CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER

REPORT TO CABINET

Date: 10 July 2019
Report Of: Andrew Lewis, Chief Executive
Cabinet Member: Councillor Karen Shore (Environment, Highways and Strategic Transport)
Title: The Establishment of the Climate Emergency Taskforce

Is this a Key Decision? No

1.0 What is this report about:

1.1 This report sets out the Council’s work to respond to the declaration of a Climate Emergency. It proposes to establish a cross-party Climate Emergency Taskforce, to understand and plan for the implications, risks and new opportunities for Cheshire West and Chester presented by Climate Change. It will take into account the latest available evidence from the Committee on Climate Change, and the Government’s recent commitment to legislate for UK-wide carbon neutrality by 2050.

2.0 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Agree to form a cross-party ‘Climate Emergency Taskforce’ to ensure the council is responding appropriately to the Climate Emergency.

2. Approve the proposed Terms of Reference within Appendix One.

3. Agree the membership of the Taskforce as set out in Appendix One, paragraph 4.

3.0 Reasons for the Recommendations

3.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council is seeking to take a proactive and evidence-based approach to identifying, mitigating and adapting to the potential risks presented by Climate Change. The recommendations outlined in section 2 would provide an appropriate and effective forum for that to happen. A similar approach has been adopted by some of the other Councils who have declared Climate Emergencies across the country, such as Manchester, Leeds, Bristol and Oxford. This Taskforce will be chaired by the Leader’s Champion for the Climate Emergency, Councillor Matt Bryan.
4.0 Establishing a Climate Emergency Taskforce, Background Information

4.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council unanimously declared on 21 May that the borough is in a Climate Emergency. In summary, the Notice of Motion details that:

- Climate Change presents an existential threat to Cheshire;
- the Council recognises the need to act in-line with the Paris Agreement and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Special Report, which states that to limit emissions to 1.5°C, there is a requirement to reach net zero by 2045;
- the Council must play its part by evidencing leadership on this issue.

4.2 The Council agreed to declare a Climate Emergency, and directed the Chief Executive to “produce a report to Council within six months to determine the earliest date before 2045 that CW&C and the borough as a whole can be carbon neutral, and revise its targets to meet that date (ideally 2030 to demonstrate leadership in the borough). These targets to be managed through the CW&C Annual Monitoring Report, business Carbon Management Plans, the Green House Gas Emissions Directive of 2019 and whatever other appropriate means become available.

4.3 The Notice of Motion further required that a copy of the motion be sent to Cheshire West and Chester Members of Parliament and the Secretary of State for the Environment. This letter has been issued.

4.4 This represents a significant policy motion, with far reaching consequences. Achieving carbon neutrality by 2045 or earlier will require a range of challenging policy decisions. These cannot be averted, diverted or postponed, and will have financial implications.

4.5 The actions taken to address Climate Change on the part of the Council, both in relation to its own carbon emissions, and those of the wider borough, will fall within three categories. The first of these is mitigation, this concerns efforts to reduce or prevent emissions of greenhouse gases. The second, Adaptation, concerns efforts to reduce the vulnerability of individuals, communities and organisations to the detrimental effects of Climate Change, or which exploits the beneficial opportunities presented by changes. The third category locally relates to behaviour change. While actions within the behaviour change category will typically contribute to either mitigation or adaptation, these are typically large-scale collective actions which cannot be mandated by the Council, such as the adoption of smart meters. Though there is a clear responsibility to go further and faster, it should be noted that there is already significant activity in progress locally to counteract Climate Change, both through the Council, in industry, in communities and by individuals. Examples of this activity on behalf of the Council includes the achievement of the fourth-best recycling rate amongst Unitary authorities in England, support to the Mersey Forest, the Council’s commitment to achieving plastic free status, the establishment of Qwest Energy in partnership with Engie, and the
Council’s contribution to the development of a Local Industrial Strategy which places emphasis on the need for clean, low-carbon growth.

4.6 In order to achieve the required change, the Council will need to play a number of roles. The Council will directly influence what it can, such as the organisation’s carbon emissions. The authority will work closely with the Council’s Companies and partner organisations to convene a collective and ambitious response to Climate Change. The Council will engage and communicate with local residents, in order to harness the widespread commitment to tackling Climate Change, to facilitate efforts by local communities to reduce emissions, and to influence residents to make positive choices to reduce emissions. This will include working with children and young people, whose visible commitment and advocacy has centred worldwide attention on this issue. In light of the significant industrial corridor within Cheshire West and Chester, there is a need to engage with business, and to review how the Council can work with industry to reduce emissions. Finally, the Council will need to advocate for central government to appropriately legislate for, and resource, efforts to reduce emissions.

