

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET13 August 2020Report by Chief ExecutiveAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE INVESTIGATION ON
CLIMATE CHANGE**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To submit the report prepared by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on its investigation on climate change to the Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATION

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet consider the Audit and Scrutiny Committee's report on its investigation on climate change, including the associated executive summary, and agree that a response be prepared.

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

3. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee agreed on 26 September 2019 to investigate climate change as its next high priority issue to be the subject of a scrutiny and evaluation review, subject to further discussions, including with the Environment Department. At the time it was noted that the Director of Environment had prepared some preliminary proposals for a refreshed climate change strategy and action plan for the Council, the existing Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2015-18 having been approved in 2015.

4. The timing of the consideration of climate change issues was considered opportune by the Committee, given the increasing expectations upon the Council from the East Renfrewshire community, and due to the rising profile which climate change is receiving in the media, not least of which was to have been the staging of the UN (COP 26) Climate Change Summit in Glasgow in November 2020 until this was cancelled due to the current Covid-19 pandemic.

5. At the meeting of the Committee held on 21 November 2019, the scope and timeline of the investigation on climate change were approved. The final draft report on the investigation, including recommendations, was considered by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 12 March 2020, prior to its intended submission to the Cabinet.

6. The Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer completed this work just prior to finishing his fixed term contract on 31st March 2020. This report was due to be considered by the Cabinet on 2 April 2020 but this meeting was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

PROGRESS TO DATE

7. Work on the investigation included collecting and reviewing evidence from national organisations on guidance available on climate change; and initial discussions with Council departments on their current and planned activities on climate change. At a later stage, an informal meeting took place on 14 January 2020 between representatives of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee and Council departments and services, to discuss their approaches to climate change and related issues. A visit by representatives of the Committee also took place on 31 January 2020 to the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre, to see the excellent work taking place on the environment and recycling.

8. The results of a national survey on climate change of Scottish local authorities, carried out by the Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer, were shared with the Committee as part of the review. Members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee had opportunities at each stage of the investigation to ask questions, to offer views, or to obtain additional information.

CONCLUSION

9. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee pursued its investigation on climate change between November 2019 and February 2020. The investigation has now been completed and the final report and executive summary (see Appendix), including recommendations, as approved by the committee, is now remitted to the Cabinet for consideration.

RECOMMENDATION

10. It is recommended that the Cabinet consider the Audit and Scrutiny Committee's report on its investigation on climate change, including the associated executive summary, and agree that a response be prepared.

Chief Executive
August 2020

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

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Background Papers

Report on Audit and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan, submitted to Audit and Scrutiny Committee by Clerk, 26 September 2019; and

Report on Investigation on Climate Change submitted to Audit and Scrutiny Committee by Chief Executive, 21 November 2019.

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EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CLIMATE CHANGE

INVESTIGATION BY THE AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: 12 March 2020

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FOREWORD

The challenges which East Renfrewshire Council is facing on climate change are increasing, and extend to all parts of the organisation. We will meet these challenges head-on, and provide civic leadership to the wider East Renfrewshire community of schools, families, community groups, businesses, and not least of all to the Council's staff.

We should not be daunted by what we are facing, but rather, due to the professionalism of our staff and their adaptability to changing circumstances, we can look forward to making a significant contribution to mitigating the effects of climate change in East Renfrewshire.

External factors are contributing greatly to the shape of the Council's response, including forward planning and investment to meet the needs of new legislation, and changing expectations. Thanks to the dedication and innovation of the staff involved, I am pleased to report that the latest annual Climate Change Return to the Scottish Government (December 2019) shows consistent improvement in our response across a range of areas, including the extent of reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and tonnage of CO₂ saved.

Turning to some specific issues, the timing of this review is opportune, and a key recommendation is that the Council's climate change strategy is renewed, which will provide a new policy direction. It is also proposed that the Council considers setting 2040 as the date by when we will become carbon neutral, which will help embed the ethos of sustainability throughout the Council, and provide new impetus for all involved.

The continuation of the excellent work taking place in our schools regarding the Learning for Sustainability (LfS) initiative should be encouraged, which has seen East Renfrewshire Council achieving the highest proportion of educational establishments in Scotland with Green Flag status. The committee witnessed good work taking place at first hand, when we visited the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre, and met the children and staff.

Due to the capacity of trees, grass and especially peat to absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere, we have commented that further opportunities should be explored to maximise the potential for tree planting, and the preservation of grassed areas, and our peatlands in East Renfrewshire as 'carbon sinks'. Exciting plans are also included in our recommendations to plant a tree for every resident in East Renfrewshire.

The ongoing roll-out of agile working across the Council, through the deployment of new laptops, is increasing options for working remotely, and improved connectivity allows meetings to be held by Skype. These measures are reducing the need for staff to travel to their work base, or to meetings, therefore cutting CO₂ emissions. The development of a new Sustainable Procurement Policy, which is in progress already, will provide a greater environmental focus to our procurement and purchasing activities, and a new policy on single-use plastics is proposed, on which input from the trade unions has already started to be gathered.

The committee's thanks go to the departments, and their management, for the work they are carrying out in mitigating the effects of climate change. My gratitude is also extended to the members of the committee for their support throughout the investigation.

