

Cabinet – 18 December 2019

Response to the Climate Change Emergency

Portfolio: Leader of the Council

Related portfolios: Not applicable

Service: Programme Management

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: Yes

1. Aim

- 1.1 Following the notice of motion on 16th September 2019, which declared a climate change emergency in Walsall, the Council is committed to becoming a net zero carbon authority by 2050. These aspirations fit well with the Council's long held priority of valuing and respecting Walsall's built environment and natural green spaces. To inform this work, the Council will develop a clear strategy to achieve efficiencies, adapt effectively and take advantage of the opportunities this agenda may bring for the people, communities, and businesses of Walsall.

2. Summary

- 2.1. Walsall Council declared a climate change emergency on 16th September 2019. The accompanying notice of motion recognised that:
- Climate change is having a marked impact on the lives of the people of Walsall and of the world.
 - The impact of climate change is a real threat to the world's future and there is a responsibility on all of us to reduce the negative impact from activities upon the environment.
 - As a Local Authority the Council have a negative impact on the environment through the use of fossil fuels, energy wastage, inefficiencies in insulation of Council buildings, the reliance on diesel fuelled vehicles and machinery etc.
- 2.2. In accepting that there is a climate emergency the Council resolved to develop strategies to reduce carbon footprint, and commit to becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

- 2.3 In the weeks since the notice of motion, work has been taking place to plan the actions the Council require to achieve carbon neutrality. These are not the beginning of the Council's efforts; a strong history of delivering against environmental objectives provide an excellent foundation from which to continue progress.
- 2.4 This report sets out a proposed way forward for Cabinet to consider, and which would enable the Council to deliver against its vision to become carbon neutral by 2050. As part of the Council's considerations, the views of Cabinet are sought on:
- The development of a new Climate Change Action Plan for the Council.
 - Extending existing, and building new, partnership solutions with local and regional partners, including the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to share best practice, align resources and expertise, develop the West Midlands response and actively promote the #WM2041 campaign.
 - The acceleration of funding bids to a range of grant giving bodies (e.g. Government, EU and Lottery sources) to deliver a series of measures to have a positive impact on both the Council and borough's carbon footprint.
 - The additional resources required to implement the action plan for the Council to deliver its vision.
- 2.5 The priority is on the Council becoming carbon neutral by 2050, however as a local authority an important role to play is also to engage, educate and support the local community to live, work and visit Walsall in a smarter, more sustainable way.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the progress, and work already underway to reduce the Council's carbon footprint.
- 3.2 That a Climate Change Action Plan be prepared by June 2020 based on the Council becoming a net zero carbon authority by the year 2050.
- 3.3 To note that carbon neutrality by 2050 is a significant commitment and resource implications will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration by June 2020.

4. Report detail - know

Policy Context

- 4.1 The Climate Change Act 2008 established a legally binding target on the UK to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% in 2050 (compared to 1990). In 2017, the Clean Growth Strategy was introduced for public and higher education sectors, with a voluntary target aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2020/21. The UK subsequently became the world's first major economy to legislate a commitment to net zero emissions by 2050 (thus amending the Climate Change Act) in June 2019.

- 4.2 The 25 year Environment Plan was launched in 2018, setting out the Government's vision to improve the environment within a *generation* "*leaving it in a better place than we found it*", and improving the UK's air and water quality, and protecting threatened plants, trees and wildlife. The 2019 Environment Bill aims to deliver on this vision, by setting out urgent and meaningful action to improve air quality, resource and waste management and environmental governance. The Bill points to a new environmental relationship between local and national government, with potentially a greater responsibility sitting with councils and specifically in their roles as Local Planning, Highways and Drainage Authorities.
- 4.3 The Local Government Association declared a climate emergency at its Annual General Meeting in July 2019 and agreed to establish the Climate Emergency Network Special Interest Group, to support councils and lobby central Government. Within a month, more than half of the UK's local authorities had declared a "climate emergency" to galvanize support for the climate change agenda and set a clear target to become carbon neutral.
- 4.4 In June 2019, the WMCA declared a climate emergency and resolved to establish a regional target for carbon reduction supported by a practical action plan for delivery. In July 2019, the WMCA Board pledged a commitment that the region will reach net zero carbon emissions by no later than 2041. In January 2020, WMCA intend to publish a #WM2041 green paper response to the climate emergency declaration, designed to act as a first stage in a programme of collaboration, engagement and policy development to address climate change in the West Midlands. The Council will continue to play a key role working alongside regional partners to tackle climate change and has committed to an achievable 2050 target in line with the Government.

