

TITLE	Officer Response to the Recommendations from the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 October 2020
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions - Gregor Murray

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

This report sets out the Officer response to the 13 Recommendations set out in section 2 (Attachment 1) Climate Emergency Task & Finish Group, Report and Recommendations, September 2020.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approve the Officers' responses contained within this Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee established a Task and Finish Group to review the Wokingham Borough Climate Emergency Action Plan. The primary objective of the Group was to make recommendations for improvement which could further enhance the delivery of the plan and to support the aspiration of achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough By 2030

The Group's overall findings were that the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) was a bold, ambitious document, in line with national best practice. Underpinned by a significant, dedicated budget and a clear governance structure.

Not surprisingly, in light of the enormous scope of the Action Plan, a number of areas were identified where more work and clarification were needed to strengthen the document and enable the engagement of residents and key stakeholders across the Borough. Including, more work was required to clarify the impact of specific schemes and ensure that they were supported by SMART targets

Following the completion of the Task and Finish Group's review of the Climate Emergency Action Plan (July 2020) and input from Officers, they formed 13 recommendations. These will help to strengthen the Action Plan, making it more robust, transparent and evidence-based.

On the whole the recommendations were accepted by Officers subject to a few cases where Officers have explained their reasoning.

BACKGROUND

In July 2019, Wokingham Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency. The Council committed to “playing as full a role as possible in achieving a net carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030”. The Council pledged to develop a Climate Emergency Action Plan and to submit annual updates showing progress on individual carbon reduction targets.

The Action Plan (first published in January 2020) focussed on establishing the borough’s baseline carbon footprint along with eight priority areas for carbon (CO₂) emission reductions, including transport, homes, businesses and waste. The Action Plan also set out proposals to generate renewable energy, increase carbon sequestration and strengthen the planning process to deliver carbon neutral construction and infrastructure. Finally, the Action Plan set out proposals for engagement with residents, schools, businesses and local stakeholders as well as ideas to promote positive behaviour changes.

The Council also pledged to submit annual progress reports showing progress on individual carbon reduction targets. The first progress report was scheduled on the anniversary of the declaration in July 2020 to provide a more detailed and robust action plan. In support of the Action Plan, a three year £50m Capital budget was approved at the Budget Council meeting in February 2020. A summary of the budget is set out in the Annex to the report in Appendix 1

The First Progress Report of the Climate Emergency Action Plan was taken to Council and approved in July 2020. As promised this was a detailed report with smart carbon targets. This included analysis of the council’s carbon footprint with projections to 2030 based on the actions set out in the Action Plan. At this point in time the actions in the plan were not sufficient deliver the level of carbon reductions necessary to meet the Borough’s 2030 target. However, the Action Plan is a living document and planning tool that assumes that new ideas and carbon reduction innovations will need to come on stream over the next 10 years to help the council play as full a role as possible in achieving a net carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030. As such, the Action Plan will remain a living document.

In order to scrutinise the Action Plan, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee established the Task and Finish Group at its meeting in February 2020. The Task and Finish Group established terms of reference. The primary objective of the Task and Finish Group was to scrutinise the emerging targets and key performance indicators underpinning the Action Plan and produce recommendations for improving where possible the plan. The Group also assessed the level of carbon reduction to be delivered for each target and its achievability, using SMART principles.

The Task and Finish Group met (virtually) on seven occasions and interviewed the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and a number of Officers. In order to seek external validation, the group interviewed Professor Paul Chatterton from the University of Leeds. They also received written evidence from the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (the LEP).

