

## **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 20 June 2023**

### **Climate Change Working Group – Update**

#### **Recommendations**

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Receive the update report
- b. Confirm membership of the Climate Change Working Group 2023-24

#### **Report of the Chairman of Climate Change Working Group, Councillor Samantha Thompson**

#### **Summary**

1. The paper provides a brief background and an update of planned activity for the Climate Change Working Group (CCWG).

#### **Background**

2. The County Council declared a climate change emergency in 2019 and has since agreed the Climate Change Action Plan which is current to 2025. This committee considers the Climate Change Annual Report and the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) as part of its work programme to maintain overview.
3. The Committee also established a working group to scrutinise specific matters arising from the CCAP. The working group has a focus on Staffordshire County Council's approach to addressing carbon reduction and to identify how it will achieve net zero by 2050.
4. 2022-23 Membership of the working group: Councillors Tina Clements, Jeremy Pert, Bernard Peters, David Smith, Samantha Thompson (Chair), Conor Wileman and Nigel Yates.
5. The Working Group provided an update to this committee on 22 October 2022, following which the Chairman met with the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change and Lead Officers to identify one area of the action plan where scrutiny can add value.
6. They identified carbon sequestration and other potential offsetting projects as a specific area of challenge for Staffordshire County Council and recognised the need to promote the significance of tree planting.

Table: Extracts from the Climate Change Action Plan CCAP:

**The Climate Change action plan**

**Carbon reduction CR-03** Research carbon sequestration and other potential offsetting projects. Outline options and make recommendations for sequestration and/or offset projects. Dec 2022

**Natural Environment NE-01** Commission a study to determine the current sequestration / storage of carbon in natural habitats on SCC landholdings and the potential to increase it through tree planting and habitat enhancement. Review report outcomes and recommendations and produce business case to take forward. Dec 2022. **Progress** Oct 2022- Engage with consultants to produce a review of land/habitats in Staffordshire (including carbon impact, carbon storage benefits, potential opportunities, other benefits i.e. social and GIS data) to determine the current sequestration / storage of carbon in natural habitats on SCC landholdings and the potential to increase it through tree planting and habitat enhancement.

**Programme Roadmap** The Council has declared a commitment to be net carbon zero by 2050. Whilst our aspirations are high to reduce this as much as possible, we acknowledge we cannot reach net zero without some carbon sequestration or offsetting. This also forms a key role within the plan.

7. The Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change is invited to all working group meetings. This provides an essential link to the Staffordshire Sustainability Board (SSB) which 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.

### Next Steps

8. The Working Group (CCWG) last met in February 2023 to agree next steps and will commence evidence gathering on 28 June 2023 with an onsite meeting at Norbury Park Estate Forest and BiFOR research woodland which is set within the grounds of Norbury Park. Members will see and hear evidence relating to tree nurseries, skills required, best practice tree planting and scientific experiments taking place on site.
9. Evidence gathering during the review will include consideration of a commissioned report to provide context and data relating to SCC rural property portfolio, best practice and innovation in maintenance and planting of trees, sequestration the options to achieve carbon capture through tree planting or habitat restoration and carbon offsetting, and

members will participate in site visits and interviews with expert witnesses.

10. Invitations have been sent to the 2022-23 membership but will be amended should committee agree to change the membership of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Climate Change Working Group.

### **Link to Strategic Plan**

11. 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**

12. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee maintain oversight of the Climate Change Action Plan. Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the remit to scrutinise Countryside and rural property portfolio.

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