

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

13 August 2020

Report by Director of Environment

CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to outline a proposed approach for the development of a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan particularly in view of the recommendations from the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet;
- a) approves the proposed comprehensive approach to the development of a new Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan;
 - b) supports the ambition for the Council to be 'carbon neutral' by 2040 (as a minimum target);and
 - c) approves the proposal to establish a cross party member/officer working group to progress the Climate Change Strategy and Action plan.

BACKGROUND

3. In April 2019 the Scottish Government became the first country in the UK to declare a climate emergency. The UK Government followed suit by declaring a climate emergency in May 2019, with over 60% of UK local authorities declaring a climate emergency by January 2020.

4. There is no single definition of what a 'climate emergency' means but most responses have included target setting around becoming carbon neutral and/or achieving reductions in other greenhouse gas emissions.

5. The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019, sets legally-binding targets to reduce Scotland's emissions of all greenhouse gases to net-zero by 2045 at the latest, with interim targets for reduction of at least 56% by 2020, 75% by 2030 and 90% by 2040. There are 7 greenhouse gases. These are carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and the four F-gases (hydrofluorocarbons- HFCs, perfluorocarbons – PFCs, sulphur hexafluoride- SF₆ and nitrogen trifluoride- NF₃).

6. However, carbon dioxide emissions are to be net-zero by 2040. Progress towards these targets will be measured against

- 1990 baseline levels of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide; and
- 1995 baseline levels of hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulphur hexafluoride and nitrogen trifluoride

7. The Council has a current statutory requirement to report its climate change impact from key activities to the Scottish Government on an annual basis. This is presently achieved by measuring the tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions equivalent (tCO_{2e}) from Council buildings, fleet and waste. The most recent reporting period detailed in the Council's *Climate Change Report 2018/19* (a separate item on this agenda) shows that good progress is being made in terms of reduced emissions.

8. The Scottish Government plans to bring forward secondary legislation that will alter the details of the existing public sector climate change reporting duties outlined above. It is possible there will be a requirement on councils to state the year by which they will cease to emit any direct greenhouse gases and their targets for reducing indirect emissions (i.e. those arising from procured goods and services). They may also be required to report on how they will align their spending plans with targets and to make their report publicly accessible. However, further details of any specific guidance/proposals is awaited from the Scottish Government.

9. East Renfrewshire Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan expired in 2018. Much of its content is now outdated and has been superseded by changes in legislation, current thinking and good practice.

10. Initial considerations indicate that the Council's current activities and practices will not achieve the Scottish Government's target to be carbon neutral by 2040 or achieve net-zero for all greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

11. Given the developing prominence of the entire climate change issue, the Audit & Scrutiny Committee undertook a comprehensive investigation into Council activity in this area in late 2019. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee report (which is a separate item on this Cabinet agenda), made twenty-four recommendations which were approved by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 12 March 2020 for consideration by the Cabinet. Of key importance are the recommendations in relation to;

- creating a full-time post of climate change coordinator based within the environment Department.
- renewing the previous Environmental Sustainability Strategy with a new Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan,
- setting an initial target for the Council to become carbon neutral by 2040 (including establishing interim targets),
- ensuring that climate change impacts/sustainability implications are given greater prominence in all council business including coverage in corporate reports and capital appraisals.
- The establishment of a cross party Elected Member/Officer climate change working group

REPORT

12. There is no specific statutory requirement for the Council to prepare a Climate Change Strategy/Action Plan.

13. However, taking all of the background information into account along with those recommendations from the Audit and Scrutiny Committee which are approved by the Cabinet today it is proposed to develop a Council Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

14. The Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan will seek to incorporate those Audit & Scrutiny Committee recommendations approved by the Cabinet at its meeting today, including setting a date for the Council to be carbon neutral which will require tougher Council targets to be set.

15. Achieving Carbon neutral/ net zero alone means that we will have to take action to remove as much carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as we put into it.

16. It is proposed that the strategy will initially focus on 3 key action areas:

- Carbon reduction measures- for example taking action to reduce the volume of carbon we produce from transport, the built environment, waste, consumption and the types of energy we use.
- Carbon off-setting measures- for example using nature to take carbon from the atmosphere and store it, e.g. extensive tree-planting and diversifying amenity grass areas to meadows and woodlands and protection of areas that are highly effective in terms of carbon capture such as peatlands.
- Adaptation measures- for example taking necessary action to protect our communities against how warmer and wetter weather patterns will impact their local environment, e.g. protecting local properties from flood events.

17. As a Council, some practical examples of actions that we can take to help deliver on the carbon reduction target could include:

- Better energy management.
- Reduction of our property assets (operational buildings make significant contributions to carbon emissions);
- Reduction in business and commuter travel mileage through increased use of digital technology and agile and home-working; and
- Consideration of innovative approaches to fleet management e.g. electric and hydrogen power solutions to eliminate carbon emissions.
- Increased tree planting.

18. The strategy and action plan will

- build on existing activity and good practice and clearly state the Council's ambition and commitment. Progress will require significant and disruptive changes to Council operations, along with clear behavioural change within our communities and businesses. In some cases, additional costs may be involved to implement new technologies and projects.
- consider changes to current practices and service provision to take account of a changing climate. For example, most expert predictions suggest that in future we will have milder but wetter winters, along with hotter and drier summers. This has implications for the Council in terms of managing increased incidences of flooding, disruption to public transport, impact on food production, wildlife and people's health.

- include consultation with all key services, customers that use them and residents more widely including young people.

19. Furthermore, the Covid-19 crisis has shown that there is an opportunity for environmental regeneration, with significant air quality improvements already being experienced both globally and locally through the reduction in carbon emissions. There is a growing impetus to promote a 'green recovery' i.e. we recover the economy from the COVID-19 recession in a sustainable manner which retains some of the unintended but environmentally beneficial consequences of the crisis. The strategy and action plan will address this issue i.e. balancing environmental, social and economic needs.

