

# Climate Change Mitigation Update

## Strategy & Resources Committee, Tuesday 30 January 2024

Report of: Head of Policy and Communications

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Purpose: For information

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Publication status: Open

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Wards affected: All

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### **Executive summary:**

On 13 February 2020, the Council declared a climate emergency and agreed to develop a climate change action plan, with targets to cut environmental impact and steps to become carbon neutral by 2030. The Climate Change Action Plan was approved at the end of 2020.

Reduced resources to co-ordinate the work taking place means there has been limited progress in delivering the action plan.

A new Policy and Sustainability Specialist post was created last year. Part of the work of this post is to be responsible for co-ordinating and overseeing the climate change work taking place across service areas, as well as ensuring the Council takes a more active role in the county wide groups.

This report provides an update about the Council's approach to climate change mitigation and the work taking place to support this.

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**This report supports the Council's priority of:** Building a better Council

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## **Recommendation to committee:**

The committee is asked to accept and note the report.

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## **Reason for recommendation:**

The committee is asked to note the progress made to support the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency.

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## **Introduction and background**

1. On 13 February 2020, the Council declared a climate emergency and agreed to develop a climate change action plan, with targets to cut environmental impact and steps to become carbon neutral by 2030.
2. At that time there was no team with responsibility for climate change mitigation and any work was carried out by a policy officer. However, the pandemic began in March 2020 and staff were redeployed to support the Covid-19 response, which meant work in this area was not progressed.
3. A [report](#) was taken to the Strategy and Resources Committee in September 2020 to outline progress and later that year the Climate Change Action Plan was adopted. In January 2022, the climate change work was paused until a new approach to delivering the work was agreed, as well as resource to manage it.
4. The Policy and Communications Team was restructured in 2023 and a new Policy and Sustainability Specialist post created. The role was recruited to, with the officer in post at the end of July 2023. Part of the work of this new post is to be responsible for co-ordinating and overseeing the climate change work taking place across service areas, as well as ensuring the Council takes a more active role in the county wide groups.
5. A review of climate change work is ongoing and a new approach is being developed to draw up a practical, deliverable action plan, which will need to reflect the Council's resources (staffing and financial) and ability to deliver.
6. The Council has also employed an ecologist to support work in biodiversity.

## **Current climate change mitigation activity**

Despite the lack of centralised resources (staffing and budget) there has been some climate change mitigation progress across the Council.

## **Transport**

7. Surrey County Council (SCC) has signed a contract with Connected Kerb Ltd, to deliver on street electric vehicle (EV) charging points across Surrey in 2024. SCC has offered districts and boroughs the opportunity to take

advantage of the terms and conditions of this contract to enable the installation of charging points in car parks and council owned land.

8. The June 2023 Community Services Committee agreed the Council could sign a contract, subject to legal and finance approval. Officers are working with SCC and Connected Kerb Ltd with the aim of signing a contract to enable the installation of charging facilities across the district. Once the contract is signed, locations and numbers of charging points will be finalised. There is also the option for other public sector third parties to make their land available for charging points under the same terms and conditions.
9. Additional grants are available and actively promoted to upgrade diesel vans to electric for business and charities through Surrey's Greener Future Programme.
10. Every new home with parking must have an electric vehicle charging point, which means this is included in housing schemes. 144 EV home charging devices have been installed under the Electric Vehicle Home charge Scheme (EVHS) across the district, with grants totalling £50,400.
11. The Council's aim is for all council vehicles to be powered by electric or other low carbon alternatives by 2030. This includes ensuring the street cleaning and recycling and waste vehicles are energy efficient and ULEZ compliant.