Carbon Reduction: Progress to date

- 4.5 Walsall Council first demonstrated its commitment to tackle climate change when it signed the Nottingham Declaration in November 2006. The authority soon adopted a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, which considered the actions it needs to take in response to the challenge of climate change. Although considerable progress has been made since the original Carbon Management Programme, changing Council priorities has left a gap in capacity to drive the agenda forward. The authority recognises that a new action plan, backed by dedicated resource and one that aligns to partners, will achieve greater impact in addressing these issues.
- 4.6 Redressing poor air quality has long been a statutory function for the Council and is an important focus that spans multiple service areas. The Council's Transport in Walsall Strategy 2017-22 supports the promotion of Low Emission Zones and Ultra Low Emission Vehicles in accordance with the West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan, and takes the lead role in the regions Low Emissions Vehicle Strategy. The strategies set out key initiatives including more sustainable travel options to contribute to achieving the Black Country's target of reducing emissions by 44% by 2033.
- 4.7 In 2017, the Council adopted the Black Country Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document which sets out simplified guidance for dealing with air quality

and is aimed at all those involved in the submission and determination of planning applications where air quality needs to be addressed.

- 4.8 More recently, together with Dudley MBC, Sandwell MBC, Wolverhampton CC, Walsall Council was issued with a Ministerial Direction to consider air quality mitigation measures that could bring forward compliance with the National Air Quality Objective for nitrogen dioxide. The Black Country targeted feasibility study combined submission was completed on 31st July and the Council received a formal acceptance response from DEFRA on Friday 5th October 2018. It was recognised that the M6 J10 improvement works will go some way to address the air quality around the A454 Black Country Route and therefore Walsall Council were the only Council out of the five authorities not to be tasked with the implementation of air quality improvement measures.
- 4.9 In January 2019 the Council adopted the Walsall Site Allocation Document and Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan forming part of the Council's suite of planning documents. The Local Plan consisting of these plans along with the Black Country Core Strategy and saved policies of the Unitary Development Plan provide policies which seek to protect and enhance Walsall through sustainable forms of development that gives consideration to matters including the protection of open space, the safeguarding of protected wildlife species, sustainable drainage and flood risk mitigation, sustainable modes of transport and accessibility, and high quality housing amongst other factors which have positive impact on climate change. The review of the Black Country Plan is now underway and this will have further regard to the sustainable development and the governments emerging proposals in the Environment Bill and other planning regulations.
- 4.10 As part of the Walsall Plan 2019-2021, developing travel plans to encourage more active travel (and thus reducing carbon emissions) by the workforce is a priority. A Cross Council approach to the development of this is being taken for Walsall Council.
- 4.11 In 2019, the Council submitted a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) bid to MHCLG for the 'Smart Energy Masterplan' project totalling £6,309,390, with the outcome known in December 2019. The funding will enable the Council to implement a co-ordinated package of energy efficiency measures including the upgrade to LED street lighting and the installation of light / temperature sensors and transmission nodes for 4G/5G capability allowing for improved localised environmental and traffic monitoring. The project will also see the installation of seven electric vehicle-charging points in public areas and digital wayfinding measures to increase active and sustainable travel.
- 4.12 The four Black Country Local Authorities have recently worked collaboratively to submit a Black Country Electric Vehicle and Infrastructure Grant Scheme ERDF bid for £3,117,924 to enable cleaner transport options for private hire and Hackney carriage taxis and implement electric car charging at scale across the region. The bid is in early expression of interest stage with further work required to confirm detail for a final submission in 2020.
- 4.13 Walsall Council is a partner in the 'Black Country Blue Network' ERDF programme which received £1,162,866 funding during its first stage to improve local habitat quality and ecological networks along green and blue infrastructure. The Council

is part of a second bid to extend the project for an additional £4,141,941. Walsall is also part of a Black Country bid to become a world famous UNESCO Global Geopark, which recently received international backing ahead of a final decision in spring 2020.