20. The starting point/foundation of the new strategy and action plan will be to define as quickly as possible a clear baseline of what needs to be measured, how it is measured and state clearly specific actions required to meet the target of carbon neutrality by 2040 (as a minimum but possibly earlier) and also the wider target of 2045 for the other six greenhouse gases.

21. It is proposed that a cross-party elected member/officer working group helps shape the development of the strategy and action plan in conjunction with the community.

22. For example, the cross-departmental/cross party working group could be tasked with engaging with respective departments and the wider community in the early stages to make sure that there is a broad consensus on how to progress the agenda. Consultation could extend to highlighting progress being made and what benefits are being realised. Digital technologies could allow us to display real-time air quality measurements around our schools and on local high streets and/or or display our progress towards net-zero carbon emissions

Progress

23. Despite delays caused by the coronavirus issue groundwork for a new approach to a climate change strategy and action plan development has started.

24. Carbon measurement is a technical specialism and as such, the Environment Department has, through a successful application for Scottish Government funding, engaged consultant expertise with regard to the development of a Local Heat & Energy Efficiency Strategy. This will look at ways that energy efficiency measures can be implemented across the Council area (public and private sectors) and reduce fuel poverty.

25. While this will only consider emissions from the built environment, it will be a vital foundation block of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. Work is also underway to provide baseline and monitoring emissions indicator figures and advise the pathway to a low carbon future, providing as far as possible costs and measurable benefits against any actions.

26. A dedicated Climate Change Officer has been recruited already to support strategy development, researching innovative practices and technologies and coordinating preparation and delivery of the action plan as soon as possible. In addition, restructuring has taken place within the Environment Department to facilitate the delivery of the climate change strategy and action plan. The Department is therefore well placed to make quick progress on the key issues.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

27. There are no financial implications associated with this report at this point in time. However, the action plan that will arise from the strategy is likely to have cost implications. In some cases, capital investment may be required but may also result in revenue cost savings, e.g. reduced energy costs as a result of energy efficient heating and lighting initiatives. The Council's Capital Investment Strategy will in due course set out the investment needed to meet the requirements of the new action plan as it is developed.

28. External funding opportunities to support existing and potential work-streams, e.g. increased active travel and cleaner transportation will continue to be maximised.

CONSULTATION

29. Consultation will form a key activity in the development of the strategy and action plan. A recent Citizens' Panel Survey had a focus on climate change and its findings will be used to shape the strategy and action plan. A summary of the key findings is attached (Appendix 1). The link to the full document is here ([link](#)).

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

30. The Council will work closely with subject matter experts from a range of organisations to make sure that the Council's approach is aligned to national policy and best practice. It is important that existing relationships with key partners and organisations such as Climate Ready Clyde (CRC), Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN), Sustrans, Zero Waste Scotland (ZWS), and many others are strengthened.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

31. There are no staffing, IT, legal, equality or financial implications directly associated with this report at this point in time.

CONCLUSIONS

32. An opportunity currently exists to provide an ambitious strategic approach to renewal of the previous Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2015-18, which will allow the Council to align activities with the national policy agenda on climate change and meet likely future requirements around carbon and greenhouse gas emission reporting.

33. The new strategy will establish baseline carbon emissions (and other greenhouse gas emissions) and set a target to achieve carbon neutrality no later than 2040, including ambitious interim targets.

34. The Council will lead by example and has a role to play in direct action and influencing behavioural change amongst its employees, local residents and businesses. Positive, disruptive change will be required in areas such as transport, the built environment, waste and consumption and how we generate energy, along with a focus on activities that will off-set our carbon emissions and plan for unavoidable climate change impacts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

35. It is recommended that the Cabinet;

- a) approves the proposed comprehensive approach to the development of a new Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan;
- b) supports the ambition for the Council to be 'carbon neutral' by 2040 (as a minimum target); and
- c) approves the proposal to establish a cross party member/officer working group to progress the Climate Change Strategy and Action plan

Director of Environment

Further information can be obtained from Andrew Cahill Director of Environment or Phil Daws
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July 2020

Briefing note – Citizens' Panel Climate Change Survey 28 July 2020

Introduction

We sought the views of the Citizens' Panel on Climate Change during February to May 2020. The findings of the study are attached and the technical report can be provided if required. The response rate was 60%, particularly strong considering the current challenges of COVID-19.

It is a timeous report as the findings will be used to inform the early stages of the development of the Council's Climate Change Strategy and as part of renewal planning, services are looking to learn from the some of the environmental positives as a result of the pandemic around for example reduced car usage.

Key Findings

Some key findings include:

- Most respondents think climate change is an immediate and urgent problem and that the Council should lead by example by taking action.
- Top priorities include reducing the Council's own use of energy/natural resources, raising awareness around climate changes and providing integrated sustainable transport solutions
- The majority feel that East Renfrewshire lacks the infrastructure for more journeys to be made by active travel (walking & cycling) and support more protected cycle ways, with strongest support amongst two Locality Planning Area wards which include Auchenback, Neilston and Thornliebank
- A minority viewed public transport as a viable option, however respondents living in the more deprived areas of East Renfrewshire and those living in rented accommodation were more likely to view public transport as a feasible option for their journeys
- Most would consider an electric or hybrid option if they were looking to replace their car and would support action to move from private cars to more sustainable transport options.
- Views were generally positive on the quality of existing recycling services and around 50% feel they could make more use of kerbside recycling services.
- Three out of four would like to do more to reduce the effects of climate change with financial costs being the most common barrier for residents to make changes, particularly for those living with a disability and those living in the most deprived areas.

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