

TITLE	Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 9 September 2022
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	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 four Wokingham Borough Partnership Members and three Conservative Members, plus substitute Members (four/three) 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.

The Committee gave initial consideration to the proposed new Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7 July 2022. The item was deferred in order to provide further information relating to points raised by Members.

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”.

Issues Raised at the July Meeting

At the meeting on 7 July 2022 Members raised a number of issues relating to the resourcing and operation of the proposed new Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee as follows:

- The impact on officers’ workload in Democratic Services, in terms of supporting the proposed Committee. Democratic Services successfully supported the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group in 2020 and 2021, including drafting the Group’s reports. This was a significant additional workload over a six month period. Support for a new O&S Committee would be met from existing resources. In addition, the recent external review of the Council’s Scrutiny function, carried out by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, included discussions about the resourcing of the Scrutiny function, especially in terms of a greater corporate focus and aim to raise the profile of Scrutiny as part of effective corporate governance. The report from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny is expected shortly. The report will be submitted to the October meeting of the Management Committee for discussion.
- The report to the July meeting suggested that the new O&S Committee be made up of nine Members (five Wokingham Borough Partnership and four Conservative). Could the Committee have a smaller number of Members? The Committee membership could be 5:4 or 4:3. Establishing the Committee on this basis would not impact on the current political balance calculations.
- Rather than setting up a new Committee, could Climate Emergency be a standing item on each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees? Whilst not creating a new Committee, this approach would still generate additional work for Democratic Services and the officers working on delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan, for example in relation to report writing and the number of meetings requiring officer attendance. In addition, a key benefit of establishing a dedicated Committee would be the development of Climate Emergency expertise amongst Members.
- Terms of Reference – it was confirmed that the Management Committee could expand/refine the draft Terms of Reference for the new O&S Committee before submitting the report to Council. If approved, the new Committee would fit into the existing O&S structure. The Chair would sit on the Management Committee and the Committee would share information with the other O&S Committees in line with existing practice.

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)
UK Climate Change Committee annual Progress Report – June 2022

Contact Neil Carr	Service Resources and Assets
Telephone No 0118 974 6000	Email neil.carr@wokingham.gov.uk
Date 29 August 2022	Version No. 1

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.