### **Buildings and heat decarbonisation**

12. The Sustainable Warmth local authority delivery (LAD) Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) with Action Surrey has delivered home energy efficiency installations to fuel poor households. This has included underfloor heating, wall insulation and air source heat pumps. The scheme is part of the wider £75m contract for Decarbonisation of Housing in Surrey, awarded to ThamesWey by Surrey County Council.
13. Action Surrey has helped install 45 energy efficiency improvements in 23 Tandridge households at a total cost of £235,989, resulting in an estimated CO2 saving of 28.67 tonnes per year.
14. The Council has worked with Solar Together to support residents to invest in renewable energy to cut carbon emissions. Solar Together is a community group buying scheme to install solar panels for less, with optional battery storage and electric vehicle charging points.
15. Solar panels, better insulation and triple glazed windows have been installed in the housing stock where possible. Bids are being made for funding to help improve the housing stock.
16. All new council properties aim to be net zero carbon. A specialist energy consultant is involved at the design and planning stage of new schemes to make sure the use of renewable energy is maximised, as well as ensuring energy saving measures are in place to reduce emissions.

17. New housing schemes are being delivered with biodiversity net gain, including tree replacement and planting native hedgerows to encourage biodiversity.
18. Retrofitting the Council's existing housing stock is costly and grant funding will be required to enable progress in this area. The Council has made a previous bid and was part of a consortium for funding to improve the housing stock, but was unsuccessful. Support from an external consultant has now been sought to help the Council with its next submission for funding ahead of the 31 January 2024 deadline.
19. Contractors are encouraged to source local materials and appoint local sub-contractors where possible, which reduces their carbon footprint.
20. Quadrant House was refurbished to make it more environmentally friendly, with improved insulation, upgraded windows and energy efficient heating and cooling equipment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The living wall makes the road more environmentally sustainable, encouraging biodiversity and improving air quality.
21. Emissions from the Council Offices in Oxted have been reduced with the use of solar panels, LED lighting, sensor lighting and better insulation.

### **Electricity and energy**

22. The Council achieved an increase in renewable generation and managing greenhouse gas emissions, by switching the Council's electricity supply to a green tariff in September 2021.
23. Rural communities have been given the opportunity to apply for the community energy fund grant. The fund aims to help kickstart projects including small scale wind farms, rooftop solar partnerships battery storage, rural heat networks, electric vehicle charging points and fuel poverty alleviation schemes.
24. Action Surrey provides energy efficiency measures for residents including loft, wall and floor insulation, air source heat pumps and solar panels. Action Surrey also administers other government funded schemes such as Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) and Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LAD). These aim to raise the energy efficiency of low income and low energy performance homes.

### **Recycling and waste**

25. The percentage of household waste which is recycled, composted or reused has increased from 53% to 60% in the last six years and the Council has moved from 43<sup>rd</sup> nationally to 7<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> in Surrey for recycling.

26. The Council continues to raise awareness of reduce, reuse and recycle campaigns with residents. This is critical to ensuring residents understand how to recycle correctly to reduce contamination, which can lead to recycling materials being rejected and taken to landfill.

### **Business and the economy**

27. The LoCase, grants scheme for businesses closed in June 2023. Businesses in the district made 81 enquiries, with 23 approved for funding. 20 businesses claimed the funding and a total of £163,158.93 was awarded with 76.21 annual tCO2e saved. Total annual savings by claiming businesses is £38,589.36 across the district.
28. Including social and environmental objectives in procurement policies is being considered, alongside price and cost when tenders are evaluated. Where possible sustainable sourcing of materials and providing supply chain opportunities for local companies will be assessed in future tenders.

### **Planning, development and biodiversity**

29. Caterham and Smallfield have experienced severe flooding in recent years and the effects of climate change will increase the likelihood and severity of flooding. Work to improve Queens Park in Caterham has included flood alleviation measures.
30. Croydon Road in Caterham is being redeveloped to extend the pavement space to encourage more greenery, planting of trees and new rain gardens to absorb water running off the road to help alleviate flooding.
31. The Council has a dedicated officer whose primary focus is ecology and biodiversity. Officers collaborate with partners including Surrey Wildlife Trust, Surrey Hills, High Weald AONBs, Surrey Climate Commission and Surrey Air Alliance to build sustainable strategies and secure funds.
32. The new mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirement introduced by the Environment Act 2021 is now expected to apply from February 2024 for major developments in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (unless they are exempt) and to small sites from April 2024 applying for planning permission. Much of the guidance is still in draft and is being updated regularly.
33. The Council has updated its BNG implementation plan in accordance with the recently released BNG guidance, tools and regulations. Working groups have been set up to process map a case study planning application through the entire application process, through to monitoring and enforcement.
34. A draft validation checklist has been produced, which includes consideration for Biodiversity Net Gain requirements and other general biodiversity updates in accordance with current best practice guidelines. A S106 template for habitat banks has also been produced.