The Group’s overall findings were that the Climate Emergency Action Plan was a bold, ambitious document, in line with national best practice underpinned by a significant, dedicated budget and a clear governance structure. It commends the Executive Member

and Officers for the significant progress made on the Action Plan since January 2020, especially in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the national lockdown. Not surprisingly, in light of the enormous scope of the Action Plan, a number of areas were identified where more work and clarification were needed to strengthen the document and enable the engagement of residents and key stakeholders across the Borough. More work was required to clarify the impact of specific schemes and ensure that they were supported by SMART targets

The group concluded that the Council’s progress compares favourably with other local authorities, including some of the UK’s largest cities. The Council’s approach of developing a dedicated in-house team, supported by Officer working groups was also a positive, which will help to embed the Climate Emergency response throughout the organisation, including the Council’s contractors and suppliers. The report also outlines that a successful response to the Climate Emergency will only be delivered through the combined efforts of every resident, school, business, Town and Parish Council and other stakeholders across the Borough.

Recommendations with Officer responses.

Recommendation	Officer Response
<p>1 That the Council work with schools, businesses and community stakeholders to develop a Vision for a Net Zero Borough, with indicators and milestones to demonstrate progress.</p>	<p>Agreed. The Council will work with the Climate Emergency Cross Party Working group to develop a Vision for what a carbon neutral borough will look like in 2030</p>
<p>2 That the annual progress report on the Climate Emergency Action Plan includes recognition of the levels of non-CO2 greenhouse gas emissions in the Borough and progress achieved in delivering reductions through the sequestration measures in place.</p>	<p>It is agreed that the CEAP should recognise the role of non-CO2 greenhouse gasses in climate change.</p> <p>However, the council’s climate emergency declaration was based on the Committee on Climate Change report and makes commitment to address CO2 emissions.</p> <p>Also, The Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy’s Local Authority emissions statistics do not at this time provide non-CO2 emissions data at the regional level. The BEIS data we receive automatically includes sequestration in the local authority footprints and offsets these against other sector carbon emissions.</p> <p>Opinions of whether CO2 reductions through sequestration should be offset against other greenhouse gasses rather than actually CO2 emissions are subjective Opinions vary and there is no universally accepted standard</p>

	Therefore, Officers do not agree that the carbon savings from sequestration actions should be used to off-set the impacts of other greenhouse gasses rather than the CO2 savings in the CEAP.
3. That implementation of the Climate Emergency Action Plan be monitored to ensure that actions are not detrimental to other environmental priorities such as improved air quality.	Agreed
4 That the Council's key decision reports include a section on Climate Emergency to ensure that the issue is mainstreamed into the decision making process. This must include a transparent, calculated carbon impact assessment of the proposal rather than a generic comment such as "in line with the Climate Emergency Action Plan".	Agreed. A methodology to provide carbon impact will be devised to support this recommendation.
5 That, as part of the 2021 progress report on the Action Plan, the Council commission an independent carbon accounting audit of the Action Plan's targets, methodology and underlying assumptions.	<p>The officers feel that this recommendation should be subject to the resources available and that considerations to strengthen the internal team are considered as a core requirement to improve the council's own capability.</p> <p>The Action Plan published in July 2020 was presented with a detailed methodology paper to describe the approach to assess carbon emissions providing transparency on the data and methodology used. The council has also introduced a methodology to assess individual projects by its potential carbon savings. This will provide significantly more value to the council and members of the public as it gives more understanding on the effects of individual initiatives. By strengthening the internal team, the council can speed up the practise for embedding these processes into all its operations.</p> <p>Also, The Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy publishes annual CO2 emissions data which will calibrate carbon savings projected in the plan.</p>

