

# Report to Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

4 March 2021

<b>Subject:</b>	Climate Change Implementation
<b>Director:</b>	Interim Director of Regeneration and Growth Tammy Stokes
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## 1 Recommendations

1.1 To consider the report and the agree the Working Group's scope of involvement with the Climate Change Programme.



## 2 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

Achieving the target for Sandwell becoming carbon neutral by 2041, is arguably the most important piece of work the authority can undertake to meet the objectives of the Corporate Plan. The implications of not maintaining the rise in global temperatures to a maximum of 1.5 degrees are severe and widespread and are set out in this report. The World Health Organisation has stated that climate change remains the greatest threat to humanity and if we don't play our part in tackling this threat, we will be at risk of undermining everything else in the Corporate Plan.

	Best start in life for children and young people
	People live well and age well
	Strong resilient communities
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
	A strong and inclusive economy
	A connected and accessible Sandwell

## 3 Climate Change and its causes

### 3.1 What is Climate Change

Climate change can be described as changes to earth's climate leading to the warming of our planet, to more extreme, volatile and destructive weather patterns.



## Examples of this include:

- The moorland fires in Staffordshire
- More frequent flooding e.g. of Bewdley and Ironbridge from the River Severn
- Drought conditions affecting agricultural crops
- Surface water flooding in urban areas due to intense rainfall
- Higher summer temperatures making it harder for the sick and elderly

There are of course many more examples that have been witnessed recently, such as the devastating wildfires in California and Australia, and the elevated levels of air pollution which affect China's residents daily.

### 3.2 What's causing climate change?

In essence, the answer to this question can best be described as being "Our way of life".

Almost every aspect of our daily lives has been built upon the availability of fossil fuels and we have become very dependent on their supply.

For example, the fuel we use to power and heat/cool our buildings, to power our vehicles, to drive our industries including agricultural food production, and the way we deal with waste. All of these activities produce 'greenhouse gases' which trap the sun's heat and are causing the planet's average temperature to rise.

## 4 Impacts, solutions and benefits

### 4.1 Potential impacts upon Sandwell

Unfortunately, almost nowhere on earth will be unaffected by the changes to our climate, and typically it is the poorest in society who suffer most, often because they already experience poor health and have limited financial means



to adapt. The following are some examples of how people in Sandwell may be affected:

- Poor air quality impacting upon residents' health
- Fuel poverty from people unable to heat or cool their homes
- Flooding of homes and businesses from overwhelmed drainage systems
- Vulnerability to rises in food prices from impacts on food-growing areas
- Extreme heat making it difficult for sick and elderly people to breath and to move around

## 4.2 Solutions to climate change

The actions that we need to take to tackle climate change are well established and have been known about for decades. It is only in the last few years that they are now being recognised as the only way for our societies and economies to function.

- Insulate all of our buildings
- Install low carbon heating systems
- Create heat networks
- Invest in renewable forms of energy
- Install the infrastructure to support low carbon forms of transport
- Increase use of public transport and encourage 'active travel'
- Encourage more efficient use of resources and reduce waste
- Support businesses to adapt to a low carbon economy
- Behavioural change

## 4.3 Benefits to tackling climate change

There are extensive benefits to society from tackling climate change, some of which are listed below and further information is contained in the appendix on the co-benefits:

- A more resilient borough able to withstand the impacts of climate change
- Reduced fuel poverty from increased home energy efficiency measures
- Opportunities for jobs and skills training from new green technologies



- Businesses able to compete in a decarbonised economy
- Improved physical and mental well-being, e.g. through ‘active travel’
- Better air quality leading to increased health
- More community cohesion, e.g. from community initiatives such as food growing.

## 5 Tackling climate change in Sandwell

### 5.1 Our Climate Change Strategy

In 2020, Sandwell Council adopted a new Climate Change Strategy, which sets out the rationale for why we need to respond, our targets for becoming carbon neutral and a series of high-level action plans, which cover the following areas:

- Council Estate and Operations
- The Built Environment
- Transport
- Waste & Recycling
- Adaptation and Resilience
- Natural Capital

### 5.2 Our emissions challenge

It should be made clear that our climate change targets are ambitious and challenging. We need to make significant cuts in the borough’s emissions and we need to do so quickly. To achieve ‘net zero’, we need to reduce our emissions as much as possible, and any which remain must be off-set.

