

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE21 November 2019Report by Chief ExecutiveINVESTIGATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide the Audit and Scrutiny Committee with the proposed scope and timeline of the investigation on climate change.

RECOMMENDATION

2. It is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee agrees the proposed scope and timeline of the investigation on climate change, which will be carried out in support of the refreshed Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan.

BACKGROUND

3. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee agreed on 26 September 2019 to investigate climate change as the next high priority issue to be the subject of a scrutiny and evaluation review, subject to further discussions, including with the Environment Department. The current policy of East Renfrewshire Council on climate change is contained within the Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2015-18, which is now due to be refreshed.

4. Climate change meets the selection criteria for investigations which was included in the new Guide to Scrutiny and Review, and approved by East Renfrewshire Council on 26 June 2019. The current investigation by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on income generation and commercialisation opportunities is approaching completion, and it is appropriate that work on the new review area commences shortly thereafter. The new investigation will provide proposals for East Renfrewshire Council to consider, in support of the work which is already being carried out to reduce carbon emissions, and in the implementation of a range of policies to address climate change.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CARBON NEUTRALITY

5. Climate change has the potential to be a very broad subject area for the committee to investigate, and it is proposed instead that the committee provides advice on specific areas which would be appropriate for the Council to consider. This work will feed-in directly to activity which is already underway within the Environment Department to refresh the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2015-18.

6. The Environment Department is participating with Glasgow City Region partners through the Climate Ready Clyde consortium to prepare for climate change and its impacts. Activities include joint working to establish a city-region level Climate Adaptation strategy and Action Plan; helping partners to assess their climate risks and opportunities; and

exchanging information, experience and good practice with other organisations and cities with similar aims.

7. There has been increased publicity in the media recently on climate change, including: the declaration of a national climate emergency (First Minister of Scotland, 28 April 2019), and the setting of a target of 2045 for Scotland to have net zero carbon emissions (Scottish Government, Climate Change Bill 2019). The amendments to the Bill also raised the ambition to reduce the emissions targets for 2030 and 2040 to 70% and 90% respectively.

8. Glasgow City Council declared on 26 September 2019 that Glasgow would be carbon neutral by 2030. The declaration followed a public debate and consultation, and took into account the work which young persons and children had been carrying out too. In November 2018, Bristol City Council was the first local authority in the United Kingdom to declare a climate emergency, and pledged to make the city carbon neutral by 2030. It is understood that a large number of councils in the United Kingdom have now declared a climate emergency.

9. Wiltshire Council declared a climate emergency in 2019, and to be carbon neutral by 2030. The council invested £12m in 2018 to convert their ageing street lighting to low energy LED lighting, substantially reducing carbon emissions and saving approximately £1m per annum. Further investment has taken place in the services' infrastructure of their buildings.

10. For East Renfrewshire Council to become carbon neutral, will involve policy initiatives, and coordination of activities across all aspects of the Council's work. A 'scorecard' can be used to assess whether or not the target of carbon neutrality is on course to be met. This would involve a list of the carbon emissions which the Council is producing, and a list of counter-measures which the Council is undertaking to reduce emissions, to enable a 'net' calculation to take place. Examples of activities which can reduce carbon emissions include:

- Citizen and business engagement in the climate change debate to stimulate greater participation
- All new Council policies to include climate change considerations
- Encouragement of Eco-schools and the reduction of carbon emissions
- New schools to be carbon neutral
- Maximising public participation in recycling activities, and reduction in landfill waste
- Planting of trees
- Creation of new areas of 'green' space, including protected areas of biodiversity, to replace depleted green space due to house building, extensions, monoblocing etc.
- Policy to reduce the use of plastics, and to re-use plastics where possible
- Environmental issues to be at the forefront of procurement/purchasing activities
- Car sharing policies for employees
- Reducing miles travelled on Council business
- Better energy management of Council buildings
- Reduction in the number of Council-owned buildings through asset management practices
- Consideration of renewable energy options for domestic use, and Council buildings
- Potential conversion of street lighting to low energy LED lighting
- Improved design standards of buildings, enabling greater energy efficiency
- Introduction of a 'greener' fleet of Council vehicles
- Introduction of lower speed limits
- Encouraging active travel (cycling and walking) and infrastructure improvements
- Encouraging use of electric vehicles, and installation of additional charging points (including associated infrastructure improvements)
- Improving air quality

