

7 January 2025

Surrey Climate Change Adaptation Strategy – Progress Report (to Central Government)

Purpose of briefing report:

This briefing report sets out the key findings from providing our first '[Adaptation Reporting Power \(ARP\) report](#)' to Central Government in December 2024. The ARP report is intended to provide a summary of key actions and progress that Surrey County Council has undertaken in progressing on climate change adaptation. This report also provides a summary of action for us to utilise as a first benchmark of progress on the [Surrey Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Strategy published in 2023 2023](#), (a sister strategy to the Greener Futures Climate Delivery Plan (published in 2021)).

It sets out the achievements we have made in embedding climate change risk and adaptation action across the organisation, in adapting our services, operations and infrastructure to a changing climate and in supporting communities to be more climate resilient. It is the first report of its kind, and one to benchmark on moving forward.

The report is for noting, and its recommendations for awareness of the increasing need for enhanced climate change adaptation resourcing and programme mobilisation in the coming years to meet the threats posed by rapid climate change impacts.

Introduction:

1. **The Surrey Climate Change Strategy (2020) identified the need to develop actions to increase Surrey's resilience to Climate Change, after the county declared a climate emergency.** But a stand-alone adaptation and resilience strategy was needed due to the complexity of what it will take for us to adapt to climate change impacts. **The Surrey Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Strategy (Surrey Adapt)', was developed, Cabinet endorsed in December 2023, and published in January 2024.** The Strategy delivers on the council's priority of enabling a greener future, but will also contribute

towards a safer, more secure and resilient county across multiple sectors and services.

2. The past few decades have brought increasing climate risks and extreme weather events to Surrey, with impacts felt most strongly by the most vulnerable. This includes one of the most extreme heatwaves reaching over 40°C for the first time ever, along with record-breaking fire seasons as well as simultaneously contending with regular flood events. These extreme weather events have seen infrastructure and services severely impacted, as well as residents, businesses and wider communities feeling the effects. These cannot be left to emergency services alone as these can be completely overwhelmed in severe conditions, we must adapt and build long term resilience into all of our Directorate’s services and infrastructure.
3. Climate Change Impacts, and our need to adapt to them are identified as a key **Corporate Risk** to Surrey County Council. It is also important to note that **Central Government has directed ALL organisations to adapt to 2C¹ of change** and plan for 4C of change particularly for longer lived infrastructure, which will necessitate the use of Adaptation Pathways for planning.
4. **We are currently operating in largely an adaptation deficit of resourcing and financing.** Adaptation needs have been significantly underdeveloped in the UK (and globally) to date. The risk is that the longer we leave adaptation the more it will cost the economy and society. Early action saves money, and lives. The adaptation strategy provides a framework for this prevention.
5. This briefing report introduces a report that we were invited to voluntarily provide to Central Government under the “Adaptation Reporting Power” in December 2024. The Adaptation Reporting Power is established under the Climate Change Act 2008 and calls for certain organisations to report on adaptation progress every 5 years.

Adaptation Reporting Power – report summary

6. The reporting guidelines stipulated that we needed to include any information on our climate change risk and vulnerability assessments, our adaptation strategies and action plans, summary of key actions and some case studies.
7. Beyond reporting on having a focussed strategy in place the report provided information on how Surrey is adapting to climate change across the organisation via a variety of mechanisms and building its capabilities to

¹ It is worth noting that under the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) – the safe level for global temperature increase under which human society can continue to safely operate and inhabit is under a 1.5C scenario, as such central government has instructed us to adapt to much more severe impacts under 2C and especially under 4C where there would be catastrophic impacts.

integrate climate change risks and impacts understanding into all our services and operations. Critically adaptation is becoming central to many of our community services, and resilience building efforts. This report was intended to give a brief snapshot of our current progress as an organisation on responding to the impacts and risks associated with climate change

8. The report provides a section for each of the 9 priority programmes of the Surrey Adapt strategy with some key actions and areas of progress along with related good news stories and case studies.
9. Four key strategic messages were provided in the report: (i) Embed understanding of climate risks for all infrastructure, buildings and services under 2C scenario and 4C scenario for long lived infrastructure. (ii) Resource climate change adaptation – both for capability growing, social and institutional change management processes, and for implementation. (iii) Funding mechanisms need to be reformed (centrally and across funding mechanisms). (vi) Climate Change Adaptation Reporting under the ARP should become mandatory in order to create a mechanism of accountability for local authorities to act on the robust climate science available and ensure that all decision-making is including known climate risk information within them to create safer communities in the face of a rapidly changing climate.
10. Please view the actual report online for its full contents as listed in the background reports section.

Challenges and Risks

11. There are resource requirements for coordinating and progressing the strategy into implementation phases. Climate Change impacts pose some of the greatest risks to our society and economy (as evidenced by the Global Risk Report 2024) and as highlighted through the Corporate Risk Register, necessitates some immediate resource allocation to drive its coordination, the rolling out of assessments and planning, and supporting Directorates in there change management and capability enhancement.

Conclusions:

12. The Adaptation Reporting Power process has been invaluable in producing our first progress report, and in providing a benchmark from which we can grow our understanding of our current capabilities. As experts in this field of work, we would recommend that Surrey County Council supports the call for all local

authorities to provide ARP reports under mandatory reporting from the next round of reporting in 5 years' time².

13. The process of tracking our actual work on adaptation, and how we need to enhance our capabilities has been pivotal in showcasing that Surrey County Council is taking proactive climate change adaptation steps, but that we do still have a long way to go in becoming truly resilient to climate change impacts. The process of reporting will become more enhanced over time as we grow our internal capability. We can both celebrate successes here, but also take on the gravity of the situation and that our adaptation capabilities need to accelerate exponentially (as they do globally).

Recommendations:

14. It is recommended that Select Committee:

1. Support that Surrey County Council would support mandatory reporting by local authorities to the Adaptation Reporting Power every 5 years³.

Next steps:

Develop the full SCC climate change adaptation Action Plan by spring 2025 (the below activities will form part of the action plan but are already priorities that require resourcing).

- Adaptive capacity assessment, to support the Action Plan and the capability development of SCC staff undertaken in 2025.
- Launch of internal climate change adaptation working group in 2025.
- Spatial Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability Assessments undertaken in 2025 (about to be initiated with consulting support).
- An Economic and Fiscal Assessment of climate change impacts and risks on SCC fiscus and costing of the Action Plan, undertaken in 2025.
- Adaptation Pathways processes will be investigated and start to be trialled from 2025 onwards.
- Iterative improvements on risk assessments will be taken annually through annual directorate assessments as well as updating of action plans, this will feed into monitoring and evaluation processes, to track progress of the Surrey Adapt strategy. The Adaptation Reporting Power to Central Government will link into our SCC internal reporting and emergent monitoring and evaluation processes for climate change adaptation.

² The national reporting is only every five years, and thus not onerous on local authorities. It is a good way to create accountability and encourage tracking of adaptation progress across local authorities, and to support lobbying to central government on enhanced support and funding.

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Report contact

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Sources/background papers

- (1) [Surrey's Climate Change Strategy - Surrey County Council](#)
- (2) [Surrey Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Strategy – “Surrey Adapt”](#)
- (3) [Progress report to Central Government under the Adaptation Reporting Power](#)
- (4) [Global Risk Report 2024 \(World Economic Forum\)](#)

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