

TITLE	Climate Emergency - position paper
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Tuesday 21 st March 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Service Manager, Climate Emergency – Sabrina Chiaretti
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Residents Services – Cllr Sarah Kerr

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Climate change affects every member of our community, particularly the most vulnerable people. Tackling the climate emergency will have positive impacts on the health and quality of life of our residents. This paper presents an update on our climate work, including two key schemes that will be launched in Spring 2023. Both schemes will enable our residents to decarbonise their homes, reduce their energy bills and address the cost-of-living crisis.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive notes the status of WBC climate emergency work, in particular the two key schemes that will be launched in Spring 2023.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Background

In July 2019, Wokingham Borough Council members unanimously declared a climate emergency. Subsequently, the Council published its first Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), which commits us to play as full a role as possible in achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. The CEAP is a robust plan that sets out the strategic direction of the Council's climate change programme of work, whilst strategically aligning with the Corporate Plan. The CEAP was commended on multiple occasions:

- In 2021, as part of the UK Climate Emergency Scorecard, for the first time ever, the Climate Action Plans of all UK Local Authorities (325 in total) were scored by an independent organisation. Out of 182 UK Single Tier LAs, Wokingham Borough Council achieved position 25, scoring higher than several authorities that have historically been known for their leadership in tackling the climate crisis such as Bristol City Council (36), and of all the Berkshire Local Authorities apart from Reading (15).
- In June 2022, the CEAP achieved "Highly Commended" at the MJ Awards, for the category "Leadership in Responding to the Climate Emergency". We were commended for our leadership, innovation and dedication in tackling the climate crisis.

We are often regarded as an expert in various areas of the climate change field, including carbon accounting and climate mitigation. Our advice is sought after by other Local Authorities and business partners alike. Groups that the Climate Emergency Team is a key

member and contributor of include: the Greater South-East Net Zero Hub and the Berkshire Climate Officers' Net Zero Task Force.

Within the CEAP, WBC has committed to several energy-related targets, including:

- "75% of homes within the borough to reach an EPC C rating by 2030"
- "Support the generation of renewable energy in the Borough to generate the equivalent of approx. 1550 kWh per household".
- "Support residents and local businesses to reduce their energy usage and carbon emissions and increase the uptake of green energy".

To address those actions, two projects will be launched in Spring 2023. These are Solar Together and WBC's Home Decarbonisation Advice Service. Both projects will enable our residents to decarbonise their homes, whilst reducing energy bills and helping to address the cost-of-living crisis.

Solar Together

In Spring 2023 the Council plans to start the process of enabling local residents to install solar panels on their homes, at a competitive market price, through the Solar Together scheme. The scheme is delivered by solar PV group-buying experts "ichoosr", that the Council has entered a sole-source agreement with. The way the scheme works in practice is explained below.

- Ichoosr runs an analysis to identify suitable properties in WBC area with the support of WBC.
- The identified properties receive a letter, through which residents are encouraged to sign up to the scheme.
- Ichoosr vets a number of suppliers, and invites them to a reverse auction to deliver installations in the properties that have registered their interest. Once the auction is concluded, residents are presented with the winning offer, and have the option to proceed with the offer and have the solar panels installed on their properties.
- Ichoosr liaises with the suppliers and provide information to the Council at regular stages throughout the scheme delivery, for monitoring and reporting purposes.

The cost of the scheme to WBC is limited to the letters sent to residents, which is estimated to be less than £5k. At the end of the scheme, WBC will receive a commission for each installation delivered in the borough, which will make the scheme at the very least cost-neutral to the Council, with the potential to generate a small amount of income. The Council has the option of renewing the Solar Together scheme if successful, every year for the next 3 years.

The Council is coordinating with the other Berkshire Local Authorities, who have signed their own deals, and will be jointly marketing the scheme across Berkshire, to maximise uptake and involvement opportunities among suppliers in the area.

From liaising with Local Authorities that have run Solar Together schemes in the past, the feedback gathered by the Climate Emergency Team has been positive. The risk of the scheme is related to global supply chain disruptions within the solar industry and suppliers'

responsiveness. We anticipate the risk will be mitigated through a strong and transparent communication activity run by the Council, as well as a robust communication support plan and complaints handling process run by ichoosr.

Home Decarbonisation Advice Service

To meet our CEAP goal of “75% of homes reaching an EPC C by 2030”, we estimate that around 15,000 homes will need to be improved in the next 7 years. At present, the Council supports residents decarbonising their homes by providing advice on home improvement interventions, and options to finance those. However, the support available is limited to fuel-poor homes or vulnerable residents and one of the key barriers for residents is lack of advice and support. If we are to achieve our target, the current advice service needs to be scaled up and enhanced, with residents proactively contacted to encourage them to improve their properties.