11. Climate change is a cross-departmental issue, and while the Environment Department is taking a lead role on behalf of the Council, the subject matter impacts on all departments. Engagement and participation of citizens and businesses in the public debate on climate change will be critical to the success of the new strategy.

POTENTIAL SCOPE OF REVIEW

12. With a view to complementing the work that is already underway on how best to address climate change within the authority, it is proposed that the committee's investigation focuses on some specific issues as follows:-

- Assessing the level of awareness of the importance of addressing climate change within departments;
- If there is a need to review governance arrangements within the authority associated with addressing climate change issues to ensure this issue is pursued effectively (for example creating a specific body or board to oversee its implementation);
- The extent to which adequate targets have been set and are being considered and developed further within the authority to address climate change;
- Linked to the above, assessing the level of existing capacity and expertise within the authority, not only within the Environment Department but also other departments, to enable climate change issues and related targets to be pursued effectively;
- Considering the extent to which departmental budgets align with goals linked to addressing climate change, including capital projects and bids;
- The extent to which discussions on pursuing carbon neutrality take place when project proposals are being discussed and developed;
- The extent to which the importance of carbon neutrality is considered in relation to the procurement and purchasing of goods and services;
- From a benchmarking perspective, which approaches have been successfully adopted by other authorities on addressing climate change;
- The extent to which the Council is taking preventive measures and adapting practices to address climate change

The proposed timeline for undertaking the review is suggested as follows:

Activity	Date
Approval of scope and timeline by Audit and Scrutiny Committee.	21 November 2019
Research and collection of comparative information from other local authorities; and cross-departmental discussions within East Renfrewshire Council to establish baseline information and future plans.	November to December 2019

Final Draft Report on Investigation to Audit and Scrutiny Committee	12 March 2020
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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13. Due to the continuing and evolving nature of climate change, additional capital and revenue resources could be required to address climate change. These might include: ensuring that schools/offices are environmentally friendly or carbon neutral; purchasing of electric vehicles and installation of more charging points; infrastructure investment in new cycle/walking routes and LED street lighting; further investment in recycling facilities; consideration of renewable energy options; tree planting etc. Recruitment of employees who possess environmental qualifications and experience will also be necessary.

14. Financial implications arising from proposed climate change initiatives would be the subject of separate reports. Potentially, future capital programme bids should include a statement concerning a commitment to carbon neutrality, and ideally, future major spending plans should be aligned to implications for climate change.

CONCLUSION

15. Addressing climate change is a challenging, but pressing issue which councils, organisations, businesses and indeed families are engaging with to a greater or lesser extent. Many local authorities in addition to establishing climate change policies and action plans, have gone a stage further and declared a climate emergency and set a target, commonly by 2030, to become carbon neutral.

16. It is timely therefore, given the refresh of the East Renfrewshire Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan, that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee contributes to this work by taking evidence and supplying information which is for the wider benefit of the Council. Information from this investigation will hopefully assist the Council in future deliberations and decision-making in relation to climate change and carbon neutrality.

RECOMMENDATION

17. It is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee agrees the proposed scope and timeline of the investigation on climate change, which will be carried out in support of the refreshed Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan.

Chief Executive
7 November 2019

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Background Papers

Report by Chief Executive to Audit and Scrutiny Committee, 20 June 2019: Proposed Guide to Scrutiny and Review; and
Report by Chief Executive to Audit and Scrutiny Committee, 26 September 2019: Audit and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan