

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 7 July 2022
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive and Director, Resources and Assets

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

An enhanced Overview and Scrutiny function which gives greater focus to the Scrutiny of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, which is a key issue for the Borough and a priority in the Council Plan 2020/24

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is requested to consider recommending to Council that:

- 1) a Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee be established;
- 2) the proposed terms of reference for the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Annex A) be approved, subject to Member comments;
- 3) the composition of the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee be five Wokingham Borough Partnership Members and four Conservative Members, plus substitute Members (five/four) as advised by the Group Leaders;
- 4) the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee be elected at the first meeting.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

The Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. This is an issue of high importance for the Borough and its residents. In order to scrutinise the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, the Committee established the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group which produced two reports (2020 and 2021).

A Member request has been received to establish a Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Under the Council's Constitution the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee is able to recommend changes to the Overview and Scrutiny structure to full Council.

The report sets out the background and proposed terms of reference for a new Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for Members to consider.

## **Background**

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's terms of reference enable it to propose amendments to the composition of and terms of reference of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to the Council on the basis of political proportionality (Paragraph 6.1.4 of the Council's Constitution).

Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019. The Council is committed to playing as full a role as possible in reducing Borough's carbon footprint to be net carbon zero by 2030. The Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan aims to:

- Reduce carbon dioxide emissions from transport;
- Reduce carbon dioxide emissions from domestic and business properties;
- Generate more renewable energy in the Borough (e.g. the Barkham solar farm);
- Create a Local Plan that specifies net zero construction and infrastructure;
- Increase levels of carbon sequestration in the Borough through greening the environment;
- Engage with young people and support sustainable schools;
- Reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill;
- Encourage behaviour change amongst residents and businesses.

An update on the Climate Emergency Action Plan is submitted to the Management Committee each year before consideration by full Council. The 2022 update report is included in this Agenda.

In its 2020 report, the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group recognised the Council's ambitious response to the Climate Emergency through its Action Plan. The Task and Finish Group also highlighted a number of areas where the Action Plan should be strengthened with the use of SMART targets which were open to external validation. The Group's 2021 report followed a similar theme. In spite of the significant focus on responding to the Covid-19 pandemic the Council was able to make progress on priorities such as the first solar farm, active travel and engagement with local schools. However, the Task and Finish Group emphasised the enormous challenge facing the Borough and the Government. A major area of concern was the lack of a coherent national strategy setting out how local authorities fitted into the delivery of Net Zero and, crucially, how the significant changes required would be funded.

The concerns expressed by the Task and Finish Group are reiterated by the recent progress report from the independent Climate Change Committee (CCC). The CCC report (June 2022) states:

"The transition to Net Zero will bring a range of benefits and opportunities, but the Government needs to make it easy for everyone to contribute. We are yet to see a public engagement strategy from the Government, three years since Net Zero was placed in legislation. The Treasury has not set out how the full range of costs and benefits of the

transition will be shared fairly. It remains unclear how central, devolved and local government will operate coherently towards the Net Zero goal”.

For information, the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group adopted the following terms of reference which may be useful in considering the terms of reference for the proposed Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Annex A):

### **WBC Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group - Terms of Reference**

1. To scrutinise the Council’s Climate Emergency Action Plan.
2. To scrutinise emerging targets and key performance indicators underpinning the Action Plan.
3. To assess the level of carbon reduction to be delivered by the Action Plan in light of the Council’s 2030 target.
4. To consider any other priorities which could be considered for inclusion in the Action Plan.
5. To review Climate Emergency actions taken by other local authorities and the private sector.
6. To interview expert witnesses in the public, private and academic sectors.
7. To develop key lines of enquiry to provide a framework for the Group’s work.
8. To issue a Call for Evidence via social media to invite residents, community groups and Town and Parish Councils to submit evidence to the Group.
9. To produce a final report to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Executive, with recommendations for improvement relating to the Council’s Climate Emergency Action Plan.

### **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 focussed on the vulnerable and 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)	£2.5k	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£2.5k	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£2.5k	Yes	Revenue

**Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision**

The role of Overview and Scrutiny Chair attracts a Special Responsibility Allowance of £2.5k per annum.

**Cross-Council Implications**

The Climate Emergency Action Plan impacts across the Council's operations. It is included as a key risk in the Corporate Risk Register.

**Public Sector Equality Duty**

Due regard has been given to Council's Public Sector Equality Duty. The proposed Overview and Scrutiny Committee will scrutinise the impact of the Climate Emergency Action Plan on residents across the Borough, including residents with protected characteristics as defined under the Equality Act 2010. The aim is to achieve better/fairer outcomes and increased value for money for all residents.

**Climate Emergency – The 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**

The proposed Overview and Scrutiny Committee will support this aim by providing "critical friend" challenge and support for the delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

**List of Background Papers**

WBC Climate Emergency Task & Finish Group reports (2020 and 2021)  
Climate Change Committee annual Progress Report – June 2022

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## **Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Draft Terms of Reference**

### 1. Role of the Committee

The role of the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be to scrutinise, review and assist with policy development relating to:

- a) the Council's commitment to play as full a role as possible to reduce the Borough's carbon footprint to be Net Zero by 2030;
- b) implementation of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, including the annual progress report to Council;
- c) progress against recommendations, agreed by the Executive, from the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee itself;
- d) examples of Climate Emergency "best practice" from other local authorities and public/private sector organisations.

### 2. Terms of Reference

In carrying out its role the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee will:

- a) review and/or scrutinise the decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions under its remit;
- b) monitor and review performance indicators related to Council services within the remit of the Committee and question the relevant Executive Member/s and senior Officers thereon, reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee where necessary;
- c) review those areas, within the remit of the Committee, included in the Climate Emergency Action Plan, Council Plan and other Plans and Policies where targets are not being met or progress is slow;
- d) conduct scrutiny reviews or projects of a service specific nature or within the remit of the Committee, including those which are cross-cutting or corporate-wide, as may be allocated by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee from the corporately agreed work programme, including the preparation of reports and recommendations for consideration by the Executive;
- e) at the request of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, undertake Policy Development and Review functions as set out in Rule 6.1.3;

- f) at the request of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, investigate matters of concern referred to it by the Executive, Council or Council Committees;
- g) at the request of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, investigate matters of concern referred to it by Non-Executive Members of the Council, Corporate Leadership Team, members of the public, or external organisations, including the consideration of requests made as a “Councillor Call for Action” as defined in Section 119 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Localism Act 2011;
- h) at the request of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, review Executive decisions within the remit of the Committee which have been “called-in”;
- i) constitute and appoint to Task and Finish Groups as necessary.