

## **ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 4 AUGUST 2020**

### **THE COUNCIL'S WORK AND ROLE IN TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE**

---

#### **Summary**

1. The Panel has requested an overview of the Council's role in tackling the effects of climate change in Worcestershire, as part of its current work programme. A presentation will be provided at the meeting, which is attached at Appendix 1.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Environment, the Sustainability Manager, Directorate of Economy and Infrastructure, and the Director of Operations, Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) have been invited to the meeting.

#### **Background**

3. Worcestershire County Council (the Council) has a long history of action on Climate Change, as shown in the Climate Action Timeline attached at Appendix 2.
4. Additionally, in 2009, a Scrutiny of how the Council was tackling climate change recognised that, while there was much more to be done, the Council was, at that time, performing better than most local authorities in terms of action taken. The Scrutiny recommendations were broadly accepted and implemented. The link to the Scrutiny Report and Cabinet Member Response are detailed in the Background Papers below.
5. In October 2018, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report heralded a global resurgence of public interest in tackling climate change as a matter of urgency. The report stated that greenhouse gas emissions would have to be lowered to carbon neutral / net zero (where the net amount of carbon dioxide or other carbon compounds emitted into the atmosphere is reduced to zero because it is balanced by actions to reduce or offset these emissions.) by 2050 to limit global warming to 1.5°C. The report urged governments to act quickly to avert catastrophic climate change.
6. In May 2019 UK Parliament declared a Climate Emergency. The Government committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, recognising much of this reduction must happen before 2030.
7. At its 16 May 2019 Council meeting, Worcestershire County Council reaffirmed its commitment to tackle climate change. It agreed to:

- Note that Parliament had declared a "Climate Emergency"

- Pledge to make Worcestershire County Council in all areas where it was directly responsible, carbon neutral by 2050, taking into account both production and consumption emissions
- Call on Westminster to provide the powers and resources to make the 2050 target possible
- Continue to work with partners across Worcestershire and the region, such as district, town and parish councils and WLEP, to deliver this new goal
- Request the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel monitors the progress made by Worcestershire County Council towards this goal.

8. A brief outline of some of the County Council's work and its role in tackling climate change, both within its own operations and countywide, is detailed below.

### **County Council Carbon Management Plan**

9. Through its own operations, the Council emits at least 1.5% of Worcestershire's total carbon emissions, (i.e. carbon dioxide or other carbon compound gases (e.g. methane and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)), that have the property of absorbing infrared radiation (net heat energy) emitted from Earth's surface and reradiating it back to Earth's surface, thus contributing to the greenhouse effect) and influences many more.

10. Since 2002, the Council has delivered a series of carbon management plans aimed at reducing these emissions and has cut emissions from Council property, transport and street lighting. Emissions from contracts, such as highways maintenance and household waste management, have also reduced.

11. The most recent figures show a total emissions reduction of 36% since 2009/10, with associated annual energy savings of around £400,000. Measures taken include investment in energy efficiency measures in buildings and street lighting, installation of renewable energy systems, such as solar PV and wood fuel and ground source heat, inclusion of 3 electric vehicles in the council's fleet and a move to increased working from home and video conferencing.

12. In 2018/19 the council emitted c.49,000 tonnes of Greenhouse Gases. The largest source (67% of emissions) arose from the disposal of household waste. The next largest source (12%) was street lighting.

13. A new Carbon Management Plan, aiming for net zero carbon emissions by 2050, is currently in draft form, pending Cabinet approval later this year.

14. The ability of the Council to achieve net zero carbon emissions will be influenced by:

- technological development, for example the complete decarbonisation of the UK's grid electricity, the availability of ultra-low emission (ULEV) HGVs, including gritter lorries, and the viability of carbon capture and storage technology for energy from waste plants
- investment by the Council in knowledge and resource to:
  - improve the energy efficiency of property estate and street lighting
  - transition to new non-fossil fuelled heating systems and fleet vehicles
  - enable the generation of more renewable energy
  - negotiate low or zero carbon service contract requirements

- the ability of the Council to offset, (i.e. a reduction of emissions of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gas made in order to compensate for emissions made elsewhere) remaining carbon emissions. As the Council reduces its carbon emissions, offsetting requirements will reduce.

### **Joint Impact Assessment (JIA)**

15. Council reports are now required to include information on the environmental impact of all proposed projects. The completion of a JIA, and any consequent full impact assessment for environmental sustainability, is required for all proposed projects. This includes assessment of carbon emissions.

