

## REPORT OF THE PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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The Place Scrutiny Committee met on 18 September 2019.

Present: Councillors Bob Bowdler (Chair), John Barnes, Colin Belsey, Phil Boorman, Godfrey Daniel (Vice Chair), Chris Dowling, Darren Grover, Pat Rodohan, Stephen Shing, Andy Smith and Barry Taylor.

Also present: Councillors Nick Bennett (Lead Member for Resources), Claire Dowling (Lead Member for Transport and Environment), and Councillor Rupert Simmons (Lead Member for Economy).

### 1. Notice of Motion: Climate Change

1.1 The following Notices of Motion have been submitted to the Chairman of the County Council:

By Councillors Trevor Webb (Proposer) and Phil Scott (Seconder)

*East Sussex County Council:*

*(i) recognises the Climate Emergency and will commit resources where possible and will align its policies to address this;*

*(ii) will set a target of achieving carbon neutrality from its activities and those of its trading companies by 2030 using the Carbon Trust framework, with an Action Plan for achieving this;*

*(iii) will report annually at the May County Council Meeting on its progress towards the target; and*

*(iv) will work with partners and contract providers and will investigate all possible sources of external funding and match funding to support this commitment, as well as writing to central government with respect to the emergency to request funding to implement swift appropriate actions in response.*

By Councillors Nick Bennett (Proposer) and Claire Dowling (Seconder)

*East Sussex County Council:*

*supports the aim and implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals;*

*declares a 'Climate Emergency';*

*will build upon the work we have undertaken to date. We will use our Environment Strategy to provide a strong unified voice in lobbying for support to address this emergency, sharing best practice across East Sussex and more widely through other partners; and*

*will, with our Environment Strategy partners, set out a clear plan of action not only to reduce our carbon emissions but to enhance and protect our environment.*

1.2 In line with County Council practice, the matter was referred by the Chairman to the Place Scrutiny Committee for consideration to provide information and inform debate on the Motions.

#### Supporting Information

1.3 The Place Scrutiny Committee considered a report at the meeting on 18 September 2019 on the two motions that have been submitted. The report outlined the background to this issue and the Council's previous and current work on climate change, which is summarised below.

1.4 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) referred to in the Motion were agreed by world leaders at the United Nations (UN) in 2015 and are a call for action by all countries to 'end poverty and protect the planet'. The 17 Goals are not legally binding but all signatories are expected to contribute to them internationally and take ownership domestically by driving delivery through their own policies, plans and programmes. East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) policies and work programmes support a number of the SDGs. Goal 13 on climate change is supported through our progress in reducing our corporate carbon footprint and supporting businesses to do the same.

1.5 The 2018 report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that "rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society" will be required in order to limit a global temperature rise to 1.5<sup>0</sup>C above pre-industrial level. Modelling indicates that to achieve this requires an estimated 45% reduction in global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030 from 2010 levels. Even half a degree above that will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, mass extinctions of animal species, and extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

1.6 The predicted impacts in East Sussex include an increase in heat-related deaths, particularly amongst the elderly, disruption and higher costs to businesses and service providers caused by flooding, and increased costs for the County Council, for instance due to greater damage to highway assets from more frequent and intense flooding and episodes of extreme heat.

1.7 The County Council has a strong track record on climate change and has reduced emissions from its own activities by about 46% between 2008-9 and 2017-18, through implementing a wide number of measures, and has supported a range of programmes to enable schools, businesses and those in fuel poverty to reduce their carbon emissions. In addition, the County Council has recently set up the Environment Board, which is accountable to Team East Sussex, to work with a range of partner organisations to update the 2011 Environment Strategy for East Sussex. The revised Strategy will provide an up-to-date evidence base, reflect the range of new national environmental policies and strategies that have emerged since 2011, and will aim to set out a clear plan of action for all members of the Board to work together to reduce carbon emissions as well as enhance and protect our environment.

1.8 However, there is increasing evidence of a change in public mood on environmental issues. This is evident from the Extinction Rebellion protests, the rise of school and student protests around climate change, and the recent local and

European election results. The County Council is also facing increasing requests from partner organisations to see what more we can do to address specific aspects of climate change.

1.9 Many organisations, including Parliament, have declared a climate emergency, and in June 2019 Parliament agreed a new target, which is legally-binding on the Government, for the UK to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2050. There are currently no legally binding carbon targets on local government. However, over 200 Local Authorities have declared a climate emergency to date, though only a minority have committed to making either their administrative areas or just their own operations carbon neutral by 2030, with most Local Authorities either committing to becoming carbon neutral by 2050 or not setting a particular date.

1.10 This probably reflects the significant uncertainty as to how carbon neutrality might be achieved, particularly as most of the large scale interventions required to achieve rapid and far-reaching change are driven by international and national financial and regulatory requirements. In East Sussex, Eastbourne Borough Council and Hastings Borough Council have committed to becoming carbon neutral towns by 2030; Lewes District Council has committed to its own estate becoming carbon neutral by 2030; Wealden District Council has committed to its own estate and the district becoming carbon neutral by 2050; and Rother District Council has committed to its own estate and the district becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

1.11 There is currently no clear pathway to carbon neutrality for the County Council's own operations, not least because technology is evolving at a rapid pace. In the absence of a clear pathway and an understanding of potential costs and benefits, it is recommended that the County Council commits to:

- the principle of its own operations becoming carbon neutral by 2050, in line with the new national target;
- carrying out modelling to understand the scale and pace of change required, the range of options available to achieving carbon neutrality, and the likely resource implications;
- preparing 5 year carbon action plans, in line with the national approach set out in the Climate Change Act of 2008, to set out a package of short and medium term measures along the pathway to carbon neutrality. This will enable the County Council to review and update the package of measures to reflect changes in legislation, technology and access to finance, which could enable the target date of 2050 to be brought forward.

1.12 The principles of the two Motions are supported, as the evidence of the need for action is urgent and Local Authorities play a significant role in leading by example and working with partners to shape a community response to these issues.

#### Response to Notice of Motion

1.13 As there is general agreement on the need for action and to avoid confusion it is recommended that Council considers one joint Motion that combines the Notices of Motion received from the Conservative and Labour groups, which sets out a realistic target of carbon neutrality for those activities within the direct control of the County Council, and that this includes a commitment to develop a plan with partner organisations to reduce carbon emissions across East Sussex.

## PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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1.14 Following consideration at the Place Scrutiny Committee, the Committee resolved to recommend that Council agrees the Motion below:

*East Sussex County Council:*

- (i) supports the aims and implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.*
- (ii) recognises and declares a Climate Emergency.*
- (iii) will set a target of achieving carbon neutrality from its activities as soon as possible and in any event by 2050, in line with the new target for the UK agreed by Parliament in 2019.*
- (iv) will build upon the work we have undertaken to date, will commit resources where possible and will align our policies to address the Climate Emergency.*
- (v) will set out a clear plan of action to reduce our carbon emissions.*
- (vi) will report annually at the May County Council Meeting on its progress towards the target.*
- (vii) will investigate all possible sources of external funding and match funding to support this commitment, as well as writing to central government with respect to the emergency to request funding to implement swift appropriate actions”.*
- (viii) will use our Environment Strategy to provide a strong unified voice in lobbying for support to address this emergency, sharing best practice across East Sussex and more widely through other partners”.*

1.15 The Place Scrutiny Committee recommends that the County Council:

☆ (1) agrees the Motion set out in paragraph 1.14 of this report.

18 September 2019

BOB BOWDLER  
Chair