35. The Council aspires to implement a higher than 10% BNG policy requirement for development within the district. It is important the impacts of developing a policy exceeding the 10% mBNG requirement are carefully considered, in particular in relation to impact on 100% affordable housing schemes.
36. Full details of all BNG work underway are available in the Biodiversity Net Gain update report considered by the [Planning Policy Committee](#) on 18 January.

## **Partnership work**

37. The Policy and Sustainability Specialist has been co-ordinating and overseeing the climate change work taking place, ensuring the Council plays a more active role in county wide groups. Joint working has enabled the Council to be able to provide resources, advice and guidance to teams across the Council about climate change activities.
38. The Council is a member of several climate change groups including the Local Government Association's Climate Action Group, Climate Change Officer's Forum, Greener Futures Partnership Steering Group and Decarbonisation Steering Group, which enables officers to be kept up to date with developments across the county and nationally.
39. Emissions from service operations are reported to Surrey County Council by districts and boroughs to monitor progress in reducing the carbon footprint.
40. For the first time since 2020, the Council has provided emissions data which can be used to measure the carbon footprint. Since the last figures were provided, fleet emissions have reduced by 86.2 tCO<sub>2</sub>e, electricity emissions by 83 tCO<sub>2</sub>e and there have been reduced emissions on business travel in the 2023 reporting. Overall, the Council's emissions have reduced by around 24%, while Surrey County Council's have reduced by 33%.

## **Looking ahead**

41. Since the Policy and Sustainability Specialist has been in post, a review of climate change has been underway, with good progress made to better understand the climate change work taking place across the Council, as well as ensuring the Council can play a more active role in the county wide groups. In addition, more robust data is being gathered to report emissions.
42. Work will continue to monitor council activities and look at ways to reduce carbon emissions and explore offsetting measures. Once the revised action plan is in place this will be regularly reviewed to monitor progress towards achieving carbon neutrality.
43. While there is limited specific budget for climate change mitigation, consideration has been given to key areas in proposing the budget and

capital programme for 2024/2025. Work to achieve net zero carbon is often capital in nature. The current capital programme includes funding for activities which will contribute to the achievement of net zero carbon, for example:

- Energy efficiency works in the housing stock.
- Provision in the council house building estimates to deliver net zero carbon on new builds.
- The Council Offices minor works programme includes provision to increase where possible energy efficiency in the offices.

Further work, including for Biodiversity Net Gain, has been considered as part of the budget setting process for 2024/2025.

44. Work will also continue with partners across the district to deliver objectives through all relevant strategies and plans by drawing on local and global best practice.

## **Key implications**

### **Comments of the Chief Finance Officer**

Financial implications are set out in paragraph 43 of the report.

With no clarity over government funding from 2025/2026 onward, the working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority to ensure stable provision of services in the medium-term.

Decisions on future budgets and capital programmes in respect of climate change will need to be taken in this context and efforts to secure external funding should continue.

### **Comments of the Head of Legal Services**

There are no legal implications arising from this report, officers must demonstrate how the Council will deliver its commitment to achieve its net zero target. Climate change is a priority for the Council and this is reflected in the work set out in this report and the future plans for its implementation. Legal Services have assisted with several pieces of work and will continue to be called upon as and when needed.

### **Equality**

This report contains no proposals that would disadvantage any particular minority groups.

### **Climate change**

This report is about the work taking place to minimise the impact of the Council's activities on climate change, as well as work to influence the behaviour of residents, businesses and suppliers.

The ability of the Council to meet its net zero target and to encourage third parties to do what they can to support this impacts climate change, as many solutions are currently still financially prohibitive for the Council and individuals.

In addition, achieving behaviour change is difficult and can take a long time, which inhibits progress.

However, the Council now has some dedicated resource with the introduction of the Policy and Sustainability Specialist role. Work has already begun to ensure there is a better understanding of the climate change work taking place across the Council, ensuring the Council can play a more active role in county wide groups.

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background papers**

None

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