

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**Thursday, 22nd October 2020**

REPORT TITLE:	ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY POLICY AND ACTION PLAN
REPORT OF:	NICOLA BUTTERWORTH, DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides Committee with an update on the Council's response to the climate emergency and on the emerging Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan, which has been developed over the past year following the Council's Environment and Climate Emergency Declaration in July 2019.

The emerging Action Plan, which is attached as Appendix 1, sets out the Council's response to the global climate crisis. The Action Plan sets out the initiatives that the Council is undertaking and will continue to develop in the face of the Climate Emergency. It is proposed that the Council prepares an Environment and Climate Emergency Policy to the set the context, framework, and approach for the delivery of the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan.

The latest evidence indicates we need to get to net zero greenhouse gas emissions across the globe by the middle of this century to stop things getting much worse. To do this, we need to all but eliminate the use of fossil fuels for heat, power, and transport. This will require a considerable change in the way we live.

The emerging Action Plan is ambitious and proposes that the Council as an organisation aims to achieve 'net carbon neutrality by 2030.' The development of the Council's Environment and Climate Emergency has been supported by third party climate change experts, Local Partnerships, who have confirmed that the Council achieving net carbon neutrality in 10 years is ambitious but possible. Through the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan, the Council will lead the way locally and regionally in seeking the to be net zero carbon in 10 years.

The Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan forms the Council's contribution to the borough-wide Wirral Cool 2 Strategy. It seeks to show leadership by pursuing net zero carbon within the decade. In doing so, it supports progress towards de-carbonisation across Wirral by 2041 and the Government's legally binding national target of net zero target by 2050

The emerging Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan sets out the Council's journey to becoming carbon emissions neutral within the decade. Many actions have already been undertaken with key aspects of the Action Plan already in place such as the

creating the Climate Emergency Team and launching the Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy earlier this summer. All aspects of the Council's function, ways of working, decision making, and service delivery will change as the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan are established.

The headline areas for delivery are:

- reduce emissions to net zero;
- fully informed decision making;
- becoming a carbon literate organisation;
- embrace home working;
- active transport (provision for cycling and walking);
- sustainable ways of operating;
- communication and engagement;
- carbon storage;
- climate resilient Wirral;
- preparing future generations; and
- measuring progress along the journey.

Already, the new ways of working which have been necessary because of the Covid-19 restrictions have created some unforeseen environmental benefits and opportunities. Many aspects of the way in which the Council works and provides services have fundamentally changed because of Covid-19 restrictions. These provide an opportunity to change the way we operate in the future. This has helped pave the way for the establishment of the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan with many of the actions within the plan now underway as a result.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to:

1. Note and endorse the actions that have been taken since the Council declared an Environment and Climate Emergency in July 2019;
2. Endorse the emerging Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan attached as Appendix 1 to this report;
3. Establish an Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Members' Working Group to act as a Task and Finish Group and develop an Environment and Climate Emergency Policy with a membership of 6.
4. Instruct the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Members' Working Group to report back to this Committee at a future meeting with recommendations for the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy.
5. The Monitoring Officer be authorised as proper officer to carry out the wishes of the Group Leaders in allocating Members to membership and substitute membership of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Members'

