

Report To:	SCRUTINY PANEL B	Date:	28 JANUARY 2021
Heading:	SCRUTINY REVIEW: CLIMATE CHANGE		
Portfolio Holder:	NOT APPLICABLE		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present Members of Scrutiny Panel B with further information to progress the Scrutiny Review: Climate Change and the Panel's look into the Council's ongoing commitment to mitigate climate change.

Specifically, this report highlights some useful guidance provided by the Local Government Association (LGA) and Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) on the role of scrutiny in climate change programmes. A summary of the discussion held at the informal working group on 20 January 2021 is also included.

Recommendation(s)

Scrutiny Panel B Members are recommended to:

- a. Note the information contained in this report.
- b. Discuss how the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny guidance can best be applied during this review.
- c. Consider future working group meeting dates, focus themes, and key involvement.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Climate Change was added to the Scrutiny Workplan 2020/2021 by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2020.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered at this stage of the review.

Detailed Information

GUIDANCE

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny: The Role of Scrutiny in Climate Change Programmes

The CfGS have released a guide on how to go about scrutiny and inquiry on climate change at a local level, with a focus on the implications for councils declaring climate emergencies. The guidance was produced with support from the LGA.

Please see below some details of the guidance document.

Initial key points the CfGS raise in the guidance:

- The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report stated that at the current rate the world is on track to reach a global temperature rise of 3 degrees Celsius by the end of the century
- The general consensus is that significant impacts on humans and the biosphere will be apparent with 1.5 degrees of warming
- Limiting warming to this level may still be possible, if concerted action is taken
- The Climate Change Act 2008 mandates some of this action – in particular reduction in emissions by at least 80 percent on 1990 levels by 2050, alongside legally binding carbon budgets and regular reporting of climate risks

Climate change is a critical global problem that will impact environments everywhere and individuals across all levels of society. Tackling climate change is a shared responsibility. It is deeply connected to other policy issues, there are no clearly defined solutions - certainly not at a local level - and new consequences are emerging. Currently, there is a great deal of uncertainty over who should respond to climate change and how this can be achieved. An effective response to climate change is not simply an issue that can be dealt with at the global scale; some form of local action is necessary for lasting environmental, social and institutional change.

Councils across the UK have recognised a duty to act. Some are already acting on climate change – often by using their convening power to agree solutions across a whole area, rather than just focusing on the council as an institution. Now, with many having declared a ‘climate emergency’, there is a growing understanding that response to the challenge needs to be holistic; but even here, there is some uncertainty about what such declarations commit councils to in practice. Councils that have made this bold statement now need to show how they will prioritise and embed climate action in all policy areas.

The challenge has been thrown into sharper relief by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. At first glance it may seem that the impact of the pandemic will be positive for climate change. Globally, lockdown measures substantially reduced emissions, and in the UK measures by highways authorities have seen roadways reprioritised to focus on the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. But in the medium and long term, the position is more uncertain:

- Lessened use of public transport might make service levels unsustainable, leading to more people using cars and putting further public transport investment in danger – compounding the impact of pollution from private vehicles

- Councils' overall plans on climate change – written in the pre-COVID world and underpinned by assumptions about economic growth and personal behaviour – could now become undeliverable unless they are substantially redrafted
- Councils' financial situation focuses attention on immediate, in-year life and limb issues. Even before COVID, money to take action on long term issues was tight – the situation is now critical.

Both COVID-19 and the continuing threat of climate change demonstrate the needs for places and communities to become more resilient. Central to this is effective partnership working. Councils have a uniquely important role in using their buying power and resources to push forward action on climate change. They also have convening power in the local area – the ability to bring together a range of individuals and organisations and to work with them to develop a coherent and consistent approach to the issue. An approach to climate change which limits councils to thinking and acting only on their conventional duties and responsibilities will not take advantage of these opportunities – and is likely to be ineffective

The guidance explains that scrutiny has a critical role to play in the cross-cutting issues presented by climate change. Scrutiny functions can:

- Play an active role in stress-testing and querying assumptions in the development of climate action plans, particularly in light of the pandemic
- Secure wider political buy-in for long-term action, in the context of significant financial pressures which make such buy-in critical
- Play a formal accountability role as councils come to make public commitments on climate action – in particular, the declaration of climate emergencies
- Support local people to engage with the council on these complex and long-term issues
- Support the council to engage with partners and others in the locality, to better understand and align priorities

The guidance sets out 10 questions that can be posed as part of the review process. The questions are as follows:

- How well does the council understand the need to take action locally?
- How does the council's leadership champion and direct action on climate change?
- How is the council adopting a clear and detailed strategic plan, and how is it mainstreaming climate change mitigation and adaptation?
- Has the council reviewed its investment strategy, supply chains, and procurement models to give due consideration to climate change impacts?
- How is the council integrating sustainability and resilience into its transport and energy plans?

- How is the council planning to understand and act on the need to adapt existing properties and estates to address the impacts of climate change – and to plan for new housing stock which is resilient to these impacts?
- How is the council promoting climate change education, diversifying the labour market, and focusing on sectors that are sustainable?
- What measures are being taken to ensure that health and social care systems will be resilient with the extra pressures they will come under due to climate change?
- How does the council identify those who are most at risk from the impacts of climate change, and what is being done to assist the most vulnerable?
- How is the council supporting and working with all relevant private and civic actors in the area towards climate change mitigation and adaptation?