<p>6 That the six monthly update of the Action Plan, in January 2021, address the gaps and errors in the current version.</p>	<p>The council committed to present an annual report on the progress of the climate emergency action plan in July each year.</p> <p>As the Action Plan is a living document and planning tool, new ideas and carbon reduction innovations will be added over the next 10 years to help the council play as full a role as possible in achieving a net carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030.</p> <p>It is expected that the Action Plan will change as more information is made available and better details of individual projects are acquired.</p>
<p>7 That the annual update report on the Action Plan include estimates of consumption emissions, progress of measures aimed at increasing awareness of these emissions and individual responsibilities such as the promotion of local sustainable sourcing options for food, goods and services.</p>	<p>Agreed. Although, it should be noted that these will be rough estimates. Assessing consumption emissions for all of the products and services consumed by our residents will be challenging in practice, because calculating consumption-related emissions is highly complex and the information is frequently unavailable. Communities consume thousands of different types of products and services, and the emissions associated with each of these is affected by many decisions made by different actors throughout their life cycles.</p> <p>The officers agree that the Action Plan should highlight the level of commitment required by all residents, local businesses and other stakeholders, and that it should strengthen our efforts to promote behavioural change that promote new lifestyle choices such as supporting local sustainable sourcing options for food, goods and services.</p>
<p>8 That future iterations of the Action Plan set out SMART targets to reduce car usage, thereby tackling traffic congestion, and demonstrate how the Council is working with neighbouring authorities, the Local Enterprise Partnership, bus and rail operators to deliver transport solutions and a transport network and infrastructure</p>	<p>Agreed. Further work is required to tackle carbon dioxide emissions from transport and that engaging with stakeholders plays a significant part to achieve this.</p> <p>The council is developing a low carbon transport strategy that will consider best opportunities to engage with stakeholders</p>

which focuses on active travel and public transport.	and will strengthen the targets identified in the Action Plan.
9 That a further report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, setting out the business case for the Green Bank Project, including an assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the viability of the project. .	Agreed. Once sufficient progress has been made on this project a report will be produced for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.
10 That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee scrutinise impact of the Local Plan Update on the Climate Emergency as part of its review of the new Local Plan later in 2020	Agreed. Particularly in light of proposed changes to planning policy by Government and the potential impact that this will have on the CEAP.
11 That the Council establish and publish details of the amount of land available for sequestration and renewable energy projects by surveying the Borough, in conjunction with Town and Parish Councils, to identify opportunities for tree planting, solar farms and other green projects.	Agreed.
12 That the annual update report on the Action Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise the relative significance of WBC's organisational footprint in any discussion of WBC's estate and facilities; • Provide details of progress on the Council's journey to becoming a Net Zero organisation, including investment, procurement and supply chains; • Outline the measures taken to protect individuals, families and groups most at risk from the impact of climate change and provide details of the outcomes; • Include a risk register, setting out the major risks (including 	Agreed. It should be noted that adding the likelihood of success or failure for each item is a relatively subjective exercise.

the impact of third party action and non-action);	
Include an assessment methodology which measures the likelihood (as a %) of success or failure for each item	
13 That, in light of the increasing number and complexity of initiatives aimed at tackling the Climate Emergency, consideration be given to strengthening the in-house team, especially in relation to “number crunching” of carbon reductions and project costs.	Agreed. The report recognises the scale of delivering the Climate Emergency Action Plan and the need for additional resources to ensure successful delivery
14 That the Action Plan recognises the important role played by Towns and Parishes across the Borough in moving to Net Zero and commits to working in meaningful partnership to develop and support local initiatives which turn new ideas into positive action on the ground.	Agreed. Towns and Parishes are currently meeting officers to plan how they can work with the council to deliver some of the actions in the CEAP

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	No	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	No	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	No	

Other Financial Information

If the findings in recommendation 13, to support additional resource to deliver the CEAP, are approved then additional revenue funding will be required

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

No further consultations due to be carried out

Public Sector Equality Duty

This report relates to adoption processes which in themselves have no particular equalities implications. Due regard to Public Sector Equality Duty and equalities assessments are taken into account in the context of each scheme

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

This decision is key to the Council's carbon neutral objectives

List of Background Papers

Climate Emergency Task & Finish Group, Report and Recommendations, September 2020

Contact Rhian Hayes	Service Place Commissioning
Telephone Tel: 0118 974 6090	Email rhian.hayes@wokingham.gov.uk