

Brighton & Hove City Council

Cabinet

Agenda Item 107

Subject: Circular Economy Routemap and Action Plan 2025-2035

Date of meeting: 22 January 2026

Report of: Cabinet Member for Finance & City Regeneration

Lead Officer: Head of Cabinet Office

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the 2nd iteration of the Circular Economy Routemap and Action Plan 2025–2035 (as detailed in Appendix 1). The Routemap sets out the strategic framework for embedding circular economy principles and practices across the city, supporting delivery of the Brighton & Hove City Council Plan 2023–2027 (a city to be proud of, a fair and inclusive city and a healthy city that helps people thrive) and the commitment to achieve net zero carbon (see Appendix 2).
- 1.2 It responds to local economic challenges by promoting resource efficiency, waste reduction and green business growth, while also aligning with national policy developments, including the forthcoming Circular Economy Strategy for England and wider government commitments to a green industrial transition.
- 1.3 Adoption of the Routemap will provide a clear policy direction for the Council and its partners, helping to ensure coordinated action to build a fairer, more resilient and sustainable local economy in line with the ambitions set out in the city's Economic Plan. It also builds upon the progress with the city's circular economy programme to date.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Circular Economy Routemap and Action Plan 2025-2035 as the strategic framework for embedding circular economy principles across the city and to inform council activity.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agrees to Brighton & Hove signing the Circular Cities Declaration to reinforce the city's role as a national and regional leader in circular innovation.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 There are wider economic, social and environmental challenges that can constrain the potential for Brighton & Hove to achieve its growth potential. These include the cost-of-living crisis, a shortage of affordable and fit-for-purpose commercial and industrial space, persistent inequalities across the city, and the urgent need to cut carbon emissions. Together these issues are impacting productivity, investment and competitiveness.
- 3.2 The Circular Economy Routemap and Action Plan 2025–2035 provides a strategic framework to address these challenges by embedding circular principles across council operations, local business ecosystems, and community initiatives. Building on the progress achieved since the adoption of the original Routemap in 2020, this refreshed plan sets out a coordinated policy response aligned with key Council Plan outcomes and national policy developments on net zero, resource efficiency, and sustainable growth.

Council Plan Alignment

- 3.3 The Circular Economy Routemap strongly aligns with the Council Plan, directly supporting delivery across all four strategic outcomes, including:
 - **A city to be proud of:** the Routemap helps to advance the council's net zero ambitions, improving waste management, enhancing the natural environment and positions Brighton & Hove as a leader in the circular economy.
 - **A fair and inclusive city:** identifies initiatives that reduce inequality, foster community-led circular projects and supports efforts to build cost-of-living resilience.
 - **A healthy city that helps people to thrive:** the Routemap will help to create new green jobs, strengthen education and skills development and supports work to improve health and wellbeing through developing a greener, more sustainable economy.
 - **A learning council with well-run services:** helps to drive innovation, strengthen cross-council working and partnerships and supports responsible resource management.
- 3.4 The work also closely aligns with the Brighton & Hove Economic Plan 2024–2027 and its mission to decarbonise and create a more regenerative economy. It will help to address key economic challenges such as affordability, commercial space constraints, and low business scale-up rates. It outlines how circular economy approaches—such as reuse, repair, remanufacturing, and regenerative design—can unlock new revenue streams and opportunities for local businesses, reduce environmental impact, and build long-term economic resilience through future-proofing operations.

Strategic Role of the Programme

- 3.5 The Circular Economy Programme provides an overarching framework to monitor and accelerate the growth of circular activity across Brighton & Hove. While the Routemap sets out a visionary direction, the accompanying Action Plan delivers practical steps to raise the profile of circularity and embed it into everyday practice. By working collaboratively with stakeholders across sectors, the programme positions Brighton & Hove as a regional leader in circular innovation—acting as a catalyst for economic growth and resilience. As the circular economy expands, its influence will extend across

the region, enabling new start-ups, fostering industrial symbiosis, and creating conditions for sustainable investment. This approach aligns with the ambitions of the emerging Mayoral Combined Authority, ensuring that circularity becomes a driver of inclusive growth and competitiveness.