In response to this, in late Spring 2023 the Council will launch a Home Decarbonisation Advice Service, with support from software and advisory services providers “Parity Projects”. Residents will have access to an online portal that enables them to identify the improvement options that they can deliver in their property, informed by data from the EPC register captured by Parity Projects. Residents can then liaise with the Council to assess whether they qualify for financial assistance and be advised on solutions to deliver the measures.

Delivery of the scheme will require a Council-wide approach. The scheme will be led by the Energy Team. Climate Emergency will monitor the delivery of the scheme, for reporting purposes and for analysing the success of the scheme. Customer Service will be trained on directing residents to the online portal, and a communication campaign will be set-up to ensure residents are aware of the scheme.

Alongside this, the Council will have access to software “Pathways” provided by Parity Projects. This will provide energy performance data of all domestic properties in Wokingham Borough, helping to identify the most effective retrofit measure for each property, reduce fuel bills, and carbon emissions. The Council will utilise this data to run targeted awareness raising campaigns and inform funding applications.

Analysis

To deliver on our climate commitment and align our work with other Local Authorities that are leaders in the climate emergency response, the Council needs to address a number of areas imminently. These are set out below. This list considers the feedback that WBC received from the Climate Emergency Scorecard initiative mentioned above, and from engaging with our Local Authorities.

- **Emission shortfall:** the latest CEAP, approved at Council in September 2022, is estimated to save 214.72 ktCO₂e emissions, but in 2030 there will still be a shortfall of 264.27 ktCO₂e emissions. So, delivering the CEAP will not result in a carbon neutral borough by 2030. There is a need for further ambitious actions to be included in the Plan, and to address all key emitting sectors.
- **Strategic embedding of climate change within the organisation.** The Climate Emergency Team is currently assessing the financial and resource implications of delivering all CEAP projects. Climate change impacts all areas of work of the

Council, and so achieving carbon neutrality and addressing the above shortfall requires a Council-wide effort. Whilst the climate emergency team leads on the delivery of the CEAP, it is key that all departments take ownership of their actions and strive to minimise the carbon emissions from their projects. It is key that the Executives are supportive of the CEAP and contribute to advance our programme of work by championing the climate cause within their work programmes and make tackling the climate emergency business as usual.

- **Community engagement:** the Council is responsible for only 4% of our Borough's carbon emissions. The Council can only influence the reduction of the other 96% of emissions, both through policy and collaborative working. Therefore, it is key that our community, including, but not limited to, residents, businesses, schools, Town and Parish Councils is aware of our climate commitment and empowered with information and support to tackle the climate crisis.
- **Climate adaptation:** Climate change is already affecting the borough's operations and infrastructure. It is key that the Council starts planning for future impacts to minimise the negative consequences on our community, as well as on our operations and finances. Work will begin in 2023 to assess the current and predicted risks that climate change poses to the borough.

Next steps

Both schemes will be launched in Spring 2023. The fourth CEAP progress report will be submitted to Council in July 2023. This will include updates on both schemes.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	Solar Together: £5k max	Yes	Revenue
	Home Decarbonisation advice Service: £3.6k	Yes	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Solar Together: £5k max (if another scheme is run)	Yes	Revenue
	Home Decarbonisation advice Service: £4K max	Yes	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Solar Together: £5k max (if another scheme is run)	Yes	Revenue
	Home Decarbonisation advice Service: £5K max	Yes	

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The Solar Together scheme is forecast to breakeven, with the council receiving any income contribution from the installations which is forecast to cover the upfront cost of £5k pa. The maximum risk to the authority is £5k pa for the duration of the scheme which would occur if there were no installations. In the event that income is not sufficient and there is a cost to the authority this will be covered by utilising existing reserves.

The Home Decarbonisation Advice Service will be funded from existing budgets and utilise existing staffing. Should there be a very high level of demand on the service it may result in the need for additional staff. If that were to happen the funding source of an additional member of staff would be considered at that point.

Cross-Council Implications The CEAP, Solar Together and the Home Decarbonisation Advice Service support a range of Council priorities and areas of work. These include: access to clean and green spaces, promotion of sustainable and active travel modes, provision of sustainable and quality homes, improving the health and quality of life of our community. Delivery of these schemes can be managed within existing resource and work patterns.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Yes, Public Sector Equality Duty has been considered. Climate changes affects every member of our community, particularly the most vulnerable people. Solar Together and the Home Decarbonisation Advice Service will reduce WBC emissions, decarbonising buildings and helping with the cost-of-living crisis. This will have positive impacts on the health and quality of life of our residents.

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*

Addressing the climate emergency through delivery of the CEAP will ensure the Borough plays as full of a role as possible in achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. Both the Solar Together and the Home Decarbonisation Advice Service schemes will ensure key CEAP targets related to Energy are achieved.

List of Background Papers

1. Wokingham Borough Council Climate Emergency Action Plan 2022 (3rd) progress report.

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