Working Group and to appoint those Members with effect from the date at which the proper officer is advised of the names of such Members.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 Wirral Council declared an Environment and Climate Emergency through an all-party resolution in July 2019. The development of an Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and emerging Action Plan is the Council's response to the declaration.
- 1.2 The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change endorsed the Cool Wirral Partnership's new climate strategy for the Borough called Cool 2 on 31 March 2020. This calls on those who support it to develop and share Locally Determined Contributions. The Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan will fulfil this commitment.
- 1.3 The Wirral Cool 2 Strategy makes clear we need to all but eliminate damaging greenhouse gas emissions by 2041. To demonstrate the sense of urgency for action and provide the lead for others, it is proposed the plan will seek to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030.
- 1.4 The Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan will drive change to the way the Council operates, makes decisions, and provides services. The emerging plan therefore contains a significant number of actions to deliver such change. An influential internal management Action Group will be required to oversee the change and deliver the actions outlined. It is intended to therefore establish an Environment and Climate Emergency Officer Action Group to perform this function and to have representations from all the Council's directorates and service areas.
- 1.5 The Council has recently commissioned the support of leading climate change experts 'Local Partnerships' to help shape the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan and to validate the Council's journey to achieving net carbon neutrality in 10 years. Local Partnership's work has recently concluded, and they have provided recommendations and observations for the Council's Action Plan. Local Partnerships have validated the Action Plan, stating it can, if applied, achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030.
- 1.6 The Constitution enables the establishment of Working Groups from time to time to develop recommendations or investigate issues of interest or concern. The recommendation is to approve the establishment of an Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Members' Working Group. The Working Group will make recommendations which will be considered in due course by this Committee.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Council has declared an Environment and Climate Emergency and with it an expectation that action will be taken to address the emergency. Therefore, the options of not acting or delaying action have not been considered as these would not respond to the Council's declaration. The emergency declaration has established an urgency for action to be accelerated and for the Council to transform the way it functions. The Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan is being prepared to meet this expectation. There are examples of other local authorities being criticised for not acting having previously declared a climate emergency.
- 2.2 Whilst a membership of 6 is recommended for the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Members' Working Group Committee could resolve to make the Working Group either a smaller size (to a minimum of 3) or a larger size.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Unnatural climate change across the world is widely evidenced and its impact is highlighted by significant events across the world. The world has already experienced a 1°C of abnormal heating since 1900. The speed of this change has risen, and the impacts are demonstratable and concerning.
- 3.2 World leaders are increasingly concerned about climate change and in recognition of this there have been several significant developments. The United Nation's Paris Agreement on Climate Change formally came into force in 2016. This sets out the globally agreed approach to mitigating carbon emissions and adapting to unavoidable change. The global goal is to limit average rises in temperature to 'well below' 2°C above the pre-industrial level and pursue efforts to limit the rise to 1.5°C. Under this agreement nations are required to develop their own Nationally Determined Contributions setting actions to help achieve the global goal. The agreement includes a 'ratchet mechanism' designed to encourage progressive improvement in these Nationally Determined Contributions which must be updated periodically and reported to the UN. At present the Nationally Determined Contributions submitted do not yet put us on a safe path.
- 3.3 In the wake of the Paris Agreement and subsequent review by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of evidence concerning the impacts of 1.5°C warming, the UK Government's own independent Climate Change Committee has made recommendations to Government. As a result, the UK Government has now tightened its legally binding target for emissions reduction. The target is now to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. Previously it was an 80% reduction in emissions compared to 1990 levels. More work will now be needed to keep within future legally binding carbon budgets.
- 3.4 The international and national position is well reflected in Wirral. We have a well-established climate change partnership, 'Cool Wirral', and the Council has maintained a commitment to tackling the impacts of climate change over many years. On 31 March 2020, the Council's Portfolio Holder for

Environment and Climate Change endorsed the Cool Wirral Partnership's new follow up strategy 'Cool 2' following support with public consultation and scrutiny from the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Council is a member of the Cool Wirral Partnership and has committed to supporting the delivery of the Cool 2 Strategy and to a contribution to it in the form of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

3.5 The Cool 2 strategy sets two goals for Wirral the place:

- To stay within a local emissions' 'budget' of 7.7 million tonnes of CO2 between 2020-2100 and to reach 'net zero' pollution as early as possible before 2041.
- To ensure a climate resilient Wirral adapts to cope with existing change and further unavoidable disruption this century.

3.6 Wirral Council has prioritised responding to climate change over many years as a signatory to the 'Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change' and its successor, the 'Climate Local Initiative.' This commitment was reaffirmed in July 2019 with the all-party 'Environment and Climate Change Emergency Declaration.' The Declaration made a clear commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by seeking additional funding to resource the Council's response, planting additional trees, investing in electric vehicle charging infrastructure, exploring investment in solar farms, and implementing appropriate decision making tools supported by a staff and Member training programme.

3.7 The Council will lead by example through the establishment of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan and the proposed ambitious but achievable target of the Council and its entity being 'net carbon neutral' by 2030. This will be a 10-year journey. The Climate Emergency Action Plan will be the Council's 'locally determined contribution' to the Cool2 strategy which sets a target for Wirral as a whole, to be carbon neutral by 2041. The partnership's other members will be urged to declare environment and climate emergencies and to develop their own locally determined contributions.