The questions put forward by the CfGS are exploratory in nature, designed to invite further supplementary questions depending on local circumstances. The above questions will be useful for:

- Scoping reviews to ensure focus in the context of a subject of significant potential breadth and depth. These questions could enable scrutiny to identify which areas the function could add most value.
- Planning local community involvement, giving a clearer sense of how best to engage the public and understand aspirations.
- Planning local business involvement to understand local context
- Developing realistic, meaningful recommendations that engage both with the global challenge and the need for local action. The 10 questions can provide a basis on which to construct evidence-based recommendations that accurately reflect current plans, best practice, and activity.

CORPORATE PLAN

As discussed at the previous meeting, the objectives set out within the Council's Corporate Plan relating to the commitment towards climate change mitigation will be a useful reference point throughout the review.

'Cleaner and Greener' is one of the five key priorities identified by the Council set out in the Corporate Plan. Within the Corporate Plan, the Council's vision for the 'Cleaner and Greener' priority is established:

By 2023, we will create a cleaner and greener Ashfield, enabling communities and businesses to thrive in a clean and tidy district, minimising waste and recycling more.

Ashfield is pro-active in encouraging more recycling, tackling environmental crime and finding innovative ways of delivering services that are responsive to the needs of our residents, visitors and businesses.

By working with our communities and businesses, the Council is better able to understand what matters and to shape services to help people enjoy living, visiting, and working in Ashfield.

The Corporate Plan further outlines numerous key projects, programmes, and initiatives to be implemented within the next four years. Please see some of the initiatives that may be of interest to this review:

Environment

- Deliver against our Environmental Charter
- Refresh the Green Business Scheme to engage businesses and promote environmentally sustainable behaviours
- Work with community volunteers and local business volunteers to encourage an increase in ownership of community open spaces
- Contribute to a reduction of CO2 emissions by increasing tree coverage in Ashfield
- Develop a Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan

INFORMAL WORKING GROUP

As agreed by Members at the previous meeting of the Panel:

It be agreed that the initial exploratory work be commenced via a series of informal meetings to enable Panel Members to engage expert witnesses and capture pertinent data as required to facilitate the next stage of the review.

The first informal working group of the review was held on 20 January with attendance from Members and both the Assistant Director of Assets and Investment and Strategic Asset Manager.

The Assistant Director of Assets and Investment provided Members with a comprehensive update regarding the ongoing work of the Council and the commitment to mitigate climate change.

Members were informed that effective collaborative work is imperative and a key priority in climate change mitigation. A Climate Change Officers Working Group has been established, with representation from all sections of the Council, to enable Officers to effectively disseminate ideas and work in the same direction. The Council has also been working in partnership with the Lead Officers Energy Group, the Midlands Energy Hub, and the Local Enterprise partnership.

Work has been undertaken, in collaboration with partners, to have a fuller understanding of the Council's climate position. This includes:

- Energy audits
- Energy data analysis
- Carbon baseline
- Employee commuting survey
- Carbon footprint exercise

Work is being undertaken to establish the Council's carbon baseline, which includes electricity, gas, water, and fuel usage, as well as the carbon cost of purchasing. This carbon baseline will allow the Council to more decisively plot future reductions in emissions.

The Council is also working to explore all available funding streams; however, Members were informed that often potential funding streams have difficult deadlines and hard to deliver projects. Nevertheless, opportunities will continue to be explored and pursued where appropriate.

Members also discussed the difficulty in achieving the right balance in procurement exercises. Often, superior green credentials will come at a higher cost – is that something the Council can afford to do?

Further discussions were held on:

- Awareness campaigns
- Grant application processes
- Resourcing
- Housing stock conditions/developing housing strategy
- Training requirements
- Towns Fund
- Leisure centre impact on emissions

Overall, the working group proved extremely useful at this exploratory stage of the review, and the insight provided by the Assistant Director of Assets and Investment and Strategic Asset Manager will enable the Panel to focus on the key issues where scrutiny can have the most positive impact.

NEXT STEPS

Members have agreed that due to the significant potential breadth and depth of this review topic, it will be most appropriate to utilise informal working groups as part of the information gathering phase.

Members are asked to discuss and approve the most appropriate focus themes and key involvement for future working group dates. Potential dates will be presented to Members at the formal meeting.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

Details of how the Scrutiny Review: Climate Change aligns with the Council's Corporate Plan are included within the detailed information section of the report.

Legal:

There are no legal implications at this stage of the review. Any legal implications identified involving any recommendations to be made to Cabinet at the end of the review will be appropriately addressed in the final report.

Finance:

There are no financial implications at this stage of the review. Any financial implications identified involving any recommendations to be made to Cabinet at the end of the review will be appropriately addressed in the final report.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None at this stage.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

Risk:

Any risks and mitigation discovered over the course of this review will be presented in a final report to Cabinet along with the Panel’s recommendations.

Risk	Mitigation
None at this stage.	None at this stage.

Human Resources:

There are no HR implications at this stage of the review. Any HR implications identified involving any recommendations to be made to Cabinet at the end of the review will be appropriately addressed in the final report.

Environmental/Sustainability

Environmental and sustainability implications will be heavily considered throughout this review, details of which will be included within the detailed information section of the report.

Equalities:

There are no equalities implications at this stage of the review. Any equalities implications identified involving any recommendations to be made to Cabinet at the end of the review will be appropriately addressed in the final report.

Other Implications:

There are no other implications at this stage of the review. Any other implications identified involving any recommendations to be made to Cabinet at the end of the review will be appropriately addressed in the final report.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, *10 questions to ask if you are scrutinising climate change*,
September 2020.

Report Author and Contact Officer

Shane Wright
Scrutiny Research Officer
01623 457318
s.wright@ashfield.gov.uk