

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 25 October 2022

Climate Change Working Group – Update

Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Note the update report; and
- b. Consider how to progress scrutiny of climate change.

Report of the Climate Change Working Group Chair, Councillor Samantha Thompson

Summary

1. The paper presents a summary of activity, findings from evidence gathered, and the current position for the Climate Change Working Group (CCWG).

Background

2. The County Council declared a climate change emergency in 2019 and set up an all-party group to review progress and suggest initial ideas to reduce the County Council's CO2 emissions. This resulted in the publication of the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) in November 2020. An officer project group met regularly to monitor progress of the Action plan.
3. On 7th September 2021 this committee considered the Climate Change Annual Report (2021) and the draft Climate Change Action Plan 2 (CCAP 2). Cabinet agreed the plan on 20 October 2021 which is current to 2025. It will be reviewed yearly to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose.
4. When Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Staffordshire County Council's Annual Climate Change report 2021, a 25% reduction in carbon emissions from 2018/19 to 2019/20 was noted. This significant reduction in annual emissions was unlikely to be replicated year on year, and slower progress was anticipated due to the nature of the challenge before the authority. The Committee established a working group to scrutinise and inform Staffordshire County Council's approach to climate change.
5. The working group aimed to scrutinise actions, challenge decision makers, and consider best practice to ensure the Council was doing all it can to

tackle climate change, and to identify how it will achieve net zero by 2050, with an aim to consider how to do this by reducing the emissions from Council services, working with others to lower emissions, and helping to create a county which is more resilient to climate change.

6. Membership of the working group consisted of: Councillors Charlotte Atkins, Tina Clements, Jeremy Pert, Bernard Peters and Conor Wileman (Chair). Councillor David Smith joined the group in December 2021.
7. The Working Group (CCWG) met on three occasions last municipal year:
 - a. 17 November 2021 – Scene setting and CCWG focus
 - b. 7 January 2022 – Scope and prioritisation of Key Lines of Enquiry
 - c. 3 March 2022 – Evidence gathering: Inquiry session
8. At the first meeting CCWG identified several key lines of enquiry including:
 - a. Embedding Net Zero commitment in Staffordshire County Council.
 - b. The transition from petrol/diesel vehicles to electric, hybrid and hydrogen vehicles in Staffordshire.
 - c. The decarbonisation of heating buildings and District and Borough Council local plans.
 - d. The advantages of the green revolution – innovations and skills.
 - e. The Waste Strategy best practice and links to the CCAP2.
 - f. District and Borough Councils working together on Climate Change.
 - g. Carbon sequestration.
9. The CCWG agreed not to look at biodiversity and natural environment and the NHS's approach to Climate Change.
10. At a meeting on 7 January 2022, the CCWG considered the scene setting and scope report, to prioritise what to look at first. Reducing the County Council's carbon footprint was considered the first priority to scrutinise.
11. At the inquiry session on 3 March 2022, Members received an overview of the recently established 'Staffordshire Sustainability Board' (SSB) terms of reference, which was presented by the Cabinet Member and Chair of the SSB, Councillor Simon Tagg. The Group invited Directors of Corporate Services, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, Families and Communities, and Health and Care to provide presentations and respond to questions on the approach to Climate Change, 'reducing the County Council's carbon footprint':
 - a. What has been achieved so far?
 - b. What has been done well?
 - c. What are the barriers/blockages?

d. What more can be done?

12. The evidence gathered in the Inquiry session on 3 March 2022 highlighted the breadth of initiatives and projects undertaken, ongoing and planned in Staffordshire County Council to reduce the carbon footprint. The evidence demonstrated the following was in place or planned:

- a. Leadership and plan in place.
- b. Energy Efficiency schemes: change lighting; replacement boilers.
- c. Projects: e.g., Air Aware Project air quality.
- d. Different ways of working: remote meetings; reduce travel; paperless.
- e. Different ways to get about: active travel.
- f. Encourage use of green spaces: outdoor activity.
- g. Use and development of new technologies: EV, solar.
- h. Use of green products/tools: environmentally friendly.
- i. Recycle and waste reduction.
- j. Carbon offsetting: tree planting, biodiversity.
- k. Awareness and changing behaviours.

13. The emerging challenges were identified:

- a. Sustainable options cost more.
- b. Lack of budget makes procurement of sustainable options and change prohibitive.
- c. Infrastructure not available.
- d. Some technology not available or cost makes it prohibitive.
- e. Changing the culture – climate change not seen as a priority.
- f. Building changes and retrofit.

14. What more can be done:

- a. CCAP2 highlights future plans.
- b. Share what we do well.
- c. Consider good practice examples from partners and Las.
- d. Member and culture change.

15. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update report from the Climate Change Working Group on 21 June 2022. The Group had agreed to invite the Local Government Association and other Local Authorities to share best practice case studies before drafting its report and recommendations. At the meeting it was explained that Councillor Conor Wileman had not been re-appointed to the Committee and Vice Chair Councillor Samantha Thompson was appointed CCWG Chair for the municipal year.

16. The Working Group next met on 28 September 2022 to evaluate the evidence gathered so far and to receive presentations from the LGA, Brighton and Hove and Cambridgeshire Councils on best practice case studies relating to Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Climate Change Engagement Policy. Due to unforeseen circumstances on the day of the meeting the LGA could not attend to provide the presentation relating to the LGA Climate Change Sector Support Programme. The proposed debate to draw conclusions from evidence gathered relating to the Councils carbon reduction and how to influence investments and pace of change to meet 2050 target was deferred.
17. Members of the Working Group voiced concerns that the group had not achieved its ambition, that the membership of the working group was not wide enough and that meetings were not in public. It was suggested that Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee give consideration to recommend the establishment of an overview and scrutiny committee with remit for Climate Change and Environmental issues.
18. There was clarification that the Staffordshire Sustainability Board considered climate change matters across the County with representation from the County and each District and Borough Council and was not a public meeting, that the Climate Change Scrutiny Working Group focus was on Staffordshire County Council and was not a public meeting and that Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee maintained overview of the Climate Change Annual report and Climate Change Action Plan and that this was a public meeting.
19. It was understood that the Staffordshire Sustainability Board (SSB) has continued to develop its role and strengthen its work programme since establishment in December 2021, working with District and Borough Councils and partners to support and inform the Climate Change Action Plans and Strategies across Staffordshire. The SSB has set a clear focus for the next 12 months and was working on the delivery model with input and advice from an Officer group that sits under the Board.

Link to Strategic Plan

20. The information in this report has a direct link to the Council's Strategic Plan as Climate Change is one of the four core principles which help shape all that we do.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

21. The working group has taken into consideration any scrutiny undertaken by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee when climate change was considered.

List of Background Documents / Appendices:

N/A

Contact Details

Report Author:	Deb Breedon
Job Title:	Interim Scrutiny and Support Manager
Telephone No.:	01785 276061
E-Mail Address:	deborah.breedon@staffordshire.gov.uk