Benefits of the Programme for the City

3.6 The benefits include:

- Economic Growth and Investment: Establishes Brighton & Hove as a safe and attractive destination for future investment in green innovation.
- Job Creation and Skills Development: Supports the creation of high-quality green jobs and upskilling opportunities, helping to diversify the local workforce and strengthen resilience.
- Affordability and Cost-of-Living Resilience: Circular practices such as reuse, repair, and sharing schemes reduce household costs and improve access to affordable goods and services.
- Regional Leadership: Positions the city as a hub for circular innovation, influencing policy and attracting funding through strong governance and partnerships.

The Approach

3.7 The Routemap sets out four key strategic objectives that build on progress to date and has been developed collaboratively with stakeholders across priority sectors:

- **Maximise council influence to drive circular demand:** for example, exploring the potential to embed circular procurement requirements in all major Council contracts—such as reuse targets, repair obligations, and low-waste construction standards—to stimulate market demand for circular goods and services.
- **Build strategic partnerships for greater impact:** for example, seeking to establish a cross-sector Circular Innovation Partnership with universities, anchor institutions, and local businesses to pilot circular solutions in food, textiles, and construction.
- **Create the right conditions for circular business growth:** exploring the potential to develop a Circular Business Support Programme offering specialist advice for startups and SMEs adopting reuse, remanufacture, and materials-efficiency models.
- **Influence regional and national policy to unlock circular opportunities:** work with regional authorities including a future Sussex and Brighton Mayor and national networks to advocate for policy changes—such as fiscal incentives for reuse, consistent recycling standards, and funding for circular infrastructure—to enable city-wide scale-up.

3.8 The Routemap prioritises key sectors with the greatest potential for circular transformation—construction and the built environment, the visitor and creative industries, food systems, and digital innovation—supporting new models of production, consumption, reuse, remanufacturing and repair. It is supported by a robust monitoring framework that applies clear milestones and measurable indicators—such as tracking the number of circular businesses supported into new markets—while using light-touch, low-

resource methods like annual partner reporting and short automated surveys to ensure progress remains transparent and accountability is maintained across all actions. By fostering collaboration between businesses, research institutions, and communities, the Action Plan seeks to enhance productivity, retain value within the local economy, and position Brighton & Hove city as a leader in a future regional hub for circular innovation and sustainable prosperity.

Circular Innovation and Collaboration

- 3.9 The council's leadership role is reinforced through active participation in national and regional networks, including DEFRA's Circular Economy Pathfinders and Taskforce, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Circular Cities Stand-Up, and collaboration with ReLondon and other pioneering local authorities. These partnerships enable Brighton & Hove to share best practice, access technical expertise, and align with cutting-edge national policy developments in resource efficiency, reuse, and waste reduction.
- 3.10 Continued engagement in these networks strengthens the city's capacity to pilot innovative circular projects, attract investment, and influence national direction on circular policy and funding. This collaborative approach ensures that Brighton & Hove remains at the forefront of the circular transition, benefitting from shared knowledge, data insights, and opportunities to scale innovation across the wider region – particularly with devolution on the horizon. Through this approach, the city aims to strengthen local economic resilience by creating high-quality green jobs, stimulating innovation in circular business models, and reducing reliance on finite resources.
- 3.11 Over the past six years, Brighton & Hove has secured significant national and European funding to accelerate its circular economy transition. This includes the [EU Interreg Blueprint project](#) (£450k, 2020–2023), which supported scalable pilots in communities, materials recovery, and sustainable procurement, and the National Lottery Climate Action Fund – [Climate for Communities](#) (£1.3m, 2025–2028), which is empowering neighbourhood initiatives such as repair cafés, reuse hubs, and sharing schemes. These programmes have strengthened partnerships with universities and local enterprises, delivered measurable reductions in waste and carbon, supported local jobs, and laid the foundations for major initiatives such as the regional Horizon-funded South East of England Hub for Circularity – helping to position Brighton & Hove as a leader in circular innovation.

Skills, Workforce and Economic Growth

- 3.12 The Circular Economy Programme is not only an environmental initiative—it is a driver of inclusive economic growth. By fostering new business models such as reuse, repair, and remanufacturing, the programme creates opportunities for green jobs and entrepreneurship. Working with universities, training providers, and industry partners, the Action Plan will deliver targeted upskilling programmes to equip residents with the skills needed for emerging circular roles. This approach supports workforce diversification by opening pathways for underrepresented groups and ensuring that local talent benefits from the transition to a low-carbon economy. In doing so, the programme strengthens Brighton & Hove's position as a regional hub for

innovation and investment, aligning with the ambitions of the Mayoral Combined Authority for sustainable growth.

