

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE23 February 2023Report by ClerkNATIONAL EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS  
ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE IN SCOTLAND &  
SCOTLAND'S COUNCILS' APPROACH TO ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide information on the Audit Scotland report on *Addressing Climate Change in Scotland*; and the Accounts Commission Report on *Scotland's Councils' Approach to Addressing Climate Change*.

**RECOMMENDATION**

2. It is recommended that the committee considers the report.

**BACKGROUND**

3. Copies of the Audit Scotland report on [Addressing Climate Change in Scotland](#) published in March 2022; and the Accounts Commission report on [Scotland's Councils' Approach to Addressing Climate Change](#) published in September 2022, have already been circulated to all Audit and Scrutiny Committee Members. Under the committee's specialisation arrangements, the Member leading the review of these particular reports is Councillor Ireland.

4. As both reports cover climate change issues, the Head of Environment (Strategic Services) has provided comments in a single report, a copy of which is attached (see Appendix A). The report includes reference to the committee's own investigation on Climate Change completed in 2020 and related issues.

5. In January 2023, following consideration of a report on the *Revised Risk Management Strategy 2023-25 and Risk Management Framework 2023-25*, amongst other things, the committee agreed that further clarification be sought from the Environment Department on the approach being taken regarding the Climate Change Impact Assessment and Strategy, including if there were any plans for a climate change risk and impact assessment to be developed for East Renfrewshire, to enable feedback on this to be provided. Comments on this are included in the attached report.

**RECOMMENDATION**

6. It is recommended that the committee considers the report.

Local Government Access to Information Act 1985

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Background Papers:-

1. Audit Scotland report on [Addressing Climate Change in Scotland](#) (March 2022); and
2. Accounts Commission report on [Scotland's Councils' Approach to Addressing Climate Change](#)

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILAudit & Scrutiny Committee23 February 2023Report by Head of Strategic ServicesUPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S PROGRESSIN RELATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide the Audit and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the Council's progress in relation to climate change action, carbon emission reductions and preparedness to meet related targets following Audit Scotland's report "*Scotland's Councils' approach to Addressing Climate Change*."

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. It is recommended that the Committee:
- Note the assessment of progress to date with respect to the Council's actions;
  - Note that progress will be challenging due to the lack of a detailed national policy framework, route plan and uncertainty on funding; and that a national step-change will be required to facilitate successful delivery of the draft Get to Zero Action Plan (GTZAP- climate change action plan) at a local level; and
  - Note that local authorities will be subject to greater scrutiny in the future by Audit Scotland in terms of action against climate change.

**BACKGROUND**

3. An investigation into climate change action in East Renfrewshire was undertaken in 2019 by Council staff with a number of recommendations submitted to and approved by the Audit & Scrutiny Committee (ASC) on 12 March 2020 and subsequently by Cabinet in August 2020.

4. The Council declared a climate emergency in October 2021 and the Cabinet approved the Get to Zero Ambition Statement in November 2021.

5. In January 2022, a progress report on the implementation of ASC recommendations was submitted to the ASC, which noted that good progress had been made despite disruption to Council business and operations due to Covid.

6. In June 2022, a Climate Change Impact Assessment (CCIA) process was agreed by the Corporate Management Team (CMT). This means that all Cabinet/Council/Committee reports are now subject to a new CCIA framework which requires report authors to estimate

likely climate impacts in order that Members have this information available to them at the point of making a decision.

7. In November 2022, the Cabinet agreed to set a target of achieving net-zero carbon, for both direct (i.e. gas/water/fuel) and indirect (i.e. electricity) emissions by 2045. No interim targets have been set.

8. A draft Get to Zero Action Plan (GTZAP) has been prepared by East Renfrewshire Council. This includes an Environmental Report, required as part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Public consultation is planned for spring 2023. Following any revisions to the plan that may be made as result of the public consultation Cabinet approval will then be sought for the draft GTZAP.

9. In September 2022 Audit Scotland prepared a report for the Accounts Commission entitled "*Scotland's Councils' approach to Addressing Climate Change*". This report highlighted the role of councils in addressing climate change and identified where further action is needed to address the climate change emergency.

10. At the request of the ASC the previous Director of the Environment agreed to bring a report to a future meeting of the Committee detailing progress made by the Council in relation to carbon emissions reduction and, where relevant, to assess preparedness to meet targets and deliver on the recommendations arising from the Accounts Commission's findings.