3.8 It is proposed that this Committee develops the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy through a Task and Finish Group with a membership of 6. The Working Group will make recommendations which will be considered in due course by this Committee.

Environment and Climate Emergency Headlines and Progress

3.9 The Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan will be used as tools to transform the way the Council operates, engages with residents, and works with partners. The Action Plan will therefore focus on the Council's functions from service provision, decision making and procurement to energy consumption, transport, and ways of working. The policy and action plan will contribute to the Cool2 strategy and targets for Wirral as a place, however, their focus will be on transforming the Council's operation to demonstrate commitment and leadership for the climate emergency response.

3.10 The following are proposed environment and climate emergency headlines to be delivered through the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan. Many of the actions initially identified in response to the Declaration have been undertaken:

- **REDUCE EMISSIONS TO NET ZERO:** Through a switch to 100% green energy and reduced demand, transforming the Council's buildings, street lighting and fleet. The Council's Recovery Plan and new ways of working post Covid-19 will be a major opportunity to address building efficiency and introduce green energy.
INFORMED DECISION MAKING: The re-introduction of carbon budget reporting, introduce sustainability appraisals, and ensure the climate emergency is considered in all reporting and decision making. The Environment and Climate Emergency Policy is a matter which is capable of being a material consideration for planning decisions and a significant matter to be considered in the development of the Local Plan.
- **CARBON LITERATE ORGANISATION:** A commitment to becoming a 'carbon literate organisation' through training of decision makers. Carbon Literacy courses have commenced for senior officers and Members in partnership with APSE Training.
- **EMBRACE HOME WORKING:** Support for staff to work from home, virtual communication and a blended approach to office provision and access to resources. Officers and Members need to support to work from home but the new ways of working and communicating established as part of the Covid-19 lockdown are here to stay and support the climate emergency response.
- **ACTIVE AND ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORT:** Invest in facilities and infrastructure to support active and alternative powered transport. The Council are working with partners to support and sustain the growing interest in active transport, which accelerated during the Covid-19 lockdown. There are also a number of initiatives to establish infrastructure for alternative powered transport such as charging facilities for electric vehicles.
- **SUSTAINABLE WAYS OF OPERATING:** Embed climate considerations into everyday operations by becoming a digital council, reducing internal business travel and promoting active travel, electrifying council vehicles, running more sustainable events, greening our procurement strategy, working towards a circular economy and increased recycling and reuse of waste.
- **COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT:** Raise awareness of the changes local people can make to help with the climate emergency and communicate what we are doing as a Council as part of the Cool Wirral partnership.
- **CARBON STORAGE:** Capture more carbon naturally by increasing Wirral's woodland and tree cover and protecting its soils and natural habitats. In the summer we launched Wirral's Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy, which sets out to plant and grow over 200,000 trees in the next 10 years. To work with local groups to nurture the trees and monitor their growth and potential disease.
- **BIO-DIVERSITY AND POLLINATION:** Establish new methods of operation and land management to promote wildflowers, pollinators, and

insects. This summer we have piloted the creation of 16 pollinator sites across the borough with reduced maintenance. The sites have proven to be an initial success encouraging insects and wildflowers.

- **CLIMATE RESILIENT WIRRAL:** Futureproof Wirral against climate change through coastal and flood management and nature-based solutions. We have secured funding to develop our Resilient Parks project and the sea defence infrastructure at West Kirby are due to start.
- **FUTURE GENERATIONS:** Invest in Wirral's young people and support their understanding and response to the climate emergency. We have transformed our Eco Schools and Cool Schools programmes.
- **MEASURING PROGRESS:** Establish a publicly accessible and dynamic performance platform linked to the communications plan. We will transition the climate emergency element of the Covid-19 dashboard to form the metrics for the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There will be financial implications to declaring an environment and climate emergency and setting a corporate priority for the Council. Successful delivery of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan will require a realignment of the Council's resources. There will be cost implications for the Council to consider achieving net carbon neutrality in 10 years. If recommendations are endorsed, a long-term financial plan will be developed and presented to this Committee.
- 4.2 In the year since the Environment and Climate Emergency Declaration was made, the Council has had to face the unprecedented challenge of responding to the Covid-19 crisis. The crisis has fundamentally changed the way the Council operates and placed a significant burden on finances moving forward. The Council now has a challenge to set a medium-term financial plan and prioritise service provision as a result. However, responding to the environment and climate emergency remains a corporate priority and the threat from climate change is undiminished. Therefore, the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan will have to be delivered within the Council's diminished financial envelope. The Covid-19 crisis has provided some unexpected benefits and opportunities for the Council, through the enforced ways of working during the lockdown period. Such working practices and emphasis will therefore be built into the Council's developing Covid-19 Recovery Plan.
- 4.3 It should be noted that not taking or delaying action is not cost neutral and the lack of a local response is likely to be more costly in the long run and expose the Council to the risk of more significantly more costs from having to respond the impact of climate change, such as extreme weather events.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications from the establishment and delivery of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan. It should be noted however, that the adequacy and inaction of both national and local government is under scrutiny by environmental interest groups with the threat of potential legal challenge in some areas. Several local authorities have been criticised for not putting their climate emergency declarations into action.