On behalf of the committee, I commend this report and its recommendations to you.

Councillor Stewart Miller
Chair of Audit and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 20 February 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Work is already underway across East Renfrewshire Council within all departments to mitigate the effects of climate change, and the activities which schoolchildren are engaged in is to be encouraged, including the attainment of ECO school status;
2. The Council's climate change strategy (the former Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2015-18), needs to be renewed as a matter of urgency to reflect changing priorities, and to provide a stimulating new policy direction, including the involvement of children and young people in the development of the new strategy;
3. In relation to oversight, it was noted that the Cabinet and the Convener for Environment have responsibility for climate change and sustainability. Notwithstanding, it is suggested that a cross party Elected Member / Officer working group could be established on climate change to make further recommendations to Cabinet;
4. That the Corporate Management Team should consider how they can best take forward their leadership role in climate change;
5. That an inter-departmental working group should be formed on climate change, supported from existing resources, and a dedicated climate change officer;
6. That the Council should consider setting a date by which it should be carbon neutral. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee suggest that 2040 could be an option, on the basis that should the Council achieve milestones earlier than planned on climate change, then a revised date could be considered;
7. New policies are either underway or planned, in relation to a Sustainable Procurement Policy, and on single-use plastics with support and input from the trade unions;
8. Importantly, to have maximum impact, the Council's new climate change strategy must have input from residents and the East Renfrewshire community, involving existing channels and new ones, such as using the Council's new website when it goes live;
9. Following a recent visit by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre, it is proposed that a film produced by pupils there on climate change and recycling, should be shared via social media links, with other educational establishments in East Renfrewshire;
10. The extension of agile working practices and the roll-out of laptop computers replacing older ones, allowing greater flexibility for when, where and how staff conduct their business, is leading to reductions in business mileage, and CO₂;
11. To protect the environment and to help the Council reach its suggested objective of reaching carbon neutrality by 2040, a headline project for the new climate change strategy could be considered e.g. a tree being planted for every resident of East Renfrewshire (approx. 95,000); and

12. The Council's annual Climate Change Return to the Scottish Government, includes examples of: innovative energy and lighting management; greater use of renewable energy; increased use of electric fleet vehicles; increased recycling and less waste going to landfill, e.g. the 'waste to energy' scheme agreed recently with other Councils, where household waste is converted to energy at a specialist plant in Dunbar.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On 26 September 2019, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee decided that a detailed review should be undertaken on climate change, and on 21 November 2019, the committee agreed the scope and timeline. The investigation commenced in late November 2019, and concluded at the end of February 2020.

1.2 The decision to select this topic area originated from a suggestion made by the Chair, who was keen that it should focus on scientifically-based findings. Although the title of the report of this investigation is 'climate change' it also covers environmental and sustainability issues too, each of which are often used interchangeably.

1.3 Climate change features strongly in the Council's overarching strategy 'Vision for the Future' (VFTF), which is currently being revised and due for completion in Spring 2020. Building upon the Community Plan, VFTF sets out the Council's role, including the mission to '*make people's lives better*'. One of the five Outcomes of the Community Plan is '*Environment and Economy*' and a number of the objectives from this Outcome relating to the environment will be reflected in the proposal to renew the Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan, which expired in 2018. The renewal of the Council's climate change strategy forms one of the main recommendations of this report.

1.4 Initial discussions were held with Council departments on climate change activities, and these were considered at an informal meeting between the Committee and departmental representatives held on 14 January 2020. This allowed the committee the opportunity to receive more information, ask questions, and to offer views on recommendations. Subsequently, discussions took place with the Health and Social Care Partnership. Joint discussions have also commenced with trade unions on the proposal to develop a new policy on single-use plastics.

1.5 The Council's recent annual Climate Change return to the Scottish Government (December 2019) showed further encouraging reductions in carbon emissions compared to the Council's submission for 2018. The reasons for this are explained in the 'Findings Section: Scope Item 3';

1.6 The Council is participating in collaborative work on climate change with the Sustainable Scotland Network, and with partner Councils through 'Climate Ready Clyde', where the Glasgow city-region level Climate Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan is being developed.

1.7 We have welcomed hearing that across East Renfrewshire's schools, children are actively involved in nature and environmentalism through the ECO schools project, and with the LfS initiative which forms part of the Curriculum for Excellence. The Council has invested in 'active travel' infrastructure, in particular cycling and walking routes, to provide safer routes to schools, and to give residents and visitors greater travel choices. On 31 January 2020, the committee visited the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre to meet the children and staff to see at first hand the work taking place there on climate change.

1.8 Looking forward, the Council has a series of challenges which it has to meet to fulfil its obligations to, and expectations of, the East Renfrewshire community. This will require investment, and new forms of engagement and communication channels to be established with all interested parties, including citizens and our own staff. These areas are addressed in further detail in the following sections. The United Nations COP 26 Climate Change summit to be held in Glasgow in November 2020, will bring increased focus on Glasgow and the City Region authorities, locally, nationally, and internationally.

2. SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION

2.1. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 21 November 2019, agreed that a detailed review take place on climate change, with the following objectives to be pursued:-

- (i) Assessing the level of awareness of the importance of addressing climate change within departments;
- (ii) If there is a need to review governance arrangements within the authority associated with addressing climate change issues to ensure this issue is pursued effectively (for example creating a specific body or board to oversee its implementation);
- (iii) The extent to which adequate targets have been set and are being considered and developed further within the authority to address climate change;
- (iv) Linked to the above, assessing the level of existing capacity and expertise within the authority, not only within the Environment Department but also other departments, to enable climate change issues and related targets to be pursued effectively;
- (v) Considering the extent to which departmental budgets align with goals linked to addressing climate change, including capital projects and bids;
- (vi) The extent to which discussions on pursuing carbon neutrality take place when project proposals are being discussed and developed;
- (vii) The extent to which the importance of carbon neutrality is considered in relation to the procurement and purchasing of goods and services;
- (viii) From a benchmarking perspective, which approaches have been successfully adopted by other authorities on addressing climate change; and
- (ix) The extent to which the Council is taking preventive measures and adapting practices to address climate change.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The committee decided that the following approaches would be used in the conduct of the investigation. Arguably, the more information sources which were used, the better informed Elected Members would be to scrutinise the Council's response to climate change, and to offer suggestions for improvement. This involved the following methods:

- 1 Gathering information from local authorities through a national survey conducted by the Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer, and completed in late 2019, on climate change. Further details are provided under Scope Item 2.
- 2 Collecting evidence from national organisations on guidance which was available on climate change;
- 3 Liaison with East Renfrewshire Council's departments, to hold initial discussions on their current and planned activities, and thoughts on climate change;

- 4 Initial discussions with the trade unions on developing a policy on single-use plastics;
- 5 Arranging for an informal meeting of the Committee to be held on 14 January to meet representatives of each of the Council's departments to ask questions, and to take evidence; and
- 6 Arranging for the committee to visit the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre on 31 January to witness the good work taking place there on sustainability by the schoolchildren and staff.

Members of the committee were also invited to contribute their views on climate change at different stages of the investigation.

4. FINDINGS

Scope Item 1

Assessing level of awareness within departments of importance of addressing climate change

4.1 The Audit and Scrutiny Committee invited representatives of the Council's Departments to an informal meeting which was held on 14 January 2020. Each representative was asked to give a short summary of examples of issues which their department was currently working on concerning climate change, and outline future plans. These examples had, prior to the informal meeting, been sent to the Committee in the form of a briefing note prepared by the Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer. The Committee asked questions of the departmental representatives, and there followed a wide ranging discussion, during which evidence of awareness of addressing climate change was presented. The Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) provided comments separately on their climate change activities.

4.2 The Education Department, and all of its establishments, are committed to the LfS initiative, which is an integral aspect of the Curriculum for Excellence. Professional learning on LfS and awareness of climate change has been extended to all probationary teachers (approximately 140 staff). This is to raise awareness of their responsibility to incorporate LfS themes into their learning and teaching, in order to complement the training already on offer to teachers who take lead roles in LfS.

4.3 The Environment Department leads the coordination of the Council's annual climate change return to the Scottish Government. Commendable work is also being carried out on energy management; asset management; sustainability and new-build Council properties; flood management; protecting the environment and encouraging biodiversity; active travel initiatives such as park and ride, and safer routes to schools; traffic management schemes; greater use of electric vehicles; and sustainable practices in relation to roads maintenance and route optimization for gritter and refuse vehicles.

4.4 The Chief Executive's Office is developing a new Sustainable Procurement Policy which will benefit Council staff once it is implemented later in 2020. Effective measures have been implemented within Accountancy Services, to reduce the carbon footprint: minimising office space requirements; cutting down on printed material, such as the annual accounts; making greater use of digital technologies, with documents being available on the Council's website; and moving towards more flexible working.

4.5 Corporate and Community Services has been instrumental in creating opportunities for more agile working across departments, including home-working through upgrading and replacement of desktops/laptops. Approximately 1700 employees in 2020 will be enabled with Skype for Business and Teams, helping to facilitate meetings to be held online, and reduce business mileage and CO2. There has been a concerted effort to minimise business mileage, and since 2016 there has been reduction of 22.6% in travel claim costs. Further analysis will be undertaken to allow fuller understanding of the reasons for these changes. Analysis will be undertaken to review opportunities to reduce production of printed and laminated materials.

4.6 HSCP advised that lighting at Eastwood Health and Care Centre switches off when no movement is detected by sensors. Landscaping at the Centre was designed to provide a home for insects, with a wildflower area and nesting boxes for small birds. Trees have been planted, and bee hives will be installed in the summer of 2020. There is one electric car, EV charging points, and a green travel plan which was introduced when the building opened three years ago will be reviewed soon. Offices are becoming 'paper-lite' including an online document management system, and staff are becoming more agile through the switch to laptops, which allows flexibility to work from other locations, whilst reducing unnecessary travel.

4.7 Overall, it was evident that meaningful activities were taking place on climate change across all departments, and there was widespread awareness of climate change. However, communications could be strengthened, and the proposed new Council website offers the potential for this to happen within the East Renfrewshire community, and the Council's staff.

Recommendations:

To raise awareness levels further on the importance of addressing climate change, across all levels within the Council, and the wider East Renfrewshire community, including maximisation of the potential offered by social media, and the Council's new website once it is launched;

To support the further promotion of agile working procedures in the Council, including raising awareness through guidance, of how employees and departments as a whole impact upon the Council's carbon footprint, and steps they can take to reduce this.