Communications

3.13 A communications and media plan will be developed to:

- Build citywide understanding of what the Circular Economy is and means for Brighton & Hove, moving it from an abstract concept to a relatable programme
- Introduce more residents and businesses to a circular economy way of thinking and working and support behaviour change
- Demonstrate circular economy principles in action within the council and with partners in the city
- Position Brighton & Hove as a national leader in circular economy practices.

3.14 Communications will be delivered by the central communications team, linking in across services and with the Council Plan delivery.

Circular Cities Declaration

3.15 The Circular Cities Declaration (CCD) is a high-profile European initiative bringing together over 80 cities committed to transitioning from a linear to a circular economy. There are currently only 3 [signatories](#) in the UK (Glasgow, London Borough of Newham and Wolverhampton).

3.16 By joining, Brighton & Hove will gain access to a collaborative network of pioneering cities, expert-led learning opportunities, and preferential access to funding and innovation programmes. It would also enhance the city's international visibility, enabling the Council to showcase its circular achievements and influence policy development at regional and national levels. The declaration supports light-touch reporting and provides a shared framework for monitoring progress, fostering accountability, and continuous improvement.

3.17 Signing the CCD presents a strategic opportunity for the council to reinforce its leadership in sustainability and accelerate delivery of the Circular Economy Routemap and the council's Carbon Neutral 2030 commitments. The CCD brief is provided as Appendix 3 to this report.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

Option 1: Stop the circular economy programme

4.1 Ceasing the circular economy programme would have a number of potential implications:

- Loss of strategic direction: Without a coordinated programme, the city would lack a clear framework to guide circular economy initiatives, resulting in fragmented efforts and missed opportunities for systemic change.
- Reduced national leadership: Brighton & Hove has been recognised as a circular economy pathfinder by DEFRA. Ending the programme would undermine this leadership and diminish the city's influence in shaping national policy.

- Missed funding and investment: The programme has unlocked past external funding opportunities. Discontinuation would risk losing future investment and partnership opportunities.
- Negative environmental impact: The programme supports the city's Net Zero and Climate Action Plans. Halting it would slow progress in reducing Scope 3 emissions and waste and weaken resilience to climate impacts.
- Economic and social costs: Circular initiatives support local businesses, reduce cost-of-living pressures, and create green jobs. Ending the programme would limit these benefits.

4.2 As such, this option is not recommended due to its significant negative impact on environmental, economic and social outcomes.

Option 2: Reliance on service-level actions without an overarching framework

4.3 Not adopting the Circular Economy Routemap would mean that activity may continue, but the lack of an overarching framework would bring a number of potential implications:

- Lack of coherence and coordination: Service-level actions may be well-intentioned, but risk duplication, inefficiency, and inconsistent outcomes without a shared strategic framework. This has the potential to increase costs to the council.
- Limited scalability and innovation: The absence of a citywide Routemap would hinder cross-sector collaboration and innovation, reducing the potential to scale successful pilots and attract external funding.
- Weakened monitoring and accountability: Without a unified action plan, it becomes difficult to track progress, measure impact, and report outcomes to stakeholders and funders.
- Reduced visibility and engagement: A fragmented approach would dilute the city's messaging, which is likely to reduce public and business engagement with circular economy principles.

4.4 Accordingly, whilst service-level actions are important, it is strongly recommended that they are guided by the strategic framework set out in this report to maximise impact and ensure alignment with citywide goals.

5. Community engagement and consultation

5.1 The Routemap has been informed by wide-ranging engagement with local stakeholders, including businesses, community organisations, academic institutions and national circular economy policy organisations (including DEFRA, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and ReLondon).

5.2 Targeted workshops and sector-specific consultations have shaped the priorities and actions set out in the plan. Ongoing engagement will be undertaken during delivery through established networks, forums and community initiatives to ensure that a wide range of voices continue to inform and support implementation.

