

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

DATE: 26 NOVEMBER 2019

SUBJECT: REPORT OF SURREY'S GREENER FUTURE TASK GROUP



SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

In 2018, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a landmark report highlighting that even half a degree beyond 1.5C would significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people. In response to this significant threat to society and our planet, Surrey County Council has declared a Climate Emergency, committing to becoming net zero carbon by 2050.

However, our current policies leave us far short of this ambition, with emissions only expected to fall by 44% against 2005 levels by 2050. We recognise the need to address this gap through committed and continued ambition, and these Task Group recommendations represent the initial calls to action to begin this process. It will require a concerted effort from central government, local government, businesses and residents to change behaviour immediately and into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Endorses the Call For Action (Annex 1) that is recommended to council for approval
2. Considers the full range of opportunities identified in the Select Committee report and agrees that these are taken forward as part of the wider strategy development to test the deliverability
3. Includes sufficient investment within the Medium Financial Term Strategy to support climate change programmes and initiatives, reviewing this on an annual basis
4. Supports the proposal that the council works together with Districts and Boroughs through the Surrey Environment Partnership to develop and deliver a joint zero carbon strategy and action plan, to be approved by April 2020
5. Agrees that the council continue to support the emerging Surrey Climate Commission
6. Under chairmanship of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Waste sets up a Member Reference Group to take the work forward and develop a zero carbon climate strategy
7. Supports a call for increased powers and resources to enable local authorities to lead on delivering on the commitment for the UK to be net zero by 2050 and asks officers to build a case for change with clear asks for the new government

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Climate Change is a complex issue and it is easy for the scale of it to be overwhelming, with residents often feeding back that they want to make changes but are not clear on what is needed. In order to provide clarity to this issue and a focus for councils, partners and residents to work together, most leading Local Authorities have adopted some form of call for action around climate change. This is why the Task Group has requested that Cabinet accepts the recommendation we adopt our own Call for Action and supports the

development of this by agreeing to further work to develop a strategy through council funding, partnership working and a Member Reference Group along with seeking support from the UK Government to achieve a net zero Surrey by 2050 in line with the motion agreed by Council on 9 July 2019.

DETAILS:

The Task Group

1. A cross-party Task Group was established by the Communities, Highways and Environment Select Committee in July 2019 responding to Surrey County Council's recent declaration of a climate emergency and the actions the council needs to take to achieve net zero carbon emissions as soon as possible. The task group agreed to consider the role residents need to play in their local community and the wider impact of other public sector organisations and the private sector on the county's environment to develop a system-wide position.

2. The membership of the Task Group was agreed as the following:

- Andy MacLeod (Chairman)
- Paul Deach
- Jonathan Essex
- Becky Rush
- Fiona White
- John O'Reilly (ex-officio)

Nikki Barton subsequently joined the task group in October 2019 and due to time commitments, Fiona White was unable to continue on the task group.

3. The Task Group met numerous times since it was first established, hearing evidence from a diverse range of stakeholders in an effort to understand the full range of issues that contribute to climate change. The task group was also keen to consult residents to gain an understanding of their concerns for Surrey in relation to climate change and to gain a resident perspective on how the Council itself can work to reach net zero carbon.
4. Various methods were used to engage with stakeholders, starting with an open call for evidence which ran from 14 August 2019 to 15 September 2019 and received 142 responses via the survey with 15 responses sent to the democratic services email, making a total of 157 responses. Out of the survey responses, 19 (13.38%) responded as an organisation and the remaining 123 as individuals.
5. Following the call for evidence, the Task Group undertook a series of witness sessions, focussing on three key groups:
- Council officers with a key role within the themes above
 - External Experts working in this field
 - Councils identified as leading the way in tackling elements of climate change

KEY THEMES & CALL FOR ACTION:

6. The Task Group investigated approaches across five key themes:
- Energy;

- Buildings, development and infrastructure;
 - Waste, resources and the circular economy;
 - Agriculture, forestry and other land use; and
 - Transport.
7. Numerous witness sessions using key lines of enquiry helped to identify the content of the Call for Action. The Call for Action is a statement of intent of the council's action on climate change.
8. If approved by the council, the call for action can be used to prioritise campaign activity and begin wider discussions with partners and communities about the behaviour changes needed at all levels to become net carbon zero. Further opportunities for action were outlined in the Select Committee report and the Task Group seeks Cabinet support to explore these ideas further to test deliverability.

SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTARY

9. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council's financial position, the medium term financial outlook is uncertain as it is heavily dependent on decisions made by Central Government. With no clarity on these beyond 2020/21, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term.
10. The Call for Action provides a basis to develop a more detailed strategy and action plan. As individual proposals are progressed, business cases will be brought forward setting out expected costs and funding opportunities. These will be subject to approval through the Council's existing governance processes, including future reports to Cabinet where appropriate, and will be considered within the Medium Term Financial Strategy in light of the Council's funding position and its other spending requirements.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – MONITORING OFFICER

11. The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment Order) 2019 will be the basis for the UK's approach to tackling and responding to climate change. It requires that emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are reduced and that climate change risks are prepared for. It has imposed a target of very significantly reducing zero emissions by 2050. The Environment Bill 2019-20 proposed to make plans for targets, plans and policies to improve the natural environment. Any subsequent Act will no doubt clarify obligations on local authorities.
12. Surrey County Council declared a climate emergency in May 2019 following the 2018 report of the United Nations intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The Greener Future Task Group Report seeks to recommend action to allow Surrey County Council to reflect that commitment. Pending legislation coming into effect this preparatory action envisaged will form the basis for meeting future legal obligations.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

13. A report is taken to the 10 December 2019 meeting of Council for a decision on the adoption of the Call for Action and the further development of a zero carbon strategy and action plan.
-

Contact Officer:

Ross Pike, Committees Business Manager, tel: 020 8541 7368

Consulted:

Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Communities, Environment and Highways Committee

Council officers, members of the public and stakeholders as outlined in the Select Committee report Annexes 4 and 5

Annexes:

Annex 1: Call for Action

Annex 2: Surrey's Greener Future Task Group Report to the Communities, Highways and Environment Select Committee, 22 November 2019
