

**ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE****Tuesday 16 March 2021**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY POLICY</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report provides Committee with recommendations for the Council's Environment and Climate Emergency Policy (attached as Appendix 1), following the work undertaken by Committee's delegated task & finish group. The task & finish group was established and met several times to develop their recommendations for the Policy.

The proposed Policy is ambitious and proposes that the Council as an organisation aims to achieve 'net carbon neutrality by 2030.' This supports the Wirral Plan 2025 ambition to create a 'sustainable environment that leads the way in its response to the climate emergency and is environmentally friendly.'

The development of the Council's Environment and Climate Emergency Policy 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 an ambitious but achievable target. Through the Policy, 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 Policy provides the basis for the Council's journey to becoming carbon emissions neutral within the decade. It recognises that all aspects of the Council's function, ways of working, decision making, and service delivery will change to address the environment and climate emergency.

The Policy provides a foundation to:

- reduce emissions to net zero;
- reduce energy consumption and use green energy;
- re-establish the carbon budget and reporting;
- become a carbon literate organisation;
- enhance biodiversity and the local environment;
- promote active transport (provision for cycling and walking);
- introduce more sustainable ways of operating;
- communicate and engage the public
- store more carbon;
- create a climate resilient Wirral;

- prepare future generations; and
- measure progress along the journey.

This matter is a key decision and affects all wards.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the work of the Members' Task & Finish Group in developing recommendations for the Council's Environment & Climate Emergency Policy.
2. Approve the Council's Environment & Climate Emergency Policy (attached as Appendix 1).

## **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. In October 2020, this Committee resolved to establish a task & finish group to develop recommendations for the Council's Environment & Climate Emergency Policy and for the recommendations to be subsequently reported back to Committee.
- 1.2 The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change formally endorsed the Cool Wirral Partnership's updated climate strategy for Wirral called 'Cool2' on behalf of Wirral Council on 31 March 2020, following consideration of the strategy by the Council's Environment Scrutiny Committee. This calls on those who support it to develop and share 'locally determined contributions.' The Environment and Climate Emergency Policy provides the basis to fulfil this commitment through the Environment and Climate Emergency Plan that will be the Council's locally determined contribution to Cool2.
- 1.3 The Wirral Cool2 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 through the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy that the Council will commit to becoming 'net carbon neutral' by 2030.
- 1.4 The Environment and Climate Emergency Policy 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 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 Action Group to perform this function, having representations from all the Council's directorates and reporting regularly to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee.
- 1.5 The Council has recently commissioned the support of leading climate change experts 'Local Partnerships' to help shape the Policy and Action Plan and to validate the Council's journey to achieving net carbon neutrality in 10 years. Local Partnerships' work has concluded, and they have provided recommendations and observations for the Council's Policy and Action Plan. Local Partnerships have validated the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy, stating it can, if applied, achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030.

### **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 Policy has been 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 Committee's task & finish group considered a range of options to determine their recommendations for the Council's Environment & Climate Emergency Policy.

### **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 then Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change formally endorsed the Cool Wirral Partnership's new follow up climate change strategy 'Cool2,' 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 Cool2 Strategy and to a contribution to it in the form of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy.

3.5 The Cool2 strategy sets two goals for Wirral the place:

- To stay within a local emissions 'budget' of 7.7 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> 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 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 the proposed ambitious but achievable target of the Council and its entity being 'net carbon neutral' by 2030. The Climate Emergency Action Plan will be the Council's 'locally determined contribution' to the Cool2 strategy. The partnership's members will be urged to declare environment and climate emergencies and to develop their own locally determined contributions.

3.8 At its meeting of 22 October 2020, Committee received an update on the progress being made in response to the environmental and climate emergency declaration of 2019, including the development of the Council's emerging Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan. Committee were advised that the Council should establish an Environment and Climate Emergency Policy to set the political context and commitment to respond to the emergency declaration. It was agreed at the meeting that Committee would establish a task & finish group to prepare recommendations for the Environment & Climate Emergency Policy and to subsequently report these back to Committee.

3.9 The task & finish group was established along with officer support and met on 3 occasions to determine the Policy's content and approach (meetings on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020, and 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021). The task & finish group referred to the emergency declaration of 2019 to ensure all aspects of the resolution were covered and to ensure the Policy will deliver the Council's environment and climate emergency commitments. During their meetings, the task & finish group received inputs from officers and questioned them on a range of issues including transport, re-wilding and biodiversity, communications, climate resilience, the Environment & Climate Emergency Action Plan and Wirral Cool2 Climate Change Strategy. The task & finish group used these inputs, along with other advice, to agree on the

recommendations for the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy to be presented back to Committee.

### **The proposed Environment and Climate Emergency Policy**

- 3.10 The Committee's task & finish group considered a range of issues during the meetings held to determine the content and emphasis of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy. The task & finish group focused on the issues that will deliver against the Council's environment and climate emergency commitments, particularly carbon emission reduction, biodiversity, transport, and new ways of operation. It is intended that the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy will be used as a key guiding framework for transforming the way the Council operates, engages with residents, and works with partners. It focuses on the Council's functions from service provision, decision making and procurement, to energy consumption, biodiversity, transport, and ways of working. The Policy, and supporting action plan that this enables, will contribute to the Cool2 Strategy and targets for Wirral as a place overall, however, the Policy's focus is foremost on transforming the Council's own operations and activities, to demonstrate commitment and leadership.
- 3.11 Many of the actions initially identified in response to the environment and climate emergency have been undertaken or are underway. The policy proposed (reproduced in the Appendix) provides a foundation for the continued organisation-wide response. It sets out broad direction, scope and responsibilities in an initial succinct policy statement. It includes further supporting detail in an annexe organised under four headings: sustainable resource use; biodiversity; transport; and council approach. The aim has been to capture the main 'headline' areas of action set out in the emerging action plan, previously endorsed by committee, including:
- **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 Post Covid-19 Recovery Strategy will be a major opportunity to address building efficiency and introduce green energy.
  - **RE-ESTABLISH THE CARBON BUDGET:** The re-introduction of carbon budget reporting, introduce sustainability appraisals, and ensure the environment 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 the training and briefing of decision makers. Carbon Literacy courses have commenced for senior officers and Members in partnership with APSE Training, with over 100 people attending the course.
  - **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 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 environment and climate emergency response.