5.2 Paragraph 26 of Part 1 of the Council's Constitution states as follows:

"Panels, Forums, Working Groups, Liaison and Task & Finish Groups may be established by Committees. Their purpose of these working groups is to examine in detail specific issues or aspects of policy, procedure, or service, according to their remit. These groups do not take any decisions but inform the deliberations of the committees. Their membership may include councillors from each party, non- councillors by invitation and, occasionally, employees"

5.3 Paragraph 2 of Part 3 Section B of the Council's constitution states as follows

"Working Groups Involving Members

Working groups, may be established by a Committee from time to time to develop recommendations or investigate issues of interest or concern alongside formal Sub-Committees. They shall be for specific purposes and shall be time limited. They will only be established when the matter cannot be undertaken by a relevant Committee and each committee is limited to establishing [two] such committees at any one time.

They usually fall into one of the following categories:

(a) Advisory groups relating to policy development or service functions

Usually established to advise about an issue or subject area. The relevant Committee shall specify terms of reference and membership, which may include invited persons holding relevant expertise or knowledge and Members who are not members of the parent Committee.

(b) Task & Finish Groups

Small groups of Members appointed by a Committee or Sub-Committee for the purpose of advising the parent committee about either:

- (i) an in-depth policy review
- (ii) performance monitoring
- (iii) responding to a major policy consultation.

The terms of reference and purpose are specified by the relevant Committee

5.4 It is proposed that the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Members' Working Group be set up as Task and Finish Group with the brief of to develop an Environment and Climate Emergency Policy, reporting back with recommendations to this Committee.

- 5.5 Task and Finish groups do not meet in public session and are not subject to the Access to Information Procedure Rules. Working Groups are not subject to the requirement for political proportionality. However, it would be good practice to apply the same principles. If rules for the allocation of seats are to be applied, then the following principles should be observed;
- (a) That not all seats are allocated to the same political party.
 - (b) That the political group with the majority of seats should have the majority of seats on the working group.
 - (c) That the number of seats allocated to each political group shall be the same as the proportion of the total number of seats on the authority held by each political group.
- 5.6 it is suggested that the Task and Finish Group should be of a size of 9 members with its membership being appointed on a proportionate basis.
- 5.7 With 6 members appointed from this Committee, the distribution of seats on the Working Group should be 3 Labour (with 2 substitutes), 2 Conservative (with 1 substitutes) and 1 Liberal Democrat (with 1 substitute).

6.0 **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 The Environment and Climate Emergency Declaration will have resource implications for the Council as directorates will play their part in delivering the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan when established. The Action Plan will apply to all Council services and resources should be appropriately realigned as a result. The emerging Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan sets out the resource implications of the journey to achieving net carbon neutrality, however the following issues will be key to this:

6.2 Environment and Climate Action Group

The internal Action Group of senior officers will be established to oversee the delivery of the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan and ensure the Council remains on track against emissions reduction targets. It is proposed that each directorate will be represented on the Action Group, which will be chaired by the Director of Neighbourhood Services. The Action Group will manage the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan's performance and establish reporting arrangements to this Committee and the Cool Wirral Partnership.