- 4.14 Public Health have also worked with Pollution Control and NHS Walsall CCG to analyse local air pollution levels and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) hospital admissions and have found the two to be correlated, whereby when PM2.5 levels increase in Walsall, so do hospital admissions for COPD. This is being used to inform a proposed local research study which seeks to examine if air quality alerts can be used to help people manage their COPD better, and reduce the need for them to go into hospital.

- 4.15 The Council's corporate building energy efficiency is being driven in the design and refreshment works. In the last 5 years the Civic Centre complex has had a 50KW photovoltaic system installed to reduce the amount of energy the Council purchases. The internal areas have had the lighting replaced and improved by installing LED lighting, which also has occupancy detection, and day light dimming technologies incorporated.

A high-energy user were the air conditioning systems in the ICT suite, these have recently been replaced with new inverter drive systems, which will increase the efficiency in utility and maintenance costs. The replacement of the building management services (BMS) in the Council House has enabled more control of the existing heating system. Within the 2 Active Living Centres at Bloxwich and Oak Park there are combined heat and power systems which help on the reduction of the electricity consumption of these buildings. A smaller area where the carbon footprint and energy efficiency is taken into account is the purchase of white goods for the corporate buildings, this element is endeavoured to purchase only A or A+ rated electrical equipment.

- 4.16 In future there are a number of other schemes where the same ethos is applied, these will include a new heating and ventilation system for the Civic Centre all designed with A Rated boilers and more manageable heating controllers. To improve the thermal value of the Civic Centre there is a scheduled scheme to replace the windows to energy efficient units, the exact specification is still to be determined. The Council House heating system is also scheduled to be replaced, this will be incorporated with the new BMS for control and will improve the building heating performance.
- 4.17 The Council's energy purchasing process has recently changed, the authority has procured an energy brokerage to review the Council's usage and purchasing strategy, this will include risk strategy, buying options and the potential of green supplies. This brokerage will be linked to a new energy Bureau provider who will monitor usage and accuracy and give regular customised reports to the Council, including measurable elements that will be requested.
- 4.18 It is important that employees of Walsall Council play their part in securing energy efficiency. Facilities Management will be working with the communication team to deliver a monthly message to employees to encourage them to assist in the Council's energy efficiency drive.

Delivering the Vision: 2050 Carbon Neutrality

- 4.19 Government statistics highlight the changes in per capita carbon dioxide emissions for each local authority.¹ Figures shows that since 2010, Walsall's carbon emissions have reduced by 22.5%, lower than the Black Country average of 24.5%. Since last year, Walsall's carbon emissions have reduced by 1.5%. In Walsall, 29% of emissions come from industry and commercial sources, 35% come from domestic sources, and 37% come from transport. The same data ranks Brownhills, Walsall highest out of all 30 towns in the Black Country according to various environmental indicators such as accessible greenspace, heat island, water quality, woodland. Bloxwich and Darlaston, however, score poorly for 3 and 4 indicators respectively. The Council has come a long way, but there is still much more to do.
- 4.20 The Council declared a climate change emergency on 16th September 2019, and duly adopted a motion to identify measures through which the organisation can become carbon neutral by 2050 in line with the National target. 2050 is a long-term, but realistic and achievable, timescale to becoming carbon neutral. However, with immediate effect, the Council intends to step-up efforts to reducing carbon footprint through a series of local actions that will have a positive impact globally.

Development of a new Climate Change Action Plan

- 4.21 The Council has already made progress to reduce its carbon footprint, however without an overarching strategy or plan for carbon reduction there is no cohesive vision for achieving its target. It is therefore proposed that the Council prepares a new Climate Change Action Plan, which will set out immediate to longer-term actions that will need to be achieved if it is to become carbon neutral by 2050 and how the Council will engage and influence others to achieve the desired change.
- 4.22 The plan is a statement of commitment and accountability and will include a number of SMART measures to reducing the Council's carbon footprint. Examples of what this may include are:
- Climate change (physical environment) recognised as a priority within the Corporate Plan, and future updates of relevant service plans and policies.
 - A review of the costs and incentives for low carbon energy solutions in building, energy and maintenance programmes.
 - A review of fleet arrangements in accordance with green travel plans.
 - Measures to reduce consumption and increase recycling and reuse across services and operations.
 - A review and implementation of a sustainable procurement strategy and framework; ensuring staff are supported to minimise the impact of climate change through the services and contracts they procure in the borough.
 - Upgrade to LED lighting and other low-energy types as part of ongoing planned replacement programme.
 - Investigate hot and cold drinks and food and water consumption in Council buildings and measures to reduce single use plastics / containers.

¹ UK local and regional carbon dioxide emissions national statistics 2005-2017

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-carbon-dioxide-emissions-national-statistics-2005-to-2017> ,June 2019

- Staff awareness campaigns, making use of e-learning, team briefings, and weekly bulletins.
 - The promotion of sustainable and active travel arrangements for staff and changes of work style e.g. skype. Ongoing cross council support for the development of a Travel Plan to support this will be important.
- 4.23 The Council will align this plan with regional ambitions incorporating the key principles of the #WM2041 Plan where they support the Council's vision:
- Active travel and cleaner transport
 - Electric vehicle infrastructure
 - Eco-friendly homes
 - Clean air, breathable places, including tree planting
 - Behaviour change campaigns, including single-use plastics
 - Re-skilling and employment as a result of sector transitions
 - Business incentives, including 'green growth challenges'
 - Energy devolution combining sustainability with reduced fuel poverty,
- 4.24 It is proposed that a working group is established to develop the action plan and to ensure its vision is fully embedded across the Council as a whole. A lead must be identified with representation from all services. It is The Council's intention that the new action plan will be developed during 2019/2020 and will be formally approved by Cabinet by June 2020.

A Partnership Approach

- 4.25 The Council cannot singlehandedly deliver the necessary changes to make the authority carbon neutral by 2050. As such Cabinet's support is sought for the Council to work alongside local, regional and national partners to align planning, share best practice and expertise to have the greatest impact in reducing its footprint.
- 4.26 The Council can leverage regional collaboration by working closely with WMCA in the support and development of its own plans to reduce carbon emissions. WMCA have drafted an action plan that sits alongside the Council's commitments proposed in this report. It makes sense to align ambitions and to work together to make the case for investment into the region that is needed to bring about the desired change. The Council can learn from other Local Authorities through its Local Government Association membership and seek advice and guidance from experts in the field.
- 4.27 The Council is in a strong position to act as an educator and influencer for change within the borough. At the same time, much can be learnt from local communities. There are some outstanding examples of grassroots action taking place every day in Walsall. There is much to be proud of and the Council is keen to act as a facilitator, bringing together residents, community groups and businesses to influence change on a larger scale, reaching wider audiences and achieving greater impact through actions.
- 4.28 Walsall Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Group operates under the umbrella of Walsall Economic Board, and takes responsibility for the development and implementation of delegated work-streams. 'Environment and Green Spaces' is adopted as a strategic theme for the Group which currently has two high level

priorities: supporting Corporate Volunteering (Community Litter Picks) and the Walsall Against Single Use Plastic Campaign (WASUP). The Council seek to continue to utilise forums such as these to harness wider commitment and engagement, identify innovation, and benefit from expertise to shape future planning.