4.7 The scale of the local challenge should not be understated. Due primarily to the significant local industrial base, per-person emissions in the borough are 12 tons per year of carbon dioxide, contrasted to the UK average of 5.4 tons per year. Industrial and commercial activities are by far the main producer of CO2 emissions, annually releasing 62.9 per cent of the total. In the rest of England this sector produces only 38 per cent of carbon dioxide. This illustrates that while Cheshire West and Chester’s carbon dioxide emissions have decreased from 6739.5 kilotons per year in 1990 to 4054.1 kilotons per year in 2016, there remains a significant gap to close by 2045 to achieve carbon neutrality. There are elements of this gap that can only be closed by national change such as significant changes to the UK’s energy mix, for which the Council will advocate.

4.8 At the time of writing, more than 100 Councils, including town and parish Councils, have declared a Climate Emergency, demonstrating the significance of this issue and the requirement to take joint action across the sector. There are many examples of local government taking an ambitious lead on addressing climate issues, such as in Bristol, the first area to declare an emergency, in Oxford, where there is a commitment to holding a citizens’ assembly on the issue, and in Manchester, who have collaborated with the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change research to determine their strategy to becoming carbon neutral by 2038. Greater Manchester’s approach is guided by Members and informed by experts, and this mirrors the approach that the Council is proposing to take. The Council will seek to create and maintain alliances with other local authorities in order to more effectively pool ideas, resources and to advocate for national change.

5.0 Public Engagement on Climate Change

5.1 As referenced in 4.6 there is considerable public interest in Climate Change. In response, the Council proposes to harness the energy, knowledge and
enthusiasm of the local community by developing a thorough programme of engagement that will involve (but is not limited to) the development of a dedicated, online platform, opportunities for representatives of interested groups to provide evidence at a public meeting of the Taskforce, engagement with young people and a Cheshire West and Chester Climate Summit of partners in late 2019. Taking a shared approach to climate change will help underpin collaboration and ensure that the Council, our communities and local businesses are responding jointly to the agenda. In the interim, pending the development of a full programme of engagement, members of the public, community groups and other interested parties are invited to submit their views to climatechange@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk, which will be used to support the planned Public Evidence session of the Taskforce.

6.0 Developing an evidence base:

6.1 The Council has a significant evidence base relating to Carbon and wider greenhouse gas emissions, and the impact of climate change in the borough. Therefore there is a need to develop a shared understanding of this evidence and data to determine a whole-Council, and whole-borough response to its messages. Furthermore, the Council will commission appropriate external advice and support in order to complete specialist carbon budgeting and intervention planning.

7.0 The Role of the Taskforce:

7.1 The Taskforce is a group, constituted of Councillors, which would be asked to shape how the Borough plans for Climate Change, and oversee the development of a robust action plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045, or earlier.

7.2 It would be chaired by the Leader’s Champion for the Climate Emergency, Councillor Matt Bryan and would report its recommendations to Cabinet. The Taskforce would be supported by officers and external expertise. In addition to the Taskforce, which will be a member-led forum, the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Highways and Strategic Transport, in consultation with the Chief Executive and the Leader’s Champion, will identify specialist internal and external support to advise the Taskforce. These appointments will be made during Autumn 2019.

8.0 How does the decision contribute to the Council’s Plan?

8.1 It is recognised that the effects of Climate Change will not be limited to the environment - there will be significant human impacts. It is generally acknowledged that the impacts of Climate Change affect the most vulnerable in society the most, and as such this issue touches on all areas of the Council Plan, from Thriving Residents, to Thriving Communities and a Thriving Economy.
Furthermore, there is a need to ensure that carbon and wider greenhouse gas emission reduction is appropriately built in to the development of the next Council Plan during the Autumn/Winter of 2019-20.

9.0 What will it cost?
9.1 Taskforce support costs will be met through existing resources and relevant external grant applications, as appropriate.

10. What are the legal aspects?
10.1 Legal considerations will include ensuring that the legal impact of emerging new legislation as a result of the Government’s recent commitments on Climate Change are fully understood, and that legal impacts and risks are accounted for when considering the response and actions of the Council.

11.0 What risks are there and how can they be reduced?
11.1 The risk associated with not establishing a cross-party Taskforce to consider the impact of Climate Change and oversee the delivery of effective responses is that Cheshire West and Chester Council is less prepared to deal with the damaging consequences of Climate Change, is less prepared to take advantage of the opportunities relating to new green jobs and sustainable economic prosperity, and does not effectively contribute its fair share under the Paris Agreement.

12.0 What is the impact of the decision on health inequalities and equality and diversity issues?
12.1 There are no equality and diversity issues directly associated with moving this process to the next stage. However, the proposal to establish this cross-party Taskforce is with a view to enhancing environmental wellbeing, preparedness and prosperity for everyone who lives and works within the Borough.

13.0 Are there any other options?
13.1 Other options include not establishing this Taskforce, with services and partners monitoring the potential impact of Climate Change on their own areas, and acting accordingly.

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