Scope Item 2

The need, or otherwise, to review governance arrangements within the authority to address climate change issues effectively

4.8 To provide the Committee with an overview on governance arrangements within other local authorities in Scotland concerning climate change, the Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer conducted a climate change survey amongst Scotland's thirty-two Councils. The survey, which was concluded at the end of 2019, covered the following key points in relation to governance:

- Had the Council declared a climate emergency
- Had the Council made a declaration of carbon neutrality
- Employee resources dedicated to central coordination of climate change
- What was the decision-making structure for climate change
- A request for a web-link to the Council's latest policy on climate change

4.9 The overall survey response was 66%, of which 86% of those replying had declared a

climate emergency, and each having done so during 2019. 52% of responders had pledged dates by when the Council, or the Council area, will become carbon neutral. Some had agreed for this to happen in stages. Further information on the survey is contained in Scope Item 3.

4.10 Central coordination of climate change within other Councils is undertaken typically by one-two full time employees, supported by departments. East Renfrewshire Council does not currently have a dedicated climate change officer. Consideration of climate change within other Councils varied considerably, with most having undertaken a review in the past year, or are currently doing so. Examples of governance arrangements elsewhere include:

Policy and Sustainability Committee
 Environment, Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Policy Development Committee
 Sustainability and Climate Change Committee
 Cross-party Member Group
 Officer Working Group – reporting to Committees

4.11 It is considered timeous, in view of national discussions on climate change, and how local government is responding to the challenges posed, that the Council considers its governance arrangements. The Committee recognises the importance of leadership at the highest level to achieve the organisational change required, including the need to renew the Council's climate change strategy. Greater focus, impact and improved coordination could be achieved through a variety of measures, as detailed in the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

That the Council's strategy on climate change is renewed, setting out the Council's future priorities with clear actions, replacing the former Climate Change Strategy and Sustainability Action Plan, and to include the involvement of children and young people in the development of the new strategy;

That in relation to oversight, it was noted that the Cabinet and the Convener for Environment have responsibility for climate change and sustainability. Notwithstanding, it is suggested that a cross party Elected Member / Officer working group could be established on climate change to make further recommendations to Cabinet;

That the Corporate Management Team should consider how they can best take forward their leadership role in climate change;

That an inter-departmental working group be formed on climate change, supported by the change-management team within the Environment Department, reporting through the Director of Environment to the Corporate Management Team.

Scope Item 3

The extent to which adequate targets have been set, and are being considered/developed further to address climate change

4.12 Since 2016, the Council, in common with other authorities in Scotland, has submitted an annual climate change return to the Scottish Government. This is coordinated by the Environment department, with information analysed under the following headings:

*Profile of Reporting Body
 Governance, Management and Strategy*

Emissions, Targets and Projects
Adaptation
Procurement
Validation and Declaration

4.13 The return to the Scottish Government includes a list of all of the Council's targets for discharging its climate change duties, and requires the submission of baseline information, comparisons to be made, and details of progress recorded. Once the return has been completed in draft form, it is submitted first to the Council's Internal Audit Section within the Chief Executive's Office for internal scrutiny and validation. Only when this thorough exercise has been completed and validated, is the final return authorised for submission.

4.14 The 2019 Climate Change Return showed the Council achieved a reduction in CO₂ emissions of 13.7% compared to last year's total. Since 2015/16, the reduction in emissions has been 26.1%, representing 5,570 tonnes of CO₂. The biggest reduction in emissions was related to lower electricity consumption across Council properties, coupled with increased supply from renewable sources. Lower consumption has been achieved from: replacement of street lighting with LED lights; upgraded and optimised timers; replacement of old inefficient electric heating with air-source heat pumps; and internal and external lighting replacement of old fluorescent lamps with LEDs.

4.15 Lower gas usage consumption was achieved across the Council's property portfolio. Programmes to install more efficient boilers, and improve building insulation contributed to this. Transport emissions reduced, including lower mileage by the Council's fleet of diesel vehicles. There was increased use of the Council's electric vehicles, and a reduction overall in mileage carried out on Council business (22.6% reduction in travel claims since 2016). Less waste was sent to municipal landfill (86 tonnes less, resulting in a saving of 429.6 tonnes of CO₂); and less gas oil was used in Council machinery e.g. for street cleaning and gardening.

4.16 From the national climate change survey results (see Scope Item 2), the dates by when other Councils had pledged to become carbon neutral ranged from: 2025 (2); 2030 (6); 2040 (1); and 2045 (2). Glasgow City Council has received wide coverage in the media relating to its declaration of carbon neutrality by 2030 (along with Edinburgh, Falkirk, Midlothian, Moray and Renfrewshire Councils). Dumfries and Galloway, and Highland Council, have set their dates as 2025. Other Councils have pledged to become carbon neutral, but have still to set a date. The Scottish Government's target is 2040.

4.17 As the Council's activities on climate change adapt and expand, further meaningful indicators could be developed to measure the Council's progress, and to allow assessment of ongoing performance. It is proposed that as a headline priority, the Council considers setting 2040 as the date by when it will become carbon neutral, on the basis that should progress accelerate ahead of target, then this date could be revised. Further consideration, through the new climate change strategy, should be given to the setting of a target date for the reduction in the Council's greenhouse gas emissions.

