

Economy and Environment OSC – 21 January 2021

Carbon Neutral Council

Portfolio: Leader of the Council

Related portfolios: Not applicable

Service: Economy, Environment & Communities

Wards: All

1. Aim

1.1 To set out the challenges the Council faces in working towards becoming a carbon neutral council by 2050

1.2 To agree the six themes that underpin and inform the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

2. Summary

2.1 This report sets out for Scrutiny the Cabinet decision in October 2020 to adopt a programme that will make the Council carbon neutral by 2050. The policy framework and an initial action plan (covering the period to 2025) follows on from the Council's previous decision to declare a climate emergency in September 2019.

2.2 The declaration of a climate emergency requires the Council to work in partnership to drive major change. An internal working group was established to shape the action plan and officers have engaged APSE Energy, Midland Energy Hub and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to develop an initial baseline of activity. Six key themes have emerged from discussions, which cover all areas of Council activity and help deliver a carbon free future:

1. Strategy (Taking the Lead)
2. Energy
3. Waste & Consumption
4. Transport
5. Nature
6. Resilience & Adaptation

2.4 This report gives an overview of the plan with an outline of activity in Appendix 1. To deliver the programme of work resource will be required and a business case will be created to integrate a fixed term Climate Change Programme Manager into the Clean and Green service structure as part the wider Proud Transformation Programme. The return on investment is substantial; it is estimated that energy saving initiatives will financially benefit the Council by £6million per annum by 2050.

2.5 Engagement with external partners and experts will continue to form a critical component of the action plan. WMCA recently launched #WM2041 Plan 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 required to bring about the desired change. The Council will need to engage with residents, businesses, schools and the wider community as part of a longer-term vision to decarbonise the region.

3. Recommendations

3.1 That Scrutiny note the contents of this report and the steps being taken to respond to the Climate Emergency Declaration.

3.2 That Scrutiny note the governance structure set out in the report to integrate a fixed term Climate Change Officer into the Clean and Green service structure as part of the wider Proud Transformation Programme.

4. Report detail - know

Context

4.1 In June 2019, the UK became the world's first major economy to legislate a commitment to cut emissions to net zero by 2050. The Environment Bill 2020 is one of the government's key vehicles for delivering the bold vision as set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan. It is part of a step-change in environmental protection and recovery, setting a new and ambitious domestic framework for environmental governance and one, which places greater responsibility on councils specifically in their roles as Local Planning Highways and Drainage Authorities.

4.2-Walsall Council declared a climate change emergency on 16th September 2019 and committed to becoming a net zero carbon authority by 2050. In 2020, the WMCA pledged a commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions no later than 2041 publishing "WM2041 – A Programme for Implementing an Environmental Recovery." The Council continues to play a key role working alongside regional partners to tackle climate change and is operating within the framework established by the UK Parliament.

4.3 The Cabinet approved in October 2020 i a climate emergency action plan to address the commitments of the declaration passed in 2019. The declaration set the target for the Council to become carbon neutral by 2050 encompassing its own assets and operations. To be clear the first phase of the Council's action plan will cover 'Scope 1' and 'Scope 2' emissions using best practice guidance as set by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol:

- **Scope 1** – All direct emissions from the activities of the Council or under the Council's control. Including fuel combustion on site such as gas boilers, fleet vehicles and air-conditioning leaks.
- **Scope 2** - Indirect emissions from electricity purchased and used by the organisation. Emissions are created during the production of the energy and eventually used by the organisation.

- **Scope 3** – All Other Indirect Emissions from activities of the organisation, occurring from sources that the Council does not own or does not control.

4.4 The plan sets out the initial opportunities the Council has identified to reduce carbon emissions relating to its own estate and operations but the authority recognises that this is only a starting point. The Council will continue to engage staff and stakeholders to expand the range of actions that will enable us to meet our target. The appointment of a fixed term Climate Change Programme Manager will enable this work to be accelerated and further funding obtained.

4.5 In order to meet the net zero target, the Council will need to ensure that reducing emissions and increasing resilience is central to its work, embedded within strategy and day-to-day delivery. The first phase of the action plan will cover a five-year period. There are established tools available to support carbon budgeting and reporting, and these will be utilised to set specific targets as individual project detail is developed.

