

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 20 March 2024

Climate Change Strategic Development Framework - Update



Councillor Simon Tagg, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change said,

"Climate Change is a critical issue facing Staffordshire. The County Council declared a climate change emergency in 2019 to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

We recognise reducing emissions in isolation is not enough and we must also build resilience into our services to the changing climate.

The revised Climate Change Strategic Development Framework outlines our priorities for achieving our net zero ambition and how to better prepare ourselves and local communities for the changing climate.

Report Summary:

The first Climate Change Strategic Framework (the Strategic Framework) was published in 2021 and set out our approach for achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The document is supported with a five-year Climate Change Action Plan identifying actions for reducing our carbon emissions.

Since declaring a climate emergency in 2019, Staffordshire County Council carbon footprint has been reduced by 50%, focusing on practical changes to the way we operate has delivered change at pace.

However, we know that even if carbon emissions are substantially reduced globally our climate will still change, potentially rapidly over the next few decades. It is therefore important that we prepare for these changes to happen and build resilience into the services we deliver.

With a strong foundation now in place for tackling Staffordshire County Council's emissions the Strategic Framework has been revised to outline and demonstrate commitment to reducing emissions and building climate change resilience into our services. The Climate Change Action Plan will be reviewed to align with the refreshed Strategic Framework vision and consider both mitigation and adaptation across all council services.

The five key themes the Strategic Framework have been revised to demonstrate our commitment to mitigation and adaptation. All of the themes outlined in the original Framework remain a high priority for action and are incorporated within the revised key themes. Having strong all-encompassing themes for mitigation and adaptation in the revised Framework provides a strong framework for delivery across the organisation.

Local authorities have an important role to play in raising awareness and involving local communities and businesses by sharing information on how impacts of a changing climate can be managed and what we can all do to help. The Strategic Framework sets out the authority's role in influencing both the local and national agenda, working with key stakeholders, and ensuring that County Council Members are informed and seen as climate change champions for the community that they serve.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Notes and approves the updated Climate Change Strategic Development Framework.
 - b. Notes that the revised Climate Change Strategic Development Framework highlights the importance of considering climate change mitigation and adaptation in combination.
 - c. Notes the Climate Change Action Plan is being refreshed to incorporate carbon reduction initiatives and building climate change resilience across all council services.
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Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

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Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills

Reasons for Recommendations:

1. In May 2019 the UK became the first major economy to pass a law requiring the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. This means that the country needs to remove as much carbon from the atmosphere as it emits.
2. Staffordshire County Council has championed the climate change agenda for many years. In June 2019 the Council declared a climate change emergency and set a target to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 aligning with the national commitment. Since that date our emissions have been reduced by 50%.
3. A Staffordshire County Council five-year climate change action plan is in place delivering against the priorities identified in the first Climate Change Strategic Development Framework, published in February 2021. The Climate Change Action Plan is reviewed annually and has prioritised actions to reduce carbon emissions to deliver against our net zero target.

4. It is recognised that adapting to the changing climate is of equal importance. In 2023 the County Council led on producing a joint Adaptation Strategy on behalf of the Staffordshire Sustainability Board. All Staffordshire District and Borough Councils have formally adopted this strategy.
5. The revised Strategic Framework reflects the importance of considering climate change mitigation and adaptation with equal importance.
6. The Climate Change Action Plan will be reviewed to align with the refreshed Strategic Framework's vision and consider both mitigation and adaptation across all council services.

Legal Implications

7. The government has made it a legal requirement to achieve net zero by 2050. It is currently not a legal requirement for councils to reduce emissions or report on adaptation achievements although we can have a wide degree of influence. The Strategic Framework provides an outline of the councils' priorities and principles to achieve net zero in support of the national requirements.
8. It is not a legislative requirement for local authorities to report on adaptation. In 2023 the government released a consultation to consider annual climate change adaptation reporting becoming mandatory for local authorities. Whilst the consultation concluded that reporting shall remain voluntary for the next few years, the government are piloting a framework and have released guidance for local authorities to follow for adaptation planning and reporting.
9. Staffordshire County Council is planning to follow the government adaptation reporting guidelines for the preparation of the Adaptation Plan to align with the recommended reporting requirements. Additionally, we are considering participation in the trial for reporting in anticipation of reporting becoming mandatory in a few years.
10. The County Council has a statutory duty to deliver numerous wide-ranging services. The delivery of services across the Council can be severely impacted by the changing climate. For example, extreme heat can lead to higher admissions for people needing care. Flood or storm events can prevent or delay care workers accessing properties. Extreme temperatures also have a detrimental impact on our Highways infrastructure leading to more repair works required and therefore putting additional pressure on resources.

11. Pro-actively identifying opportunities to adapt and mitigate impacts from the changing climate on our services allows us to prepare for extreme weather events and the general changing climate to ensure continuity and high quality in all aspects of delivering our services.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

12. Measures to reduce the County Council's carbon footprint and build resilience across our services provide potential to make long-term savings and reduce risk, for example by a reduction in energy use.
13. In the Adept publication ['Preparing for a changing climate good practice guidance for local government' \(June 2019\)](#) it states, "Studies show that adaptation action is generally cheaper, and more effective over time than the costs incurred responding to the impacts".
14. The authority has committed specific funds in its MTFs to support the climate change agenda with £590,070 committed for 2024/25 and a further £546,700 committed up to 2025/26.

Climate Change Implications

15. One of the key priorities in the Staffordshire County Council Strategic Plan is to tackle climate change. The Strategic Framework provides an overarching approach for the Council to deliver against climate change commitments and ambitions.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Climate Change Strategic Development Framework - Update.

Community Impact Assessment

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