

Call in Questions & Responses to Overview & Scrutiny Board

Havering Climate Change Action Plan

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- 1) The Report fails adequately to emphasise the climate change emergency facing the Borough and its residents bearing in mind evidence from across the world and locally including, for example, the increased incidents of flooding in Havering;

The report presented to Cabinet sought to present key issues as succinctly as possible. Even so, it ran to 24 pages. The report did highlight recent global temperature increases and attributed these to human activity. It set out the available data relating to CO₂ emissions in Havering, including their source (e.g. transport, domestic, commercial activity). The report also summarised the current position nationally and regionally and the role of local authorities in tackling climate change. Rather than repeat large amounts of information already in the public domain, the Cabinet report referenced and hyperlinked a number of relevant detailed documents, including those produced by the UK Climate Change Committee and Government guidance on carbon budgets.

The Cabinet has made it clear that it wishes the Council's focus to be on practical action. The Action Plan approved by the Cabinet has been produced on this basis. It is intended that the plan will be reviewed and revised every year.

It will be essential to convey the scale of the challenge facing the council and the people of the borough more generally. Effective communication, internally and externally, will therefore play a major part in the delivery of the Havering Climate Change Action Plan. A public-facing document summarising the contents of the plan is currently being produced. There will also be a strong push within the Council on culture and behavioural change required as a result of the adoption of the Climate Change Action Plan.

- 2) The Report fails to provide any estimate of the costs of implementing each Action Plan and how the substantial funding needed will be obtained and from whom;

The Havering Climate Change Action Plan is a high-level document, which requires a considerable amount of detailed work to be done across the Council and the Borough. This will be taken forward via the range of relevant plans and strategies that the Council produces and the costs of delivering the plan will be built into the Council's policy and financial planning processes. Much of the Council's investment will be based on existing financial practices. Each year, changes in service demands are matched with the financial planning of revenue budgets. Consequently, opportunities for sound investment in climate change measures can be assessed and bid for through existing processes. The Council's

budgets are set each February or March for the following financial year. It should be noted that the existing revenue and capital schemes already include provision to reduce carbon emissions in areas such as council housing investment and fleet renewal to example some of the initiatives.

While a number of initiatives in the Action Plan will actually cost very little to implement, as the respective Heads of Service will use their existing resources and rightly incorporate actions within their business as usual, there will be substantial investment required in a number of key areas – in particular the retrofitting of residential and administrative properties and the recommissioning of the Council’s vehicle fleet. In areas such as these, before costings can be produced, there will be a need to do further detailed work to identify the most appropriate forms of investment, its phasing and the sources of funding. It was not practicable to do all of this work as part of producing the report. It should be noted that individual business cases will also take account of revenue savings made as a result of the transition to more energy efficient processes. Business cases will also take account of investments in the infrastructure which lead to training, skills and employment opportunities for local residents and businesses. Any decisions will be subject to appropriate approval processes, in accordance with the Council’s Constitution, including equalities and health impact assessments.

It is important to remember that tackling climate change is an issue that the Council will need to address as a priority for decades to come and that rapid technological changes are taking place, such that, for example, the per dwelling cost of retrofitting the Council's housing stock today is likely to be very different, in real terms, in 10 years’ time. Investments will take place as equipment wears out and needs to be replaced. In most service areas, tackling climate change does not simply involve expenditure on a one-off basis, but is, rather, of a phased and cyclical nature.

What is clear is that the cost of responding to the challenge of climate change, both in mitigating the causes and potentially dealing with the effects on the borough, cannot be met by the local Council Tax alone. The plan as drafted will assist the Council in quantifying the ask of government and other agencies e.g. the Environment Agency, TfL and Thames Water in order to tackle this important agenda. Lobbying for the investment required will be an important part of the action plan.

3) [The Report fails to set out the priority list of actions and when each of the actions is to be completed;](#)

Appendix A to the report sets out not only the currently planned actions and tasks, but also the timescales by which each action should be completed.

4) The Report failed to set out how contributions to carbon offset will be applied;

There is no need to establish a process as that process already exists. Carbon Offset Contributions are secured in S106 legal agreements attached to major planning permissions (delivering 10 or more residential units or 1,000sqm of new non-residential floorspace). The Carbon Offset Contributions are secured through the application of London Plan 2021 Policy S12 - Minimising greenhouse gas emissions (and previously London Plan 2016 Policy 5.2) when assessing planning applications. This policy requires all major development proposals to demonstrate a minimum reduction of at least 35% beyond the baseline of Part L of the current Building Regulations, while aiming to achieve net zero-carbon. Where it is demonstrated that net zero-carbon cannot be fully achieved on site any shortfall is required to be offset through an in lieu cash contribution to the borough's Carbon Offset Fund. This fund is ring-fenced for use to pay for projects that deliver carbon reductions.

