

Agenda Item 33

TITLE	Climate Emergency Engagement & Communications Plan
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 th December 2023.
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Engagement Officer, Climate Emergency – Resh Thorpe
DIRECTOR	Giorgio Framalocco – Director of Place and Growth
LEAD MEMBER	Cllr Sarah Kerr – Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Residents Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Climate change poses a significant threat to our community. Increasing temperatures and more extreme weather events have negative consequences on every member of our community, and disproportionately affect those that are most socially vulnerable.

Effectively engaging with the community and changing behaviours through an Engagement and Communications Plan will make people feel empowered and invested in the climate issues that we face; consequently, seeing themselves as being part of the solution, not just part of the problem will help us to work towards achieving our target to become a Carbon Neutral Borough by 2030. This will also have positive implications on the economy, health and quality of life of our community.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee notes and provides comments on the September 2023 Climate Emergency Engagement & Communications Plan.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Background

In July 2019, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) members unanimously declared a climate emergency. The declaration set out the commitment to play as full a role as possible in achieving a carbon neutral borough by 2030.

Subsequently, WBC published its first Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), establishing 10 key priority areas and over 100 actions to mitigate CO2 emissions and achieve this carbon neutral goal by 2030. The key priority areas are:

1. Transport
2. Renewable Energy Generation
3. Building Retrofitting
4. Carbon sequestration
5. Schools
6. Waste & Recycling
7. New Developments
8. Procurement
9. Engagement and Behaviour Change
10. Council Specific actions

WBC recognises it cannot reach this ambitious 2030 goal alone. Alongside the successful delivery of mitigation and adaptation projects, the success of the CEAP requires stakeholders including staff, residents, businesses, schools, Town and Parish Councils, WBC partners and community organisations to engage with the CEAP and minimise their carbon footprint by shifting to more sustainable behaviours.

Section 9 of the CEAP is about engagement and behaviour change, as per action 9.1.1 an Engagement & Communications Plan is needed to outline how WBC will effectively engage with the community and change behaviours in a positive way to make people feel empowered and invested in the climate issues that we face; consequently, seeing themselves as being part of the solution, not just part of the problem. This will aid delivery of the CEAP and help WBC to work towards achieving our Borough's dream to become a Carbon Neutral Borough by 2030.

Analysis

The aim of the Engagement & Communications Plan is to ensure that everyone who lives, works, and studies in Wokingham Borough understands our journey to a carbon neutral future, and is equipped with the knowledge, tools and support required to make their contribution to it; and to take ownership individually, as an organisation or as a community.

The Climate Emergency Engagement & Communications Plan will sit alongside the CEAP and will be used as a guide to work with stakeholders and share ideas, and to collaborate on communication and engagement initiatives, in a positive and inclusive way. The success of the plan will be evaluated and reported against priority 9 of the CEAP. This plan will also help WBC to consider and develop actions, for inclusion in the CEAP, that will have the most impact in shifting behavioural change and lasting benefits for delivering our dream for a carbon neutral Borough by 2030.

Specifically, the Climate Emergency Engagement & Communications Plan will aim to:

1. raise the profile of what we are doing as a Local Authority to reduce emissions against our ten CEAP priorities to help us achieve our carbon neutral target for 2030.
2. invite dialogue from our stakeholders and allow the community to constructively challenge our CEAP.
3. empower people to take action by supporting and incentivising residents, businesses and the wider community to make sustainable choices and pledges
4. prioritise engagement with under-represented groups who are likely to experience the more immediate effects of climate change.
5. collaborate with partners across the Borough and other local authorities to run communication and engagement initiatives across a wider area.

Next Steps

Alongside the evaluation methods outlined within the Plan, the Climate Emergency team will coordinate the delivery of the plan, working alongside officers from key departments. The team will report quarterly on progress on our engagement and communication against the relevant department service Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

In addition, we will come to the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny committee with an update against the Climate Emergency Engagement & Communications Plan every six months, one of which will part of the annual scrutiny meeting of the CEAP progress report against Priority 9.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

WBC 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)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The cost implications are N/A as there is currently a WBC Climate Emergency Engagement officer in post within the Climate Emergency team who will be responsible for the development, co-ordination and evaluation of the actions set out in the Engagement and Communications Plan. Funding for this post expires in 2024/25, an MTFP growth bid has been put in to make this post permanent. We will collaboratively and creatively work in partnership with our stakeholders and actively look for sources of funding such as government grant schemes to fund and assist any actions within the delivery of this plan that require financial funding.

Cross-Council Implications

Addressing the climate emergency through the delivery of WBC's the Engagement & Communications Plan supports a range of Council priorities and areas of work included in WBC's CEAP. 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. Addressing the climate emergency requires commitment from all council departments.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Yes, Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken into account and an EDI form has been completed and is attached to this cover report. Climate changes affects every member of our community, particularly the most vulnerable people. Tackling the climate emergency, minimising emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change will have positive impacts on the health and quality of life of our residents.

List of Background Papers

Appendix A - Wokingham Borough Council Climate Emergency Engagement & Communications Plan
Appendix B - EDI report– Climate Emergency Engagement & Communications Plan

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