5.3 A collaborative approach is crucial in driving the sustained impact and innovation that the Routemap seeks to support.

6. Financial implications

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. Activities relating to the Circular Economy programme will be covered by existing budget resources. The majority of actions within the Circular Economy Routemap and Action Plan will be delivered by external partners, supported by existing networks and funded programmes. Council involvement will primarily focus on coordination, monitoring, and enabling activity, which can be managed within current resources. Some officer time will be required for governance, stakeholder engagement, and communications, but this is expected to be absorbed through existing roles. Where specialist input or additional capacity is needed, opportunities for external funding and collaboration will be actively pursued to minimise any direct financial impact on the council.

Name of finance officer consulted: Ishemupenyu Chagonda Date consulted (11/12/25):

7. Legal implications

7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report. When seeking to implement the circular economy principles proposed by this report, the legal implications arising from such proposals will need to be considered as part of decision-making on future projects.

Name of lawyer consulted: Siobhan Fry Date consulted (19/12/25)

8. Risk implications

8.1 Failure to adopt the refreshed Circular Economy Routemap and Action Plan may result in missed opportunities to address local economic, social and environmental challenges, including the potential to weaken the council's ability to meet its Net Zero targets.

8.2 There is also a risk that without a clear framework, local businesses and partners may face uncertainty when adapting to emerging national policy and regulatory requirements.

8.3 Delivery risks include limited availability of funding, capacity constraints and an over-reliance on external partners.

8.4 These risks can be mitigated through the strong governance provided by the circular economy programme, a collaborative approach and alignment to the emerging national circular economy strategy.

9. Equalities implications

9.1 The circular economy programme supports inclusive economic growth through helping to create accessible training, employment and community opportunities. The Action Plan helps to address social inequalities by

supporting community-led initiatives (such as the Circular Communities project), working collaboratively to create opportunities for green skills and jobs, as well as reducing cost-of-living pressures through reuse, repair and sharing schemes.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 It is anticipated that implementation of the Circular Economy Routemap and Action Plan 2025–2035 will make a significant contribution to achieving the Council’s Carbon Neutral 2030 target and wider sustainability objectives. By embedding circular principles such as resource efficiency, reuse, repair, remanufacturing, and regenerative design across council operations, local business ecosystems, and community initiatives, the Routemap promotes a shift from a linear ‘take-make-dispose’ model towards one that keeps materials and products in use for longer. This approach is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, minimise waste generation, and optimise the use of natural resources.
- 10.2 In addition, the Routemap will enhance the city’s climate resilience and environmental quality by supporting sustainable construction practices, encouraging low-carbon consumption patterns, and enabling community-led circular initiatives that build local capacity and neighbourhood resilience. The actions set out in the Routemap will also deliver co-benefits for health, wellbeing, and inclusive economic growth by helping to create green jobs and strengthening local supply chains. Collectively, these outcomes will support Brighton & Hove’s transition to a more sustainable, low-carbon, and resource-efficient economy.

11. Other Implications

Crime & disorder implications:

- 11.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report. However, the Circular Economy Routemap supports wider social benefits, including community cohesion, access to affordable goods and services, and opportunities for training and employment. These outcomes may contribute indirectly to reducing social inequalities that can be associated with crime and disorder.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The Circular Economy Routemap and Action Plan 2025–2035 provides a clear strategic and coordinated framework for embedding and delivering circular principles across Brighton & Hove. It supports delivery of the Council Plan 2023–2027, contributes to the city’s net zero target, and responds to local economic and environmental challenges.
- 12.2 Adoption of the Routemap will strengthen the city’s resilience, unlock external funding and investment, foster inclusive economic growth, and ensure alignment with emerging national policy. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the refreshed Circular Economy Routemap and Action Plan 2025-2035 as the strategic framework for embedding circular economy

principles and practices across the city, and endorses its adoption to inform council policy, procurement, service design, and partnership activity, thereby enabling the continued delivery and progression of the Circular Economy Programme.

- 12.3 It is also recommended that Cabinet agrees to sign the Circular Cities Declaration, helping to cement Brighton & Hove's position as a leader in circular innovation in the UK.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

1. Circular Economy Routemap and Action Plan 2025-2035
2. Council Plan Alignment
3. Circular Cities Declaration Brief