6.3 Recovery Plan

The Council's Covid-19 Recovery Plan and difficult financial position provide an opportunity to reconfigure how the Council operates and bring forward changes to the way the Council operates and delivers services. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this report, the Covid-19 crisis has provided unforeseen benefits and enabled some of the climate emergency actions (previously fledging) to become embedded. Home working, digitalisation, active travel, reduced energy demand and reduced staff travel have all been progressed during the Covid-19 enforced lockdown. The Council's Recovery

Plan and rationalisation of assets is a 'green reset' opportunity which will help accelerate the impact of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan.

6.4 Staff Investment and Development

To enable the Council to become a Carbon Literate Organisation, investment in carbon literacy training will be required for the Council's senior people and carbon awareness briefings for all staff and members. The employee development structures including core competences are being amended to include carbon literacy as a core requirement.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Unnatural climate change presents an existential threat. There are already many direct risks associated with existing and unavoidable change locally, including disruption and damage from more frequent extreme weather events including recent high-profile storms, heat waves and flooding. The actions needed to prevent more dangerous change demand a response from all parties from global to local. Everyone must play their part in addressing climate change and organisations who can lead and support others such as the Council must do so. Having a robust Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan with clear targets in place, is a crucial mechanism to mitigate identified risks and play a part in wider efforts to address the problem.
- 7.2 The Council has made a series of public commitments to act on climate change, including the declaration of an Environment and Climate Emergency in July 2019. A failure to demonstrate action and commitment to change would present a reputational risk. There are local authorities across the country, who, having declared a climate emergency, are now under scrutiny having done little to turn their declaration into action.
- 7.3 The Council's corporate risk register has been amended to reflect the environment and climate emergency declaration and the identification of the risk climate change has on the Council, Wirral as a place and its residents. The delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and working jointly with partner organisations and communities forms the mitigation to such risk. The risks associated with the effective delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and targets, have been identified and mitigated. The Environment and Climate Emergency Board will monitor these risks as part of their management of the action plan.
- 7.4 The Council's difficult financial position caused by the worldwide Covid-19 crisis and its effect on medium term financial planning, is a potential risk to the effective delivery of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan. The Action Plan requires the realignment of resources across the Council for key objectives to be achieved. The emergency declaration remains in place along with the urgent need for action, nothing has changed in this respect. Therefore, the exercise to adjust the Council's medium-term financial plan will need to be undertaken with climate emergency as one of the focus

points. There are also opportunities and new ways of working coming from the Covid-19 crisis that can support the adjustments required to the financial plan and envelope.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 There has been full public consultation delivered as part of the development of climate emergency related strategies such as the Tree Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy and in support of the Cool Wirral Partnership's Climate Change Strategy, Cool 2 including a number of climate emergency public events. The Climate Emergency Action Plan sets out a comprehensive communications and engagement plan for ongoing resident and stakeholder engagement on climate emergency issues.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The Equality Impact Review is attached via link below:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Environment and Climate Emergency Declaration was resolved with all party support at Council on the 15th July 2019 due to 'extreme concern' about the impact of climate change and the urgent need for action. The Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan has been developed in response. Through the establishment and delivery of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan, it is proposed that the Council commits to achieving net carbon neutrality by 2030. This is an ambitious but achievable target, and it will have fundamental benefits to Wirral's environment and residents. A key objective of the action plan is for officers and members to be 'carbon literate' in order to fully understand the climate related implications of their decisions and the impact of the way in which services are delivered.

The content and recommendations contained within this report are expected to:

- Reduce emissions of CO2
- Reduce emissions of Greenhouse Gasses
- Demonstrate that Wirral Council plans to deliver on its commitments
- Contribute towards attainment of Wirral Cool2 Strategic Plans

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cool Wirral Partnership (2019) [Cool 2: A strategy for Wirral in the face of the global climate emergency](#)

UN (2015) [Paris Agreement](#)

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2018: [Summary for Policymakers](#). In: *Global Warming of 1.5°C. A special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty*

CCC (2018) [Managing the Coast in a Changing Climate](#) (including various appendices and accompanying reports)

CCC (2019) [Net Zero: The UK's contribution to stopping global warming](#)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet Wirral Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy	27/07/2020
Decision of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change A New Climate Change Strategy for Wirral	31/03/2020
Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee Climate Emergency Headlines	12/03/2020
Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee Environment and Climate Emergency Declaration Update	24/09/2019