To date the Council has received £610k in carbon offset contributions. The Council is currently considering a range of carbon reducing projects for funding from the Carbon Offset Fund covering: installation of electric vehicle charging points, purchase of electric fleet vehicles, installation of PV solar panels on Council-owned buildings, installation of green infrastructure on Council-owned buildings, and the planting of trees.

The Council has a set governance procedure for the agreement of spend of S106 contributions and this includes the agreement to spend the Carbon Offset Fund. There is a 2 stage formal project fund request process, with bids first being reviewed at officer level at the monthly Infrastructure Steering Group of Officers meetings. Subsequently bids are presented to the Infrastructure Planning and Delivery Board (this is a function of SLT) which sits every six weeks. The Infrastructure Planning and Delivery Board will shortly make a recommendation on the spend of the Carbon Offset Fund monies, the Council is currently holding, based on a comparative assessment of the merits of the projects that have been put forward for funding. This recommendation will be put forward to Cabinet.

5) The Report fails to set out how the Action Plans will be achieved with far less staff and how it intends to recruit the two specialist climate change officers;

It is not envisaged that the delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan will be particularly constrained by staffing levels within the Council. All staff have a role to play in delivering the strategy and an internal culture change programme will be developed that will inform staff about the Council's approach to tackling climate change and the role that they can play.

The staff recruited to support the programme will have a number of responsibilities, particularly to help the services understand and deliver improvements required by the Council's commitment to tackle climate change. In addition the roles will support the evaluation of complex and fast changing regional, national and international requirements. An important element will be to work with the consultation and engagement teams to

ensure the community are engaged through the existing consultation structures and where necessary on an ad hoc basis as the emerging requirements and best practise evolve. Government and the private sector investment in actions to tackle climate change will need to be identified and in many cases this will require business cases to be prepared and approved to secure funding for the local community. These opportunities are often short term with stretching turnaround application requirements. The filling of these posts might need to be short term appointments or longer term or secondment on matrix based job descriptions. This will enable the fit to the short, medium and long term needs and ensure that the skills required are sought from within or outside the Council.

6) [The Report fails to set out how the Council will ensure greening of the Borough whilst taking up more land for housing;](#)

The Council has recently adopted a new Local Plan, which provides a statutory framework within which these issues are addressed and reconciled.

The report references in the action plan that in early 2022 the Council will launch a consultation which will help to develop a 10 year strategy setting out how we will manage and develop our parks, allotments and other open spaces. It is anticipated that the Strategy will be finalised in the summer of 2022. In addition to the 1000 trees to be planted to commemorate the impact Covid-19 has had on the local community the Council will continue to review and increase the number of trees to be planted with a current target of introducing an additional 250 trees within the urban environment per year for the next four years. During the spring of 2020 the Council introduced an “urban meadow” approach to managing approximately 10% of the Borough’s highway verges, encouraging and supporting bio-diversity. This will continue with wild flowers being sown within these verges ready for the coming spring

The Havering Climate Change Action Plan is a strategic document. The matters raised in this point are referenced in the action plan and are rightly where these matters and actions are decided. Where short term actions fall outside of these documents they are identified in the Havering Climate Change Action Plan.

7) [The Report fails to set out how residents will be encouraged to participate in the journey to reach carbon neutral by 2040 and how objections to the costs involved will be overcome;](#)

As noted above, the Council will be developing an ongoing programme of community engagement regarding climate change. This will include the kind of behaviour changes residents can make that will support the Council's climate change objectives. Much of this communication with the local community will be done through individual service areas, as part of their day-to-day work. The Council will be open and transparent about why it is responding to climate change and the various roles individual residents and businesses can

play. It will seek to address any objections or improvements to the approach through ongoing engagement. It is worth noting that legislation and wider market forces will also encourage a shift in residents' journeys towards carbon neutral, with the Council facilitating this.

8) [The Report fails to set out how the Council will achieve its target when it has failed to deal with current issues such as regular flooding in the Borough;](#)

There is increasing evidence that climate change plays a considerable part in generating the heavy rainfall that has resulted in flooding in many London boroughs and across Europe in recent years. The borough already has a Multiagency Flood Plan and a number of associated documents, which are referenced in the Action Plan. The Action Plan also contains the following tasks:

- “Promote the Havering Community Flood Warden Scheme to allow the Council to address any flood risks in Havering. The Flood Wardens’ duties include monitoring local areas that are at risk of flooding and reporting this to the Council. Flood Wardens are also encouraged to check the flood storage and critical drainage areas in their local community and share any information by taking photos of what they think might be a risk.”
- “Continue to ensure that the Major Emergency Plan (MEP) for the whole of the Borough takes into consideration climate change scenarios and flood risk.”
- “Engage with London-wide and regional efforts on adaptation to climate change impacts with relation to flooding and water management.
“Continue to monitor responsibilities of the Flood and Water Management Act into day-to-day planning. Identify and introduce better flood management processes balanced with developmental and regeneration needs.”
- “Continue monitoring of blocked culverts, recording flooding incidences and allocating funding for maintaining cleared culverts.
“Monitor the flooding issues and rise of safety requirements across the borough.”
- Implement actions in Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP).
- Establish Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) approval body and carry out responsibilities.