4.18 The setting of a date by when the Council will be carbon neutral is critical to the overall success of the Council's strategy to mitigate the effects of climate change. By setting such a date, this should ensure that the Council's future activities remained concentrated on this target, and bring a strong influence to bear on future decision-making. However, in view of the Committee's preference for this investigation to be scientifically-based, it is not considered necessary to recommend to the Council that it should declare a climate emergency in East Renfrewshire.

Recommendations:

That the Council considers setting a date by which it should be carbon neutral. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee suggest that 2040 could be an option, on the basis that should the Council achieve milestones earlier than planned on climate change, then consideration could be given to revising this date;

That consideration be given to establishing reporting mechanisms to inform the Cabinet on progress being made towards reaching the suggested target date of 2040, subject to baseline figures being agreed for all services, e.g. reductions in paper, printers, vehicle mileage, single-use plastics, to enable better information gathering on the Council's climate change performance;

Scope Item 4

Assessing the level of capacity/expertise to enable climate change issues/targets to be pursued effectively within the authority

4.19 As detailed earlier in this report, a wide range of activity is taking place on climate change across each department of the Council, with the Education and Environment departments having the largest remits. However, there is no single officer with full-time responsibility for climate change coordination within the Council, which has been challenging, especially within the Environment Department. The current arrangements for climate change coordination within the Council are described in the following sections.

4.20 Sustainability and the environment are coordinated within the Education department by the Quality Improvement Officers, each of whom liaises with their respective school cluster. Currently, the Council has the highest proportion of educational establishments (with thirty) holding Green Flag status, of any local authority in Scotland, although the ambition is for every establishment to hold one. Training will take place this term, in partnership with Keep Scotland Beautiful, to guide staff through the process of achieving a Green Flag. Work is also taking place on successfully integrating the LfS initiative within the Curriculum for Excellence, to become a part of everyday school life. Although challenging, there is not considered to be a deficit in climate change support within the Education department.

4.21 Within Environment, work on climate change strategy, sustainability, the environment, carbon reduction, biodiversity, innovation in energy efficiency, recycling, new-build projects etc. is being carried out mostly by existing staff, as their remits have evolved due to changing national policy, legislative compliance, and new collaborations. In some cases, the work has been supported through external grant funding, and in others, the expertise required has been secured through secondment of officers, or revision of roles of existing staff, and specialist recruitment. Overall however, resourcing of this work has been challenging in the current economic climate.

4.22 For the Chief Executive's Office and Corporate and Community Services, the range of work carried out in support of climate change is being undertaken by employees through existing roles and responsibilities, with no single officer having a remit dedicated to this. There will, inevitably, be an increasing requirement for project-based working on climate change responses.

4.23 From the national climate change survey results, (see Scope Item 2), most Councils have assigned between one and two members of staff to centrally coordinate climate change matters. Others use a team to undertake this role, or they have an arrangement similar to East Renfrewshire Council's approach. It is clear that the expectations on our Council are increasing,

and are doing so at national, regional, and local levels. Given the growing importance and centrality of climate change as an issue which cuts across all services and departments, and with the expected impact of future legislative changes, it is appropriate that the Council considers how it should meet these challenges.

4.24 Arguably, much more could be achieved if a full-time dedicated officer was responsible for Council-wide coordination of climate change activities, including the direction of the inter-departmental officer working group, as proposed in Scope Item 2. This post would also provide support to the Elected Members in their consideration of climate change and sustainability too.

Recommendations:

That a full-time post of climate change coordinator is created with Council-wide responsibility, as a matter of urgency, and based within the Environment Department, subject to further discussion on the resource implications;

That the Council's departments give further consideration to the capacity which they have to coordinate climate change activities, especially due to the need for greater inter-departmental working and the likelihood of greater project-based work, through the joint working arrangements proposed at Recommendation 6 above.

Scope Item 5

The extent to which departmental budgets align with goals linked to addressing climate change, including capital projects/bids

4.25 Departmental budgets within East Renfrewshire Council are not currently aligned with goals linked to addressing climate change. This position is largely very similar to the vast majority of authorities which responded to the national climate change survey. One Council though has developed this theme quite significantly, and it might be worthwhile for East Renfrewshire Council to monitor further developments, and to revisit this proposal at some point in the future when considered timeous to do so.

4.26 For the Council to meet its future climate change objectives and targets, consideration will require to be given as to how these will be financed. Although the availability of grants will continue to be pursued, and a fair degree of success in this area has already been achieved, greater use of the Council's own financial resources may inevitably be required. Although the committee is not making a specific recommendation on this, the point is considered to be important, and is included in this report for the attention of Elected Members.

4.27 Regarding the Council's capital programme, and to provide increased focus on the environment and sustainability, it is proposed that consideration be given to a standard paragraph being included on the capital projects appraisal form to ensure sufficient focus is placed on these issues as bids are developed. This suggestion will require to be approved by the Corporate Asset Management Group prior to the start of the 2021/22 process, and input from the Budget Strategy Group and the Corporate Management Team will also be required.

