

CABINET – 24 November 2020

PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Public Questions**Question (1): Ms Sally Blake**

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Your report “Greenhouse gas emissions from the estate and operational activities of Surrey County Council - Reporting period: 2018/19” says your total net greenhouse gas emissions for that year were 34,118 tonnes of CO₂.

The answer to a Freedom of Information request stated that 2,722 tonnes of wood were felled in the Surrey Countryside Estate in 2018/19 and supplied as wood chip for burning. Most of this went to a power station. Using the Government’s recommended ‘out of scopes’ factors, this would have emitted 3,636 tonnes of CO₂.

The Government’s guidance notes say “outside of scopes factors should be used to account for the direct carbon dioxide (CO₂) impact of burning biomass” and “All fuels with biogenic content ... should have the ‘outside of scopes’ emissions reported to ensure a complete picture of an organisation’s emissions is created”.

A letter sent to Surrey County Council, before the 2018/19 report was published, pointed this out and asked that these emissions be included. They represent nearly 11% of the published figure. Providing a transparent picture of CO₂ emissions is critical with the climate change emergency.

Please could you explain how these emissions are being reported to ensure a complete picture of Surrey County Council’s greenhouse gas emissions? It would be helpful if your answer could include:

- I. whether you agree the emissions figure of 3,636 tonnes of CO₂, or advise what the corrected figure should be and the basis for its calculation;
- II. whether the emissions from biomass burning were included in the 2018/19 report, and if not why the Government’s guidance was ignored; and whether the report will be amended to include them.

Reply:

Thank you for your email and attached documentation which we have reviewed. Following engagement with various officers in our environment, arboriculture and land and property teams, as well as colleagues at the Surrey Wildlife Trusts, we would like to raise the following in relation to points i) and ii) you have raised.

Ash dieback is a plant health issue that is facing the entire country:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-54373214>

We, and other land owners and managers will be dealing with this disease for the foreseeable future. We will need to use a range of methods to cope with the disease as it causes the death of trees across our estate. In reference to the works that were carried out on Norbury Park during 2018/19, this site was managed and run by our partner Surrey Wildlife Trust. SWT have a tree safety inspection and maintenance programme that led to them making an intervention

on the site for public safety. Whilst they were amongst the early adopters of this strategy it is actions like this that helped bring forward the Tree Council's Toolkit on dealing with the disease:<https://treecouncil.org.uk/science-and-research/ash-dieback/local-authority-ash-dieback-action-plan-toolkit/>

There are significant costs to dealing with this disease; you can see in the BBC article above that the National trust are appealing for funding to help them cope. When SWT went out to tender for the required safety works the most competitive quote was to remove the arisings for biomass. It is important to note that not all of the timber went to energy production. Where the Ash felled was of sufficient quality it went to furniture production or other uses. It was the poorer quality material that went to energy production. This is standard forestry practice but we will of course keep this under review to ensure our approach is appropriate.

Our voluntary organisational carbon emission reporting is for scope 1 and 2 emissions only at present, and as the energy produced from the power plant was not directly used by Surrey County Council, we have not included it within our 2018/19 emissions inventory.

Having published our Climate Change Strategy for Surrey County earlier this year, we are currently working with our partners to develop a delivery process and to embed climate change across our services. This includes reviewing our current emissions reporting, with a view to potentially restating our baseline and scope in future years due to the changing nature of our operations. However, we would like to assure you that we will be considering the transfer of material to biomass power plants as part of that work.

I hope this helps to provide clarity in this matter.

Mrs Natalie Bramhall
Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change
24 November 2020

Question (2): Mr Paul Kennedy

Surrey County Council's daily coronavirus update is potentially very helpful but the data are 5 days out of date. I note the explanation that recent days are subject to change because of late reporting. Nevertheless, publication with a delay of 5 days is potentially misleading, particularly when used to alert communities and partner agencies to a surge in cases, as happened recently in Mole Valley. I note that the council's weekly intelligence summaries are slightly less out of date, which can be confusing when they are published on the same day. Would it not be better to publish a daily update with more up to date case numbers, suitably qualified for late reporting, and can you please confirm that information which is shared with partner organisations does include more up to date information?

Reply:

Both the Intelligence Summary Report and the Daily Dashboard use the Public Health England (PHE) public-facing dashboard as their data source and show cases by specimen date (the date the test was completed). These cases are subject to reporting delays and therefore latest available data can show artificially low case numbers. In order to mitigate the impact of potentially misleading idea that case numbers are dropping when that might not be accurate, we use data that is "complete" which means it is not subject to fluctuation or reporting delays.

For example, as of today (18th November, data updated on the 17th November) the cases that have been reported for Mole Valley are shown below for select dates. You will see that it shows on 17/11/2020 there were 0 cases reported. This is unlikely and should be look at this data in 5 days time we will see the number of cases reported on 17/11/2020 to be greater than zero. This is because the effect of reporting delays is picked up in the data over 5 days.

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Specimen date	Daily cases	Cumulative cases
17-11-2020	0	1.807
16-11-2020	8	1.807
15-11-2020	12	1.799
14-11-2020	15	1.787
13-11-2020	21	1.772
12-11-2020	31	1.751

As noted, there are two slightly different time periods reported in the Intelligence Summary and Daily Dashboard. The Intelligence Summary compares cases and rates between geographical areas and provides further insight, while the Daily Dashboard compares case numbers to the previous 7-day period for each district/borough.

When investigating how Surrey compares with other geographical areas for the same time period (Intelligence Summary), we can use slightly more up to date data. But when comparing with the previous 7-day period (Daily Dashboard) it is important that case numbers are more “complete” (i.e. all data is received), otherwise the impact of the most recent missing data (due to reporting delays) may incorrectly show that case numbers are reducing where this may not be accurate. For this reason, the Daily Dashboard has a slightly longer delay than the Intelligence Summary.

When discussing Intelligence and Surveillance with Partner agencies we provide the most recent data and also complete data, together with in depth robust epidemiological analysis. This is mostly “Official Sensitive” data which we are not approved to publish in the public domain. The intelligence, together with insight from partner agencies is used to appropriately inform/guide next steps.

We hope this information is helpful.

**Mr Tim Oliver
Leader of the Council
24 November 2020**

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