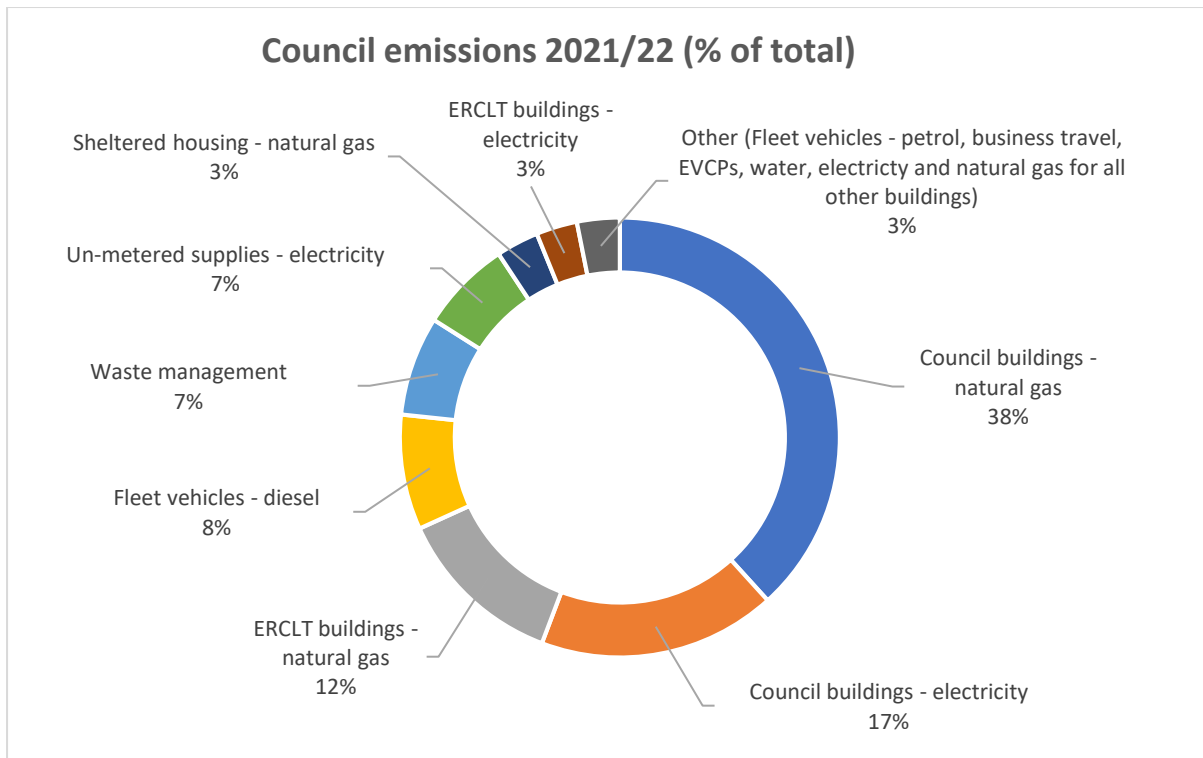
## REPORT

### *Progress*

11. The 2021/22 carbon emissions for the Council were reported to Cabinet on 26 January 2023. This was informed by a newly adopted approach which provides a more accurate assessment of emissions compared to previous years. The measurement also incorporated supply chain emissions for the first time (i.e. procured goods/services which make up 57% of the Council's emissions). East Renfrewshire Council is one of the first local authorities to measure this.

12. For the purpose of comparison, the Council's estimated emissions, excluding supply-chain emissions, for 2021/2022 were 15,578 tCO<sub>2</sub>e, which represents a reduction of 28% compared with the baseline year (2019/20) and 10% against the previous year (2020/21).

*Figure 1: Breakdown by emissions source*



13. The Council has reduced its emissions by:

- Implementation of the Clyde Valley Residual Waste Contract – a 49% carbon saving from reducing landfilled waste.
- Improvements to utilities- (3 phases between 2016-21, part funded with SALIX loan) for 20 properties to improve energy efficiency (e.g. remove fluorescent lighting)
- Street lights – 62% carbon saving via LED replacement.

14. Whilst good progress has been made, most of the emissions savings are a result of the Clyde Valley Waste Partnership and further reductions from this contract are not expected now that it is established and these gains have been achieved.

### *Targets*

15. If the Council continues on its current trajectory of reductions of c. 150 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per year, it will not meet the 2045 target for net zero carbon emissions, which requires reductions of c. 870 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per annum. Therefore it can be concluded that a step-change is required if the 2045 target is to be met. It should be noted that this situation is not unique to East Renfrewshire Council.

16. While no interim targets have been set by this Council, it is worthwhile to note that the Scottish Government has set a national interim target of 75% reduction by 2030 and 90% reduction by 2040 (from a baseline year of 1990).