Funding, Resource and Capacity

- 4.29 The Council does not currently have a dedicated officer / resource to develop the action plan and interim arrangements should be identified. The required action will amount to a significant programme of work that can only be achieved if it is adequately resourced. Additional expertise will also be required across services to meet new statutory requirements placed upon the Council through the Environment Bill and other government programmes. Resource implications will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration by June 2020.
- 4.30 The External Funding Team will continue to identify new sources of revenue to reduce the financial pressure on the Council. Cabinet support is sought for the acceleration of funding proposals to achieve the Council's carbon neutral vision and to help reduce the carbon footprint of the whole borough.
- 4.31 The External Funding Team has identified a pipeline of Government, EU and Lottery funding opportunities to progress the climate change agenda. This includes a newly launched £100M National Lottery Climate Change Action Fund, that will enable people and communities to take the lead in tackling climate emergency and includes areas such as sustainable energy, sustainable transport, consumption, food and protecting and regenerating spaces and habitats. The fund encourages a cross-sector response and The Council aims to work closely with voluntary and community partners, businesses and residents to ensure the borough leverages additional resources to deliver carbon neutrality.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

- 4.32 Responding to climate change is critical to the future of the borough's quality of life and therefore is fully consistent with the 5 strategic priorities identified in the Council's Corporate Plan.

Risk management

- 4.33 There are well-documented risks associated with climate change and as such urgent steps in responding to these must be taken. The UK's Committee on Climate Change identified the top six climate change risks for the country: flooding and coastal change, risks to health and well-being, shortages in public water supply, risks to natural capital, risks to food production and new and emerging pests and diseases.

Financial implications

- 4.34 Further work is required to understand the cost implications linked to implementation of a Climate Change Action Plan. The External Funding Team will continue to lever additional revenue through bids to grant funding bodies and

detailed business cases for individual grant programmes will be brought forward through the appropriate governance processes.

It should be noted that there is an increasing financial risk to the Council if no action is taken. Climate change is linked to severe weather events e.g. flooding, which incur additional costs to the Council and increased risk of harm to residents.

Legal implications

- 4.35 The Council's actions must be consistent with UK and EU legislation and targets for climate change. As actions are developed consultation will take place with legal services to ensure that proposals are acceptable with National and EU rules and regulations.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

- 4.36 The Council's approach to procurement has a role to play in its response to climate change, and this will be aligned to the forthcoming action plan.

Property implications

- 4.37 A significant part of the Council's carbon footprint relates to the operation of Council buildings, particularly in relation to electricity and heating and this will be considered and outlined in the emerging action plan.

Health and wellbeing implications

- 4.38 It is widely acknowledged that the implications of climate change affect all sectors of the economy and can have a profound effect on personal behaviour and wellbeing. In particular, poor air quality is linked to mortality in the population with exposure to a specific pollutant (particulate matter) accounting for 5.5% of all deaths in Walsall. Health and wellbeing will be a key cross cutting theme in the development of actions and funding proposals.

Staffing implications

- 4.39 The Council should identify a lead officer who will coordinate work across services and partners.

Reducing Inequalities

- 4.40 Climate change affects all sections of society, however some groups may require additional support to make the necessary lifestyle and behavioural changes than others and this will be fully considered as part of the action planning process. Equality analysis will be undertaken against each proposed action.

Consultation

- 4.41 Further consultation is required to engage residents, businesses, and communities and outline proposals for how this will be done will be included in the emerging plan.

5. Decide

- 5.1 To develop and adopt a new Climate Change Action Plan that sets out how the Council will become carbon neutral by 2050, and how working with others will achieve the desired change.

6. Respond

- 6.1 The Council will prepare a Climate Change Action Plan, following which a series of business cases will be brought forward on each of the item it contains. The Council intend to return to Cabinet with a fully developed plan by June 2020.

7. Review

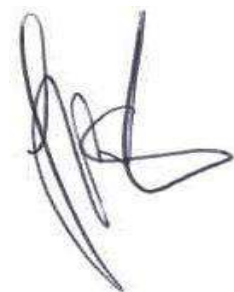
- 7.1 A working group will be established to gather feedback and evidence from all Council services and used to inform the development and delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan.
- 7.2 The Council will monitor achievements against measures set out in the action plan, which will include robust performance monitoring and reporting procedures.
- 7.3 The External Funding Team will monitor progress of funding applications against priorities set out in the action plan.

Background papers

Not applicable

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