### **Worcestershire Partnership Climate Change Strategy**

16. The Worcestershire Partnership Climate Change Strategy expires at the end of 2020. All six Worcestershire district councils are now developing their own district wide climate change plans and aligning them with Worcestershire's Energy Strategy below. The Worcestershire Partnership Executive Group (PEG) is keen to ensure effective joint working on Climate Change. The County Council is currently coordinating shared working sessions with public sector partners on various aspects of the challenges posed by climate change, such as carbon sequestration, climate change adaptation and community engagement, and is shortly due to launch an EU funded advice and grant funding programme supporting energy efficiency and renewable energy measures across Worcestershire's public sector.

### **Worcestershire Energy Strategy**

17. Published in March 2019, and funded by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), the Council coordinated the development of the WLEP Energy Strategy. It aims to deliver the following targets:

- Halve Countywide emissions from 2005 levels by 2030 (aspiration for net zero carbon emissions by 2040)
- Double the size of Worcestershire's low carbon sector by 2030
- Triple the generation of renewable energy in the county by 2030 (to 15% of electricity demand).

18. The Council provides support for the Energy Strategy Steering Group and monitors progress. It has also developed, and is managing, a range of projects supporting the Strategy. Examples of these activities, grouped under the Energy Strategy's four priorities, are detailed in Appendix 3 (attached).

19. Progress on the Energy Strategy's targets is as follows:

- Countywide carbon emissions have fallen by 32%, (37% per capita), since 2005
- The value of Worcestershire's Low Carbon and Environmental Goods and Service Sector (LCEGS) was estimated as £1.1bn GVA for 2013/14. The Council has initiated a BEIS funded study into the current nature of the Midlands' LCEGS sector, (down to district level)
- 12% of Worcestershire's electricity demand is now generated from renewable sources (up from 5% in 2015).

## **Adaptation to Climate Change**

20. It is important, in parallel to its carbon reduction work, that the Council addresses the risk that climate change poses to its assets, services and the wider County. However far and fast carbon emissions are reduced, carbon emissions remain in the atmosphere for many years. Scientists predict that, even when emissions reduce to net zero, a certain amount of the observed warming of our climate will continue, with increasing incidence of extreme weather, such as severe flooding and heat waves.

21. UK Government has established the National Climate Change Adaptation Programme. The corresponding UK Climate Change Risk Assessment identifies six priority risk areas: flooding, high temperatures, water supply shortages, natural capital, food production, and pest and disease.

22. In terms of preparing the County for the impact of climate change, the Council:

- is the lead Local Flood Authority and has a duty to manage flood risk from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses across the County
- coordinates the Local Nature Partnership which addresses natural capital, water quality and climate change as its main foci
- was the lead nationally in designing its new buildings to cope with future climatic change. Buildings such as Redhill Primary School and The Hive were designed to cope with intense rainfall and hotter summers.

23. Project Managers must complete a JIA for new Council projects that includes consideration of the impact of severe weather and climatic change.

## **Summary**

24. Throughout the life of the Worcestershire Climate Change Strategy, and the Council's own carbon management plans, the Council has generated hundreds of thousands of kilowatt hours of renewable energy, supported residents and businesses to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, lobbied Government and worked with partners to improve the resilience of the county to the impact of Climate Change.

25. Much more will be required, however. Far reaching and transformative action will be necessary at both national and local level to achieve net zero emissions for Worcestershire and to deal with the impact of climate change.

26. Central Government has recently announced a series of measures aimed towards this, including funding for a 'green recovery' from the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis offers both challenge and opportunity in terms of the Council's ability to tackle climate change.

## **Purpose of the Meeting**

27. The Panel is asked to consider the information provided, and to discuss the Council's work and role in tackling Climate Change. In doing so Members may wish to consider:

- whether there are areas of this work that the Panel would wish to scrutinise in more detail
- whether any further information is required at this time
- determine any comments or recommendations for Cabinet.

## **Supporting Information**

Appendix 1 – Presentation

Appendix 2 – Worcestershire County Council Climate Action Timeline

Appendix 3 – Examples of activities supported by the Energy Strategy

## **Contact Points**

Emma James / Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers, Tel: 01905 844964 / 844965  
Email: [scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk)

## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- [2009 Scrutiny Report 'Tackling Climate Change'](#)
- [CMR response to 2009 Scrutiny Report 'Tackling Climate Change'](#)
- [United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report 2018](#)
- [16 May 2019 Council Agenda and Minutes \(Council's commitment to tackle climate change\)](#)
- [Worcestershire County Council Corporate Environmental Report 2019](#)
- [Worcestershire County Council Energy and Carbon Management Plan 2016-2021](#)
- [Worcestershire Partnership Climate Change Strategy 2012-2020](#)
- [Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership Energy Strategy 2019-2030](#)