- To achieve net zero for the council by 2030
- To achieve net zero for the borough by 2041
- We have a carbon budget of 9.1million tonnes from 2020 – 2100
- We will have used this up in **c.7 years** at our current rate
- We need to reduce our emissions by 13% every year until 2100
- Emissions in 2020 fell by only around 8%
- SMBC emissions are only c.1% of the borough’s



## 5.3 Our targets

It is important to understand what we are including and what we are *not* including in our targets for carbon neutrality.

We are including:

- Direct emissions from the fuel we burn to heat our buildings and power our vehicles
- In-direct emissions from fuels burned to generate power, i.e. electricity

We are *not* including:

- The goods and services we procure as a council and as residents.

## 6 Where are we now

The need to tackle climate change was first recognised internationally at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, however it was not until 2008 when the UK first passed legislation specifically around Climate Change – a commitment was made to reduce the UK’s emissions by 80% by 2050.

In 2015, the Paris Agreement was signed, when countries from across the globe committed to reducing further rises in global temperatures to so more than 2 degrees, and ideally to 1.5 degrees.

In 2019, the UK government became the first developed nation to set a ‘net zero’ target for 2050. This hasn’t yet been translated into specific targets for local authorities, but this is a logical next step in helping the government to reach that goal.

In 2020, Sandwell Council along with the WMCA both produced Climate Change Strategies, with joint targets for carbon neutrality by 2041.

COP26 in Glasgow which the UK is hosting, will almost certainly result in more focus on achieving the 1.5 degree limit.



## 6.1 Progress so far

- An agreed Strategy and targets for the way forward
- A Members Steering Group chaired by a Cabinet Member
- An Officer Working Group – authors of the Strategy
- Agreement to establish several themed implementation groups
- A small team to support the Climate Change Programme

Additionally, we have:

- Membership of the WMCA's Low Carbon Officer Group
- Access to examples of 'best practice' through membership of several networks
- Responded to offers of funding from central government
- Continued to work closely with Transport for West Midlands
- Highlighted that several Sandwell businesses already demonstrate 'circular economy' principles

## 7 Next Steps

As part of implementing the Climate Change Strategy successfully, a number of steps have been identified as being critical success factors:

- Embed climate change into corporate strategies and operational functions
- Continue to build commitment to climate change from top to bottom of the authority
- Climate change needs to be a core component for decision-making throughout the authority
- Develop a council-wide programme of Carbon Literacy
- Establish a borough-wide strategic partnership to oversee the Strategy's implementation
- Set up a partnership/network of businesses working towards the 2041 target



- Develop a portfolio of base-line data sets which will support informed decision-making around priorities
- Establish the ‘implementation groups’ to develop the Action Plans – Senior Lead/support
- Investigate the resources SMBC will need to access to implement the Strategy

## 8 Challenges

To help the Scrutiny Working Group consider its role with the Climate Change Programme, several challenges are presented below, which again must be faced in order to meet our climate change targets.

- To develop a strong corporate focus on climate change, despite the on-going pandemic
- The scale and speed of the emissions reductions required
- To identify the revenue and capital resources needed to deliver the Strategy
- To engage with residents, community groups, businesses, stakeholders and partner organisations to deliver the 2041 target
- To recognise and respond to the behavioural changes needed across the borough
- To make sufficient progress on our own 2030 target so that we can legitimately advocate for others to follow our lead
- To seek and be able to pro-actively respond to offers of funding from central government and ensure that Sandwell does not ‘fall behind’ further
- To recognise that some areas of our response will need greater level of support than is currently available





## 9. Appendices

Co-benefits of Tackling Climate Change

## 10. Background Papers

Climate Change Strategy

