

Report to: Place Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 18 July 2022

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport & Chief Operating Officer

Title: Progress report on Scrutiny's recommendations following the review of becoming a carbon neutral council

Purpose: To consider the progress report.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) consider the progress report; and
 - 2) note the agreed additional spend on corporate climate change of £3m per year up to 2024-25.
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1 Background

1.1 In October 2019 the County Council declared a climate emergency, setting a target of achieving carbon neutrality from its activities as soon as possible and in any event by 2050. In June 2020 Cabinet adopted a climate emergency action plan and in November 2020 the Place Scrutiny Committee completed a review of the County Council Becoming a Carbon Neutral Council. The Committee's 37 recommendations were agreed by full Council in February 2021. This report sets out the progress to date against these recommendations (appendix 1).

2 Supporting Information

2.1 The County Council first developed a carbon reduction plan in 2009. Since then, it has reduced its operational carbon emissions from scope 1 and 2 by over 60%. The Climate Change Action Plan adopted in 2020 set a target to reduce corporate carbon emissions by 13% per year, which is a science-based target, and set out a delivery plan for 2020-22. The Place Scrutiny Committee carried out a review in 2020, both of the County Council's progress to date in reducing its carbon emissions and its plans to reduce emissions further to get to net zero.

2.2 The County Council has a large and complex carbon footprint which is larger than that of all the East Sussex District and Borough Councils combined. The majority of carbon emissions generated by the Council's activities are from sources over which it has influence but limited direct control. These are school buildings and emissions from the procurement of goods, works and services to enable the Council to fulfil its statutory functions. This includes major services such as highways maintenance, waste disposal, and education, as well as social care provision commissioned from a myriad of relatively small independent providers. Addressing the emissions from our large and diverse supply chain is a complex and significant task which will take time.

2.3 In 2020-21 the Place Scrutiny Committee undertook a Scrutiny Review of Becoming a Carbon Neutral Council. The review made a number of recommendations, which were

accepted by full Council and are being implemented alongside the agreed climate emergency action plan. Appendix 1 includes a summary of progress to date against the agreed recommendations. Of the 27 actions, 6 (22%) have been completed and 21 (78%) are in progress. Progress with a number of actions will be over the long-term, for instance keeping the market for larger hydrogen powered vehicles under review and considering investment in carbon off-setting through investment in woodland creation. Some actions require additional resource and many actions, such as behavioural change work, will require long-term delivery programmes.

2.4 Proposals for significant additional resource of £3m per year up to 2024-25 to address the County Council's carbon footprint were agreed by Cabinet in 2021-22. This funding is being supplemented by bids for external funding, with over £800,000 of funding secured over the last 18 months. Investment is being made during 2022-23 in the following areas:

1. Modelling of options to get to net zero, in order to better understand the potential costs, benefits and timescales.
2. Solar PV at 6 sites, low energy lighting at 10 sites, heat decarbonisation at 2 sites and up to 8 electric vehicle charge points at County Hall.

2.5 Oversight of the investment set out above is provided by the Climate Change Officer Board, which includes representatives from all departments and is co-chaired by the Chief Operating Officer and the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport. A key priority of the Board during 2022 is to produce an updated climate emergency plan for 2023-25, which will set out the scale of investment required to achieve the carbon reduction target of 13% per year, how the £3m per year allocated to date will be spent and how far this delivers against the reduction target. A sub-group of the Scrutiny Place Committee has been established to input during June-September to the development of the updated climate emergency plan, with the final plan to be brought to Full Council in February 2023.

2.6 The recent increase in the Council's energy costs, and the future further increase in energy costs, increase the business case for investing in most carbon reduction measures, such as solar PV and low energy lighting. However, there are practical challenges within the supply chain, with strong competition for materials and labour leading to an increase in the costs of delivering carbon reduction projects and delays in delivery.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 The Council has recognised the severity of the climate crisis by declaring a climate emergency and setting a clear science-based target to get to net zero from its activities. Significant work has already been undertaken to reduce emissions and good progress has been made against the actions recommended by the Scrutiny Committee. The additional investment agreed by Cabinet in 2021-22 will enable the scale and pace of carbon reduction activity to increase. The Place Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the progress report and additional resources now available to implement the recommendations.

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LOCAL MEMBERS: ALL

BACKGROUND PAPERS: None