Progress to date – baseline assessment

4.6 The Council’s carbon footprint of 17,872 tCO₂e from Scope 1 and 2 emissions has been calculated using data that was available to the Council during the reporting year (2018) including gas, electricity and fleet. The carbon footprint has been undertaken in accordance with best practise guidance by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol and calculated using 2018 conversion factors for the carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) published by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

Scope 1&2 carbon emissions by source for 2018

Emissions Source	Scope	% Split	TonnesCO₂e
Natural Gas	1	30%	5,406
Council Vehicles	1	6%	1,135
Electricity	2	64%	11,331
Total	-	100%	17,872

Emissions Source	% Split	TonnesCO₂e
Scope 1	37%	6,541
Scope 2	63%	11,331
Total	100%	17,872

4.7 It is estimated that there will be 3,482 tCO₂e from hard to reduce sources that will be unavoidable by 2050 that will need to be offset, and it assumed that this can be achieved through offsetting initiatives including tree planting schemes, solar energy and solar farm(s). It is estimated that energy saving initiatives will financially benefit the Council by £6million annually by 2050.

4.8 Although the net zero carbon target year is 2050, it is assumed that the majority of interventions could be in place by 2035 as ageing building services and vehicles should be upgraded by this point through routine maintenance. Likewise, the Government plans a ban on selling new petrol, diesel or hybrid vehicles in the UK by 2035. The Council should be able to achieve significant carbon and cost savings by reviewing its maintenance policies to specify highly efficient plant and services, and electric vehicles, rather than replacing like-for-like. Changing policies to specify materials with low embodied carbon should also reduce Scope 3 emissions by considering the carbon life cycle cost in terms of the supply chain, operation and decommissioning. It is recommended that a detailed audit and feasibility study is carried out for all assets to determine the site-specific initiatives. This will provide an indication of the realistic interventions that could be provided and the likely financial and carbon savings.

4.9 The initial plan seeks to capture actions from the working group, incorporating recommendations from stakeholders and align (where appropriate) to regional strategy. This approach recognises the scale of the agenda, the importance of building momentum and encouraging widespread action. The plan is attached to Appendix 1; it is presented using 6 key themes:

Theme 1: Strategy (Taking the Lead)

4.10 Addressing the climate emergency is a formidable task that will require all services and employees to contribute fully. To achieve net zero whole scale system change is required; staff and Members need to understand why an emergency has been declared and what actions are required. Climate change activity should be embedded into service delivery and investment will be required to communicate the vision and strategy.

4.11 To ensure that every aspect of the Council's work is seen through the lens of the climate emergency, measures have been identified to embed carbon reduction objectives into Council decision-making and to raise staff and Member awareness. These include 'officer champions', briefing programmes, carbon reduction e-learning and sustainability appraisal of Cabinet reports.

Theme 2: Energy

4.12 This programme of work will align climate action with the Council's Estates Strategy, reducing energy use and improving building efficiency. The Council has been taking steps for some time to reduce energy consumption and it is imperative that improvements continue to be made. A biomass boiler is supplying heat at the depot, a 49.8KW photovoltaic system is installed on the roof of the Civic Centre, new inverter drive systems have replaced air conditioning systems in the ICT suite, and a feasibility study is being progressed into the development of heat networks in the borough.

4.13 There has been an estimated 47% per cent reduction in the Council House electricity usage since lockdown and 33% in the Civic Centre highlighting the positive impact of changing the way we work. Enhanced opportunities for remote working will make a continued positive contribution to reduced energy consumption, staff travel and CO₂ pollution. Other proposed measures include a feasibility of building removal / seasonal closures, cost effective improvements for 'high energy users' such as Active Living Centres, Crematoria, and Streetly, energy savings campaigns and integration of low carbon and renewable energy options where feasible.

Theme 3: Waste & Consumption (Generated by the Council & its operation)

4.14 How the Council manages its waste has a direct impact on climate change. Defra's Resources & Waste Strategy (2018) demonstrates just some of the performance step changes, policy interventions and new solutions now required to contribute to a net zero carbon future. The strategy combines actions with the longer-term policy direction of the Governments 25 Year Environment Plan, setting out the blueprint for eliminating avoidable waste of all kinds by 2050.

4.15 The Council's role in determining disposal options and influencing consumption and waste generation means this will form an important area of action. Projects are ongoing; 700 tonnes of biomass generated from the Council's tree / grounds operations was sold as biomass and Clean and Green led on 54 litter picks, attended by 555 individuals with a return on investment of £13k. Measures to build on this work involve technological and behavioural change, promotion of waste minimisation methods, 'buy local' campaigns, and work towards the Council becoming single-use plastic free.