A recent scrutiny report looked at the issues of flooding and the work the council is doing, independently and with other agencies. This work includes the cleaning of all 25,000 gullies across the borough, almost 70% of which has been completed with the remainder due to be completed by the end of the calendar year. The scrutiny was presented with the commendable work Havering and the agencies undertook.

Challenges of extreme weather events, which are not predictable, make the responses difficult to plan for. Examples of this occurred in Havering in June 2021 when one month's rainfall fell in 45 minutes which the drainage network could not cope with. This was the same a month later in North London where the A406 was submerged under water. The actions referenced in the Havering Climate Change Action Plan will ensure that all agencies are prepared as possible for, and ready to respond to, any events as we all learn about the impacts of climate change.

9) The Report fails to set out what in depth information will be provided to members to monitor progress;

It is intended that an annual report will be produced, setting out progress made in the previous year, current challenges and future priorities. Regular progress reports will also be produced for the Cabinet, the Cleaner Safer Steering Group and SLT. However, the frequency of reporting will need to be balanced against the value added. Often, in programmes of this size, the too frequent collation of data and production of updates is counterproductive and wasteful. Therefore, it is proposed that monitoring and other feedback should be proportionate to the particular circumstances of the various actions.

10) The Report fails to set out how the Council will persuade residents and private businesses to change habits to reduce carbon emissions;

The vision of the Stakeholder and Community work stream of the Action Plan is: "That local people are the drivers of the climate change agenda in Havering and support this through their actions and behaviours (including businesses, students, visitors, partners etc.)"

The scope of this theme is extensive and includes engagement in the following spheres:

- Schools and Education settings
- RSLs, private housing and Housing Associations
- Biodiversity and green spaces; Friends of Parks
- Community Groups, including faith groups and diversity groups.
- Local Employers (including major employers)

Through its procurement function, the Council will actively encourage businesses to adopt new habits and best practice to help reduce carbon emissions, by requiring all businesses/companies to provide evidence of due regard to climate change.

- 11) The Report fails to set out how given the substantial cuts in the budget going forward will the additional costs in dealing with climate change will be absorbed.

Tackling climate change at a time of constrained resources will always be a challenge and Item 2 above sets out the need to lobby government and partner agencies for the investment required to resource this agenda. The Council has well-established processes for resourcing services' priority funding requirements and these will be used to bring forward any additional requirements as a result of delivering the Climate Change Action Plan. As was noted above, the cost of the investments required will be significant in a number of areas. However, they will also often be cyclical and undertaken on a planned basis over a period of time. Due to rapid technological change, the cost of certain types of investment, (e.g. heat pumps and climate friendly vehicles) is likely to fall in years to come.

- 12) The references to community engagement in the Report are inadequate and should be bolder with consideration given to forming a Havering Climate Change Commission to involve business, public and third sector participation to feed into the democratic processes and wider community awareness of the implications of climate change.

Engagement structures will be considered as part of the implementation of the Climate Change Action Plan. A separate Climate Change Commission was considered and discussed amongst officers but dismissed, as it is believed that the existing structures are the most effective and efficient way to reach the most residents and businesses. The cost of such a commission was also a consideration, and the resources required could be directed at delivering actions and improvements for a wider group of residents. However, there are also other fora that might be used, such as a climate summit that could reach a wider group of participants than the suggested Climate Change Commission.

Conclusion

The Climate Change Action Plan covering report and the Climate Change Action Plan itself build upon previous plans and set out the next strategic stage in tackling climate change in Havering.

The report is bold and includes ambitious actions and targets, which will be based on emissions evidence and best practice. The action plan contains clear actions and milestones which will continue to lead to real improvements across the Council's services. The action plan is constructed to enable an annual review which will allow changes in circumstances and evolving regional and national plans to be incorporated into the strategic target for the Council and Borough to be Carbon Neutral by 2040, ten years ahead of the national goal of 2050.

The report brings together these actions while not repeating the detailed actions contained in the Council's strategic documents such as the LIP, AQAP, Local Plan, the Capital Strategy, Waste Reduction and Recycling Plan to name but a few. It is in these documents and

individual business cases where funding and tactical actions are set out in detail and are happening.

Tackling climate change is a long-term challenge. The Council's Climate Change Action Plan represents a realistic set of steps towards carbon neutrality. As successive action plans are implemented, the challenges facing the Council and the borough will change. In some instances, they are likely to involve maintaining changes that will be made in the next few years; in others, the challenges will be more demanding. In some cases, the Council will be free to act, using its own resources; in others, there will be a need for new legislative frameworks and more resources being made available by government. Most of all, there will be a need to engender wide-ranging changes in behaviour - by organisations and local people - leading to a genuinely sustainable way of life.