city planning for the local impacts of climate change.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 There is a council strategic risk (SR8: Becoming a more Sustainable City) agreed by the Strategic Leadership Board in November 2011 and reported to Audit Committee which has a role to monitor the effectiveness of arrangements to manage the risk, including internal controls.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 Environmental factors are known to influence the health and wellbeing of the population – for example, the beneficial effects of good access to green spaces on mental health, and the detrimental effects of air pollution, such as particulate matter, on respiratory disease. However, the relationships between these factors are complex and there are other influences on health outcomes such as mental health and respiratory illness. Therefore it is difficult to find single measurable indicators which show the health impacts attributable to environmental factors alone. The health and wellbeing chapter of the SOLE aims to highlight the influence of the local environment on health by highlighting measures that are known to impact on the health and wellbeing of the population.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 The SOLE is all about the city-wide picture of the environment here and has been specifically commissioned by the CSP to draw attention to the big local environmental issues. This is so decision-making, commissioning plans and service delivery have a clear environmental context and should lead to overall improvements in the city's environment and its track record in reducing environmental harm. Key environmental measures highlighted in the SOLE are also included in the City Performance Plan.

6. **EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

- 6.1 The SOLE could have focused only on the quality of the city's environment and not on its impacts. This would have been a very traditional model and most similar reports these days cover both. The CSP also wanted this wider picture to be clearly set out.
- 6.2 There was an option to commission external consultants to produce the report. It was felt this would be more costly, would provide no better outcome and might in fact have been less comprehensive and thorough than a report produced in partnership locally by a member of the council's Sustainability Team.
- 6.3 The report could have been produced earlier, but it was felt that publication post-local elections in 2011 would be less likely to be at risk of influence or become a political football. The CSP felt it would be more helpful to produce this snapshot near the beginning of the new administration's term of office.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 One of the council's top priorities is creating a more sustainable city. Cabinet needs to know what the big environmental issues locally are and consider whether the right plans are in place to tackle them and so make the city more sustainable.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Key issues arising from SOLE and plans in place to tackle them.
2. Summary – State of the Local Environment

Documents in Members' Rooms

State of the Local Environment report (full version) www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/state-of-the-local-environment

Background Documents

1. State of the Local Environment report – Brighton & Hove full version www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/state-of-the-local-environment
2. State of the Environment – South East England [Environment Agency] – <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/library/publications/34103.aspx>
3. State of the City – Summary report on Brighton & Hove Local Information Service <http://www.bhlis.org/news/item?itemId=65>
4. Forum for the Future's 2010 Sustainable Cities Index: http://www.forumforthefuture.org/sites/default/files/images/Forum/Projects/Sustainable_Cities_Index/Brighton_Sustainable_Cities_Index_2010.pdf