Theme 4: Transport

4.16 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. The Council is taking a lead role in the development of the Black Country's ULEV Strategy and Action Plan, which sets out a series of recommendations for Black Country Councils in order to prepare for the anticipated 2035 Government ban on the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles.

4.17 Fuel use by the Council's fleet is estimated at around 6% of direct Council emissions. Opportunities to improve the efficiency of the fleet are therefore required to achieve a net zero target. This will involve installation of adequate electric vehicle infrastructure / charge points at Council offices, depots, car parks and leisure facilities, a review of the car pool scheme and development of a green staff travel plan.

Theme 5: Nature

4.18 The Council is committed to improving the green infrastructure across the borough. Walsall sites encompass the recently awarded Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark and work is underway to improve local habitat quality and ecological networks as part of the 'Black Country Blue Network' ERDF programme. Continued enhancements to increase meadow, wetland and green areas in Walsall can help towards offsetting residual emissions whilst delivering a very wide range of co-benefits. Planting 20ha of new woodland in Walsall will sequester between 5500 to 7000 tCO₂e by 2050.

Theme 6: Resilience & Adaptation

4.19 Whilst the climate emergency action plan will enable the Council to mitigate the impacts of climate change, the Council and its partners will need to work together to make sure that it is resilient and adaptable to long-term pressures on services and infrastructure. This programme of action will result in the development of practical and cost-effective actions to adapt to the impacts of climate change. This includes a 'Walsall

Flood Community Resilience Scheme' to provide local communities and businesses with the necessary information and support to prepare, respond and recover from emergency situations.

Resourcing

4.20 The management and implementation of the action plan will require appropriate capacity and resource. Additional expertise is also required to meet new statutory requirements placed upon the Council through the Environment Bill and other government programmes and policy changes.

4.21 A business case will be created to integrate a fixed term dedicated Climate Change Programme Manager into the Clean and Green service structure as part of the wider Proud Transformation Programme. The Council will look to cover the costs of this post through external funding opportunities for future sustainability.

4.22 The new officer should provide the resource to ensure central co-ordination to a corporate priority. The Council will explore a wide range of external funding options to help support implementation of the plan. These include:

- The Government's £3billion Green Investment Package includes £1billion for public retrofit to reduce emissions and invest in green heating technology.
- £40million **Green Jobs Challenge Fund** for environmental charities and public authorities to help create and protect 5,000 jobs in England.
- £50million **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund**.
- Defra / Environment Agency **£200M Innovative Flood and Coastal Resilience Programme** to support 25 areas (including Walsall) affected by flooding.
- Defra **£40M Green Recovery Challenge Fund** to support nature restoration, nature-based solutions, and sustainable jobs.
- Defra **£2M Air Quality Grant Scheme 2020-21**.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

4.23 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.

Financial implications

4.24 There are financial implications to declaring a climate emergency and setting a new priority for the Council. A business case will be created to integrate a 3 year fixed term Climate Change Programme Manager into the Clean and Green service structure as part of the wider Proud Transformation Programme at a cost of £158k. In the unlikely event of external funding not being found this would need to be funded through Council resources.

Legal implications

4.25 The legal framework for this work is set out in the Climate Change Act 2008 (CCA2008) and the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019. The Order sets the expectation that the UK will achieve net zero by 2050.

Reducing Inequalities

4.26 Climate change affects all sections of society, however some groups may require additional support to make the necessary lifestyle and behavioural changes than others. Equality analysis will be undertaken against each proposed action.

5. Decide

5.1 To approve the contents of this report and the steps being taken to respond to the Climate Emergency Declaration.

5.2 To confirm the governance structure set out in the report to integrate a fixed term Climate Change Officer into the Clean and Green service structure as part of the wider Proud Transformation Programme.

5.3 To support the recommendation to require all future Cabinet reports to include an impact assessment on climate change mitigation and resilience (as is currently the case for equalities).

5.4 To note the measures detailed in Appendix 1 that have been proposed by services in support of the delivery of carbon reduction priorities.

6. Respond

6.1 Over the next 12 months the Council will prepare a final version of the Climate Emergency Action Plan, following which a series of business cases will be brought forward on each of the items it contains.

7. Review

7.1 The Council will monitor achievements against measures set out in the action plan, using established tools to support carbon budgeting and reporting. A 6-month and annual review of the action plan will take place, with appropriate oversight provided through scrutiny committees and Cabinet.

Background papers

Appendix 1: Draft Walsall Council Climate Change Emergency Action Plan

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