17. Table 1 below shows the targets for key climate change themes. It demonstrates that in key areas, the Council is required or expected to make significant change to its future plans and operations.

Table 1: Targets for key climate change themes

Theme	Target	By When	Status
<b>Buildings &amp; Estate</b>	Zero direct emissions (e.g. removal of gas boilers)	2038	Non-statutory
	Completion of Local Heat & Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) and action plan	January 2024	Statutory
<b>Fleet &amp; Transport</b>	20% reduction in car kilometres travelled	2030 (against 2018 baseline)	Non- statutory
	No longer operate cars with internal combustion engines (ICE).	2025	Non- statutory
	Begin, and complete, ceasing the purchase of new ICE vans and light commercial vehicles (i.e. less than 3.5 tonnes).	2025-2030	Non- statutory
	Have plans in place that means no new ICE heavy goods vehicles (e.g. bin lorries, gritting trucks, buses) are purchased	2030	Non- statutory
<b>Housing</b>	All social housing at Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C	2025	Statutory - On track to meet this 99% achievement in 2021/22
	All social housing at EPC Band B	2032	Non- Statutory

18. Many of these targets are currently non-statutory and are described as ‘policy expectations.’ This may change over time - for example, it has been advised that targets relating to social housing will be the subject of a formal review by the Scottish Government in 2025. It may be that, should these targets become statutory, additional funding will be made available.

### Challenges

19. On 7 December, the Climate Change Committee published its first 5 yearly review of progress in reducing emissions in Scotland. A key message was that “*The Scottish Government urgently needs to provide a quantified plan for how its polices will combine to achieve the emissions reduction required to meet the challenging 2030 target.*” and that the country is “*off-track*” in terms of meeting emissions targets and milestones.

20. As acknowledged by the Audit Scotland/Accounts Commission report, local authorities have a critical role in contributing to national climate change targets. There is a growing consensus, however, that without a clear national policy framework or adequate funding, councils will struggle to fulfil this critical role.

21. Many of the Accounts Commission recommendations require investment of financial and non-financial resources. Whilst East Renfrewshire Council can work to estimate and define costs, its ability to deliver a number of the recommendations is significantly diminished given the current budgetary constraints. For example, to risk assess climate impacts on building and infrastructure or to develop and implement a biodiversity action plan are significant additional and specialist tasks.

22. This constraint applies not only to meeting the recommendations of the Accounts Commission report but also to the delivery of many of the actions identified in the draft GTZAP. Beyond funding constraints, there are further challenges related to new technology development and market design, regulation and planning, procurement and market readiness, availability of quality data, and fairness and equality. Politics and perceptions will also come into play as the Council navigates its way through the difficult questions that require to be asked on its journey to net-zero. For example, with respect to the Council's property estate, potential closure of community buildings would require an evidenced case with political support.

23. The scope and scale of the change required for our buildings alone means that the pace of work needs to be increased if the Council is going to remove all gas boilers by 2038. There are c.100 buildings which all emit CO<sub>2</sub>. For each property, it is necessary to ascertain if the property is required or surplus to requirements. If required, **one** needs to ascertain if it can be retro-fitted to be carbon neutral. If so **one** needs to calculate the likely cost of variety of technological options with many permutations to consider i.e. thermal efficiency options for building fabric, heat source (air source heat pump, ground source heat pump, solar photovoltaic (PV) panels etc). In order to undertake these assessments surveys are required using specialist, technical expertise in order to inform decision-making. As such, significant funding would need to be made available. As it currently stands the Council does not have this funding or the further funding which would then be required to implement retrofit measures.

24. Even should funding be made available, it should be noted that due to the size of the Council's estate this would take the shape of a rolling programme over multiple years and would require careful planning. For example, the Education estate (c. 50 schools and ancillary buildings) would be limited in terms of the time for works to be undertaken with only 15 summer holidays between now and the target date.

25. Similar challenges exist across many areas of Council activity. For example the replacement of internal combustion engine vehicles with electric vehicles will require additional capital provision (as electrical vehicles are frequently more expensive than their internal combustion engine counterparts), will require the installation of a electricity substation at the depot, will require a large footprint for vehicle storage and will create logistical issues for service delivery. Whilst all of these challenges can be resolved, the process of resolution is not without cost.

26. The draft GTZAP, along with key asset management plans, will outline what is required and will estimate the scale of investment needed. The examples outlined in paras 22-25 are replicated across all of the key areas, e.g. social housing and open spaces management. The Council also has a role in shaping local travel and transport plans which has associated challenges and costs.