- **ACTIVE AND ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORT:** The investment 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:** The development of a communications programme to 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 and maintenance to promote wildflowers, pollinators, and insects. During the summer, the Council piloted the creation of pollinator sites across the borough with reduced maintenance. The sites have proven to be an initial success encouraging insects and wildflowers and we are developing a pollinator's policy for the Council.
- **CLIMATE RESILIENT WIRRAL:** Futureproof Wirral against climate change through coastal and flood management and nature-based solutions. We have secured funding to develop a Resilient Parks project and work on the sea defence infrastructure at West Kirby is due to start this year.
- **FUTURE GENERATIONS:** Investing 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 available and dynamic performance platform linked to the communications plan. This Committee will receive regular updates on progress towards net carbon neutrality and action through the development of a range of metrics.

## 4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however, the Council has declared an environment and climate emergency and in doing so setting a corporate priority. Successful delivery will require a realignment of the Council's resources. There will be cost implications for the Council to

consider, in order to achieve net carbon neutrality in 10 years. A budget allocation of £0.25m has been made directly to support work the environment and climate emergency, with elements of the capital programme also supporting related interventions. 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 has had the challenge of setting a medium-term financial plan and prioritising 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 will have to be delivered within the Council's diminished financial envelope, along with any external funding that can be obtained. 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 Strategy.
- 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 of the Council's Environment and Climate Emergency Policy. 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 and are the subject of scrutiny and challenge for not doing so.
- 5.2 This Committee resolved to establish a 'task and finish group' to develop recommendations for the Environment & Climate Emergency Policy and for this group to report their recommendations back to Committee. The task & finish group, established with the Monitoring Officer's advice and in line with the Council's Constitution, subsequently met several times to receive inputs on keys aspects of the environment and climate emergency response and to develop recommendations for the Council's Environment and Climate Emergency Policy.



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

- 6.1 The Environment and Climate Emergency Policy has resource implications for the Council as directorates will play their part in delivering the Policy once established. Through the work of the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Group, directorates will be supported to set out the resource allocations within their service plans and strategies. The Council's procurement and contract management arrangements will be overhauled, along with the code of conduct for suppliers, to comply with the Policy.

The Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan set out the resource implications of the commitment of being net carbon neutral within 10 years, however the following issues will be key to this:

### **6.2 Environment and Climate Emergency Action Group**

The internal Action Group of senior officers will be established to oversee the policy's implementation and delivery of the 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. The Director of Neighbourhood Services will update this Committee regularly on the establishment of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and on progress with the Action Plan.

The Action Group will develop a framework of year end outcomes for the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan's delivery over the next 10 years. Progress against these year end targets will be reported to this Committee.

### **6.3 Recovery Strategy**

The Council's Covid-19 Recovery Strategy and difficult financial position provide an opportunity to reconfigure how the Council operates and bring forward changes to the way the Council 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 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 Strategy and the rationalisation of assets is a 'green reset' opportunity which will help accelerate the impact of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy.

### **6.4 Staff Investment and Development**

To enable the Council to become a Carbon Literate Organisation, investment in carbon literacy training is required for the Council's senior members and officers and climate change awareness briefings for all staff and members. The employee development structures including the Council's People Strategy, 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 apparently done little to turn their declaration into action.
- 7.3 The Council's corporate risk register has been updated 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 Environment & Climate Emergency Policy and working jointly with partner organisations and communities forms the mitigation to such risk. The risks associated with the effective delivery of the Environment & Climate Emergency Policy, have been identified and mitigated. The Environment and Climate Emergency Action Group will monitor these risks as part of their management of the Environment & Climate Emergency 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. The delivery of the Policy will require 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 the environment and climate emergency as one of the focus points. There are also opportunities and new ways of working coming from the Covid-19 crisis and enforced lockdown, which can support the adjustments required to the financial plan and resource 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, Cool2, including several climate emergency public events. The Environment & Climate Emergency Policy commits the Council to deliver

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 15 July 2019 due to 'extreme concern' about the impact of climate change and the urgent need for action. The Environment and Climate Emergency Policy has been developed in response. Through the establishment and delivery of the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy, 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 and inspire other organisations to make such commitments. A key objective of the action plan is for senior 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 Gases
- 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 – Wirral Council's Environment and Climate Emergency Policy.

## 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](#)

*Wirral Council's Emerging Environment & Climate Emergency Action Plan*

*Wirral Council's Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy*

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
<b>Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee</b> Environment & Climate Emergency Policy and Action Plan	<b>22/10/2020</b>
<b>Cabinet</b> Wirral Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy	<b>27/07/2020</b>
<b>Decision of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change</b> A New Climate Change Strategy for Wirral	<b>31/03/2020</b>
<b>Environment Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b> Climate Emergency Headlines	<b>12/03/2020</b>
<b>Environment Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b> Environment and Climate Emergency Declaration Update	<b>24/09/2019</b>