

Wiltshire Council

Full Council

17 October 2023

Item 7 – Update on the Council's Response to the Climate Emergency and revised Environmental Policy

From Bill Jarvis (Wiltshire Climate Alliance)

To Cllr Nick Holder – Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change

Pre-amble

The update to climate progress issued to Cabinet on 10th October 2023, contains little of any substance on the progress made in supporting and guiding the county as a whole to reach carbon neutrality by 2030 although it recognises that 99.5% of all carbon emissions arise from the county and not the council.

The Council is however making good progress in tackling a wide number of areas in its direct control. There are a number that are behind programme but there are plans to address these.

The Council intends to develop case studies on their adopted actions and to make these available to businesses in the county; a good and productive idea.

One area where the council is making very little progress is on the matter of scope 3 emissions, a large percentage of total council carbon output. This issue needs outcomes set and plans made if anything is to be done in good time for the 2030 deadline.

I understand the council decided to limit themselves to scopes 1&2 after the acknowledgment of the climate emergency in 2019, but excluding them from calculations does not make them go away.

Question (P23-30)

Can the Council provide details of meetings and action agreed with any Wiltshire business where climate issues have been specifically addressed in the past 12 months, including:

- specific offers of case studies and their appropriateness for those businesses.

- Financial incentives, for example, rates holidays for climate related action or council supported charging points at taxi ranks.
- Estimated carbon reduction in the county from such discussions.

Response:

It is correct that we are making good progress on reducing the council's own emissions, and we are also making progress on the council's Scope 3 emissions, by working with suppliers, developing a contract management toolkit, including climate considerations in major contract tendering processes.

We have regular contract meetings with key suppliers and climate issues are on the agenda. For example an Environment Forum meets quarterly to discuss environment and climate issues relating to the highways maintenance contract. In November a Sustainability and Carbon Reduction event is being jointly organised by the council's highways team and contractors Milestone, and key supply chain partners are invited to showcase new innovation and share learning.

It is correct that we aim to use case studies and explore the opportunities for working in partnerships to deliver the climate strategy. This includes using our existing business networks and communication channels, not only to share our experience but also for the council to learn from Wiltshire businesses.

We can't detail specific meetings and actions discussed with our Wiltshire businesses due to commercial confidentiality, and information about quantifiable carbon reduction from our engagement with businesses is not available. However, we have regular 1-to-1 conversations with our larger businesses who very often are focused on energy efficiency and sustainability as part of business as usual.

We also have quarterly meetings with organisations such as housing associations, Ministry of Defence and public sector organisations.

Regarding financial incentives and support, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund "Invest in Wiltshire" grant programme has a cross-cutting theme of decarbonization for all projects.

Wiltshire Council will, in the next two months, be going out to tender for SME energy efficiency programme delivery which will provide support to a minimum of 100 Wiltshire businesses in the form of energy efficiency audits and advice.

Pre-amble

Firstly, we do not agree with the statement Councillor Holder made at the Cabinet meeting on 10th October regarding WCA statement on the council's efforts to address climate adaptation.

To be clear, WCA were encouraged by the statement that the Council are now addressing adaption because it was last addressed in 2015, some 8 years ago.

WCA are disappointed that this has been further delayed until 2024 through lack of staff availability. The impacts of climate change are rapidly increasing and delay in implementing mitigation measures will only increase disruption and costs for the council and the people of Wiltshire.

Adaptation to climate change is required because of a failure to address climate change. Delay to addressing adaptation compounds that failure, only making impacts worse.

These adaptations must also reduce the risk that civil emergencies caused by climate are minimised.

Question (P23-31)

- a) Can the Council confirm that responsibility for developing adaptation plans sits with all departments within the council and their contractors; that clear co-ordination and input from parishes is in place.
- b) Can the Council confirm that a dedicated adaptation co-ordinator is in place to manage this development and that all adaptation plans will be in the public domain in order that citizens of the county can be reassured that clear actions are taking place to mitigate the impacts of climate change across the county.

Response:

- a) For clarification, the existing Adaptation Plan is published on the council's website and was last updated in 2016, not 2015. Meanwhile, the existing Adaptation Plan contains information on climate impacts and predictions for Wiltshire that remains relevant.

Yes I can confirm that all departments will be working with the Climate team on reviewing and updating our Adaption Plan.

'Increasing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change' is a master risk on the council's corporate risk register, meaning that every service area has a responsibility for managing and mitigating this risk in relation to its operations.

Currently the Climate Team is working with all directorates to raise awareness of the impacts of climate change and to support service areas to carry out a climate change risk assessment and set up adaptation action plans.

Parish and Town councils will also be invited to input to the Adaptation Plan work at the relevant stage of the project, however for the time being, their development of emergency plans is an important step, as outlined in the Adaptation Plan 2016, and supported by the council's Emergency Planning team.

- b) Currently there is a dedicated Climate Officer coordinating work on the revised Adaptation Plan. An update and initial actions and recommendations will be provided in March 2024, leading on to detailed action planning. The council will publish appropriate information and communications for audiences including residents. Citizens of the county can be reassured that clear actions are being taken by the council.