#### *Audit Scotland/Accounts Commission Report*

27. As noted at paragraph 9 in September 2022 Audit Scotland prepared a report for the Accounts Commission entitled "*Scotland's Councils' approach to Addressing Climate*

*Change*". This report highlighted the role of councils in addressing climate change and identified where further action is needed to address the climate change emergency.

28. Five recommendations are made as follows:

<i>Recommendation 1:</i>	<i>Ensure clear and transparent emissions targets are in place</i>
<i>Recommendation 2:</i>	<i>Increase action on adaptation and climate resilience</i>
<i>Recommendation 3:</i>	<i>Make action plans clear about the gaps and challenges that remain</i>
<i>Recommendation 4:</i>	<i>Increase collaboration efforts</i>
<i>Recommendation 5:</i>	<i>Embed climate change into decision-making at all levels.</i>

29. The Council's "Get to Zero" team has assessed the Council's progress against these recommendations. Progress is good and key foundations are being laid to assist future progress.

30. The assessment identified a number of key items for consideration and has also resulted in some suggested changes to the proposed Get Top Zero Action Plan:

- Interim carbon reduction targets will be included in the forthcoming GTZAP and are based on the council's carbon baseline year of 2019/20;
- Following publication of the GTZAP, all key over-arching organisational reports and plans should be reviewed to go beyond acknowledgement to action with GTZ performance targets and critical activities cross-referenced and subject to existing governance mechanisms;
- Inclusion of climate change progress in major corporate reports such as the annual performance statement of accounts;
- Consider climate impacts earlier i.e. at project design, options appraisal and business case development stages, rather than leaving the assessment to the end of the proposal;
- Revision of corporate documents, designed to request additional funding, to explicitly reference net zero; and
- Develop an ongoing PR campaign/programme for the next 12 months which includes internal and external communications.

31. It is necessary to note that there are areas where greater national leadership or collaboration with partners and other local authorities will be required: These include:

- Seeking further guidance on areas that are particularly complex, or where the scale of the challenge is so great that a collaborative approach between multiple councils or national organisations is needed. These include measuring supply chain and area-wide emission and how to align spending plans with climate policy and 'spending power'; and



- Clarification with partners at Climate ready Clyde on the specific delivery role for the Council in terms of the regional Adaptation & Action Plan and what 'considering adaptation in decision-making processes' may look like in practice.

32. The report by the Accounts Commission concludes that "*Climate change will be an ongoing area of interest for the Accounts Commission through its annual audit, Best Value and performance audit work*". Therefore the Council can expect greater scrutiny on climate change commitments and action than in previous years.

## CONCLUSIONS

33. In 2022 East Renfrewshire Council made progress to improve responses to the climate change challenge, with improvements in carbon emissions data, introduction of CCIA's and developing of a draft Get to Zero Action Plan, which will be published after public consultation.

34. However, it remains very challenging for East Renfrewshire Council to meet net-zero targets due to the lack of a national policy framework, route map and funding constraints. Indeed there is a significant risk that East Renfrewshire Council will not meet these targets but the Council is not alone in this respect. Other local authorities face the same challenges and the country, as a whole is 'off-track' to meeting its interim net-zero target of 75% reduction by 2030.

35. Transformational change is required across all areas of Council and community activity and needs to start now if targets are to be met. Much of the action required will need to be delivered at a national and regional level, with local councils fulfilling a partnership and delivery role.

36. In reviewing the Accounts Commission recommendations on action to be taken by local councils, there a number of areas where East Renfrewshire Council is performing well but gaps also exist. These gaps will be addressed, as far as possible in the forthcoming GTZAP but additional funding and joint working with other local authorities and partners will be necessary in order to fulfil recommendations and delivery of the plan. The GTZAP will identify funding requirements as far as possible.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

37. It is recommended that the Committee:

- Note the assessment of progress to date with respect to the Council's action;
- Note that progress will be challenging due to the lack of a detailed national policy framework, route plan and uncertainty on funding; and that a national step-change will be required to facilitate successful delivery of the draft Get to Zero Action Plan) at a local level; and
- Note that local authorities will be subject to greater scrutiny by Audit Scotland in terms of action against climate change.

[Scotland's councils' approach to addressing climate change \(Prepared by Audit Scotland September 2022\)](#)

[Investigation on climate change \(Audit and Scrutiny Committee report, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020\)](#)

[Update on progress against the climate change report \(Audit and Scrutiny Committee report, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022\)](#)

[Glasgow Regional Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan \(Climate Ready Clyde, June 2021\)](#)

[Addressing climate change in Scotland: A summary of key recommendations for public bodies \(Prepared by Audit Scotland March 2022\)](#)