Recommendation:

To invite the appropriate bodies to consider inclusion of the following wording on the capital projects appraisal form:

‘Please outline any positive or negative effects for sustainability which the project will have once completed. In terms of carbon reduction for example, impacts could include use of renewable energy sources, reduced energy/fuel consumption, increasing recycling and reduced need for people to travel. In terms of the environment, benefits could include the provision of sustainable drainage, tree-planting, habitat creation and reduced use of plastics.’

Scope Item 6

The extent to which discussions on carbon neutrality occur when project proposals are being discussed and developed

4.28 Given the increasing focus on climate change, and to assist Elected Members in their consideration of items, it is proposed that the Corporate Report Format Guidance is revised and re-issued to all departments of the Council, to reinforce the importance of climate change. The Guidance, which is used by authors when writing reports for the Council’s committees and decision-making bodies, currently includes a requirement to consider and report on sustainability implications of their proposals. Even where the issue is not relevant, authors are requested to still report this, to demonstrate that sustainability was considered. New criteria on sustainability and climate change should be developed in keeping with the Council’s overall climate change strategy, to assist authors with this.

4.29 The Director of Education has held discussions with primary and secondary pupil councils to seek the views of pupils on the Council’s Local Development Plan 2. She invited members of the planning team to present to pupils, and led a discussion around how the Plan could meet the needs of children and young people by ensuring opportunities to: walk and cycle safely to school; enjoy well planned and maintained green spaces; and to keep East Renfrewshire clean by providing and using recycling bins in streets and public spaces. Pupil council representatives were asked to discuss these issues further with pupils across their schools, and to make their views known through the online public consultation space. We welcomed hearing about such initiatives which encouraged pupils to take an interest in both climate change and sustainability issues in their area.

Recommendation:

That the Council’s Corporate Report Format Guidance is re-issued with a request that sustainability and climate change implications are given greater prominence and wider consideration. Further criteria on sustainability and climate change should be developed, led by the Council’s renewed climate change strategy, to assist authors in the preparation of reports.

Scope Item 7

The extent to which the importance of carbon neutrality is considered in the procurement/purchasing of goods and services

4.30 We welcomed the fact that work is underway to develop a Sustainable Procurement Policy. This demonstrates commitment to the process for organisations to meet their needs for goods, works and services in a way which achieves value for money on a whole life basis, and generates benefits to society, the economy and the environment. The new policy which will be implemented in 2020, covers the three strands of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. It aims to meet the substantial challenges of balancing the complexities of sustainable procurement and the continued drive for best and added value. It

will also provide improved focus on sustainability considerations for all procurement and purchasing activities.

4.31 Useful discussions have commenced through the Chief Executive's Office with the trade unions concerning the usage of single-use plastics across the Council, which might lead to the formation of a new Council policy on this matter, including guidance for staff when procuring/purchasing goods and services.

Recommendation:

To agree that a Council policy is developed, with input and support from the trade unions, on the usage and deployment of single-use plastics throughout the authority, to minimise and eventually eradicate their use.

Scope Item 8

From a benchmarking perspective, which approaches have been successfully adopted by other authorities on addressing climate change

4.32 The results from the national local authority survey on climate change showed that some Councils advocated a strong partnership approach to addressing climate change, working with other public, private and community organisations. One Council will use a Citizens' Assembly to help identify how its Council's activities can be made net-zero carbon, and another held a successful Youth Climate Change Conference which gathered valuable contributions from young people. Citizen, third sector, and business engagement with the climate change debate are considered to be essential to the formation of policy and related action plans. Examples from the survey will help to inform the new strategy.

4.33 It is proposed that East Renfrewshire Council engages further with its communities to find out their views and priorities. Existing channels could be used, such as the Citizens' Panel, while the Council's new website will provide opportunities for both communication of information, and citizen participation once it is launched. The Director of Environment has established links with East Renfrewshire Youth Voice to ask what their concerns are. The committee supports the Director in maintaining this dialogue, which could lead to the group undertaking a climate change project, which could be filmed and then sent to schools.

4.34 It is clear from the national climate change survey results that each Council was addressing climate change seriously from a range of fronts. This included policy-making, governance arrangements including decision-making structures, and how they engage with their communities. Examples from the survey on a range of areas will be useful to consider in the preparation of the proposed new climate change strategy for our Council.

Recommendation:

To agree that further consultation and engagement takes place with the East Renfrewshire community to establish what their views and priorities are on climate change, to inform the renewal of the Council's climate change strategy, using existing channels such as the East Renfrewshire Citizens' Panel, East Renfrewshire Youth Voice, and through new channels, e.g. the Council's new website once launched.

Scope Item 9**The extent to which the Council is taking preventive measures and adapting practices to address climate change**

4.35 The visit which the Committee undertook to the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre on 31 January 2020, allowed the Members attending to witness the excellent work which was taking place there, including the production by pupils of a climate change film. On the day of the visit, one of the pupils suggested that the film could be shared via social media to other schools in East Renfrewshire, and this was supported fully by the committee.

4.36 Other activities taking place in educational establishments as part of their ECO schools work included: development of a science garden with areas to encourage insects and pollinators; vegetable growing and soup-making; compost heaps; bug hotels; bird boxes; bird feeders; 'bee bombs'; pond areas; orchards; wildflower areas; sensory herb gardens; willow tree tunnels; and installation of poly tunnels with work benches.

4.37 The Council has invested heavily in active travel initiatives in recent years, including the provision of safer routes to schools, and improved infrastructure for cycling and walking, such as park and ride facilities. It might be valuable to assess the impact of this investment to provide useful information for Elected Members, citizens, and partner organisations.

4.38 Discussions on the Council's approach to public transport have commenced, including information gathering on local transport movements, including citizens' needs. A briefing arranged by the Director of Environment for Elected Members was held in January 2020, and a report is awaited on the findings from survey work, which will include recommendations.

4.39 The Environment Department have provided various options for the Council to take preventive measures, and adapt practices to mitigate climate change, many of which are already underway. The Committee considered these at their informal meeting held on 14 January 2020, with discussions on protecting the environment and promoting biodiversity; increasing tree planting, and preservation of peatlands; promoting greater use of electric vehicles, and investment in associated infrastructure; increasing liftshare options; improved energy management of Council housing and other public buildings; and including greater sustainability considerations in the planning of new house-building developments. Recently, the Council has been advised of the new (and very challenging) energy efficiency targets associated with the Scottish Government's Learning Estates Strategy, which will be used to deliver our new Neilston Learning Campus.

Recommendations:

That the film produced by pupils at the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre on climate change and recycling, should, on the suggestion of a pupil there, be shared via social media links, with other educational establishments in East Renfrewshire;

To maximise the potential for achieving further ECO schools status and Green Flag awards, across educational establishments in East Renfrewshire, building upon the excellent work already taking place;

To investigate the feasibility of reviewing the Council's recent investment in active travel, to assess the impact of more choices for citizens of cycling and walking, and associated benefits, such as safer routes to schools, alternative commuting options, increasing access to the countryside, or more generally improving the quality of life for residents;

That consideration be given to what further action can be taken, such as thorough revisions to the Local Development Plan, and related planning guidance, to promote sustainability and raise awareness of the authority's expectations regarding new housing developments;

That a review be undertaken of our approach to public transport to ensure it is sufficiently sustainable, and tailored to residents' current and future needs;

That the opportunity is taken through the re-development plans for Eastwood Leisure Centre complex, to consider the option of introducing a district (i.e. linked) heating system for the public buildings located within Eastwood Park;

That the implications should be assessed of plans to replace gas boilers with low carbon heating after 2025, for new homes;

To continue the programme of improvements already underway to the Council's housing stock and other public buildings, to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions through the use of innovative new technologies in relation to lighting, heating, and infrastructure;

To continue working with partner organisations and other agencies to ensure the preservation and protection of peatlands in East Renfrewshire, including the exploration of new funding opportunities, to ensure that the huge potential of peat to absorb CO₂ is maintained and increased where possible;

To protect the environment, and to help the Council reach its suggested objective of reaching carbon neutrality by 2040, a headline project for the new climate change strategy could be considered e.g. a tree being planted for every resident in East Renfrewshire (approx. 95,000).

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The proposed renewal of East Renfrewshire Council's climate change strategy, and consideration of other high-level objectives, such as the recommendation to agree 2040 as the date by when the Council will become carbon neutral, comes at a time when publicity and public interest on climate change are growing. Increased focus on Glasgow and the City Region will take place in the build up to the major United Nations Climate Change Summit (COP 26), to be held in Glasgow during November 2020.

5.2 The overriding purpose of this report is to support the renewal of East Renfrewshire Council's climate change strategy, and a wide range of recommendations covering all departments and services, are provided for the consideration of the Cabinet. The renewal of our Council's climate change strategy will also support the revised Council strategy VFTF, and help the authority to meet its community plan objectives.

5.3 Further engagement with the East Renfrewshire community is suggested to find out their thoughts on climate change, and what their expectations are. For the Council's departments and services, staffing resources will require to be identified, and thought given as to how information on climate change will be communicated internally. New policies are either in development or proposed on sustainable procurement, and usage of single-use plastics, which is commendable and will be useful to help guide staff.

5.4 Climate change is receiving greater coverage in the media due to world news events such as Australian wildfires, flooding in Jakarta, and Amazon forest fires. It could be easy to miss the importance of the collective impact of what can be achieved by encouraging

relatively small steps to be taken across the East Renfrewshire community to increase recycling; help nature; encourage sustainable practices; and reduce carbon emissions.

5.5 There is further scope for citizens and community groups to become involved in sustainability activities, such as: planting of vegetables in gardens, which will reduce 'food miles'; leaving parts of garden ground to grow wild, or planting wildflowers which can attract insects and birds. Planting of trees would help to absorb carbon from the atmosphere (over time). Many schools in East Renfrewshire are already spearheading these activities, and if neighbours adopt some of the same practices, then wildlife corridors can start to be created. Guidance for citizens on active participation will be included in the new climate change strategy.

5.6 The suggested setting of 2040 as the date by when the Council pledges to become carbon neutral, and the renewal of the Council's climate change strategy would provide further momentum for the Council to take on climate change challenges. Regarding governance, various recommendations have been made which, if adopted, would provide greater resilience for consideration of climate change matters and decision-making. New investment will be required if we are to meet our climate change objectives, and innovative practices will continue to play an important part in the Council's approach. The results of this investigation, including the identification of best practice, will also be shared with the East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust.

5.7 The timing of this investigation mirrors that of many Councils across Scotland during the past year. This has seen consideration of such matters as the declaration of a climate emergency, the setting of a date (ranging from 2025 to 2045) by when Councils will become carbon neutral, how they will engage their communities, and provide a new policy direction by refreshing their overall strategy on climate change.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

It is proposed that the Cabinet considers the following recommendations:

1. To raise awareness levels further on the importance of addressing climate change, across all levels within the Council, and the wider East Renfrewshire community, including maximisation of the potential offered by social media, and the Council's new website once it is launched;
2. To support the further promotion of agile working procedures in the Council, including raising awareness through guidance of how employees and departments as a whole, impact upon the Council's carbon footprint, and steps they can take to reduce this;
3. That the Council's strategy on climate change is renewed, setting out the Council's future priorities with clear actions, replacing the former Climate Change Strategy and Sustainability Action Plan, and to include the involvement of children and young people in the development of the new strategy;
4. In relation to oversight, it was noted that the Cabinet and the Convener for Environment have responsibility for climate change and sustainability. Notwithstanding, it is suggested that a cross party Elected Member / Officer working group could be established on climate change to make further recommendations to Cabinet;
5. That the Corporate Management Team should consider how they can best take forward their leadership role in climate change;
6. That an inter-departmental working group be formed on climate change, supported by the change-management team within the Environment Department, and reporting through the Director of Environment to the Corporate Management Team;
7. That the Council considers setting a date by which it should be carbon neutral. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee suggest that 2040 could be an option, on the basis that should the Council achieve milestones earlier than planned on climate change, then consideration could be given to revising this date;
8. That consideration be given to establishing reporting mechanisms to inform the Cabinet on progress being made towards reaching the suggested target date of 2040, subject to baseline figures being agreed for all services, e.g. reductions in paper, printers, vehicle mileage, single-use plastics, to enable better information gathering on the Council's climate change performance;
9. That a full-time post of climate change coordinator is created with Council-wide responsibility, as a matter of urgency, and based within the Environment Department, subject to further discussion on the resource implications;
10. That the Council's departments give further consideration to the capacity which they have to coordinate climate change activities, especially due to the need for greater inter-departmental working and the likelihood of greater project-based work, through the joint working arrangements proposed at Recommendation 6 above.

11. To invite the appropriate bodies to consider inclusion of the following wording on the capital projects appraisal form:

‘Please outline any positive or negative effects for sustainability which the project will have once completed. In terms of carbon reduction for example, impacts could include use of renewable energy sources, reduced energy/fuel consumption, increasing recycling and reduced need for people to travel by private car. In terms of the environment, benefits could include the provision of sustainable drainage, tree-planting, habitat creation and reduced use of plastics.’
12. That the Council’s Corporate Report Format Guidance is re-issued to all departments, with a request that sustainability and climate change implications are given greater prominence and wider consideration. Further criteria on sustainability and climate change should be developed, led by the Council’s renewed climate change strategy, to assist authors in the preparation of reports;
13. To agree that a Council policy is developed, with input and support from the trade unions, on the usage and deployment of single-use plastics throughout the authority, to minimise and eventually eradicate their use;
14. To agree that consultation and engagement takes place with the East Renfrewshire community to establish what their views and priorities are on climate change, to inform the renewal of the Council’s climate change strategy, using existing channels such as the East Renfrewshire Citizens’ Panel/East Renfrewshire Youth Voice, and through new channels, e.g. the Council’s new website once launched;
15. That the film produced by pupils at the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre on climate change and recycling, should, on the suggestion of a pupil there, be shared via social media links, with other educational establishments in East Renfrewshire;
16. To maximise the potential for achieving further ECO schools status and Green Flag awards across educational establishments in East Renfrewshire, building upon the excellent work already taking place;
17. To investigate the feasibility of reviewing the Council’s recent investment of resources in active travel, to assess the impact of more choices for citizens of cycling and walking, and any associated benefits, such as alternative commuting options, increasing access to the countryside, or more generally improving the quality of life of residents.
18. That consideration be given to what further action can be taken, such as thorough revisions to the Local Development Plan, and related planning guidance, to promote sustainability and raise awareness of the authority’s expectations regarding new housing developments;
19. That a review be undertaken of our approach to public transport to ensure it is sufficiently sustainable, and tailored to residents’ current and future needs;
20. That the opportunity is taken through the re-development plans for Eastwood Leisure Centre complex, to consider the option of introducing a district (i.e. linked) heating system for the public buildings located within Eastwood Park;
21. That the implications should be assessed of plans to replace gas boilers with low carbon heating after 2025, for new homes;

22. To continue the programme of improvements already underway to the Council's housing stock and other public buildings, to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions through the use of innovative new technologies in relation to lighting, heating, and infrastructure;
23. To continue working with partner organisations and other agencies to ensure the preservation and protection of peatlands in East Renfrewshire, including the exploration of new funding opportunities, to ensure that the huge potential of peat to absorb CO₂ is maintained and increased where possible;
24. To protect the environment, and to help the Council reach its suggested objective of reaching carbon neutrality by 2040, a headline project for the new climate change strategy could be considered e.g. a tree being planted for every resident in East Renfrewshire (approx. 95,000).

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