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| 3 December 2020 | | ITEM: 8 |
| Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee | | |
| Establishment of the Climate Emergency Taskforce | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: N/A | |
| Report of: Gary Crooks, ERDF Business Manager | | |
| Accountable Assistant Director: Stephen Taylor, Strategic Lead for Economic Development | | |
| Accountable Director: Andy Millard, Director of Place | | |
| This report is Public | | |

Executive Summary

Climate change is widely recognised as an important and challenging issue for the UK economy and society. As a local authority, the Council has a responsibility to address emissions and to assist local communities and businesses to do the same. At the same time such a fundamental change in the economy brings opportunities to promote new technology and to develop new industries. By acting on climate change and embracing the principles of Clean Growth it is possible to achieve our goal of net-zero emissions but also to have a positive effect on the prosperity of the borough.

In October 2019 the Council passed a motion to declare a climate emergency and to take urgent action to reduce its carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030.

The immediate challenges are to support existing CO2 reduction activity, update strategic documentation to reflect a focus on climate change and green growth, scoping and developing the strategy setting out how the Council will set and realise new ambitious targets and will utilise Clean Growth principles.

This report sets out a collaborative approach to tackling climate change utilising the recently established Climate Change Partnership and Officer groups. It also proposes that climate objectives are considered within an economic development context to maximise the positive outcomes for the borough.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **The Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment on the approach and activity being taken to address the requirements set out in the Council motion to declare a climate emergency.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Climate Change Act 2008 committed the UK to an 80% reduction in carbon emissions relative to the levels in 1990, to be achieved by 2050. In June 2019, secondary legislation was passed that extended that target to reductions of at least 100% within the same period. The Environment Bill published in January 2020 builds on this foundation. As currently proposed it places specific environmental responsibilities on the Government or on the proposed new Office for Environmental Protection, which had previously been held by the EU. It also moves many aspects of delivery from central to local government.
- 2.2 The growing responsibility that local authorities have in mitigating and adapting to climate change is well documented, featuring in legislation guidance and policy. For example, Chapter 14 of the National Planning and Policy Framework (2019) is dedicated to '**Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change**'. Currently 300 or 74% of District, County, Unitary & Metropolitan Councils have declared a Climate Emergency.
- 2.3 Thurrock Council passed a motion to Declare Climate Emergency in October 2019 and requested that Council's activities become net-zero by 2030.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The activity called for to meet national and local climate change targets is not only extensive but will require change at an extraordinary pace. As with the implications of climate change the remedies will be far reaching, affecting many aspects of the Council's operations and the lives of Thurrock residents.
- 3.2 Tackling climate change is a theme that cuts across many directorates and departments within the Council. In the absence of a central resource, separate teams have implemented their own CO2 reduction projects. This essential work has helped the council to reduce its emissions but a more coordinated approach is required to meet targets of the scale now proposed. The immediate challenges are to, support existing CO2 reduction activity, update strategic documentation, develop the strategy for new ambitious targets and by using Clean Growth principles build a central resource to coordinate activity.
- 3.3 To guide development of a new strategy a cross-party Climate Change Partnership has been established. Work around the partnership was put on hold in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic however work is now

underway and the group met for the first time 21 October 2020. The group will support the embedding of carbon reduction in all areas of council activity and consider ways to maximise local benefits. Following a framework created by the Carbon Trust it will undertake six core meetings to investigate how and when Thurrock Council can achieve net-zero carbon emissions. The conclusion of the group meetings will provide the guidance required to produce an updated strategy document and action plan. The meeting schedule is:

| Meeting | Theme |
|---------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Scoping |
| 2 | Carbon Baseline |
| 3 | Target Setting |
| 4 | Decarbonisation Pathways |
| 5 | Action Plan |
| 6 | Monitoring and Evaluation Measures |

3.4 At its first meeting the group agreed that primary focus should be on reducing the Council's carbon emissions to net-zero. However the group recognised the role the Council can play in facilitating reduction in emissions across the economy and were keen to explore what could be done to help businesses reduce their emissions and to promote clean growth in the medium term.

3.5 To support the work of the Climate Change Partnership, to co-ordinate work across the Council and to secure the update of strategic documentation an Officer Group has been established to work in conjunction with the Partnership Group. The Officer Group comprises of representatives from each directorate in key positions to advance the climate agenda. The primary functions of Officer Group are:

- To provide support and guidance to the Partnership Group Members through information and expert opinion
- To report on the current position of each directorate in relation to climate change
- To bring to the attention of the Partnership Group current business priorities
- To identify the necessary budget and resources to undertake this work

3.6 Work on refreshing and updating strategic documentation is underway. Initiated by the planning team. A scoping study has been produced to provide a baseline assessment of Thurrock's current climate impact, synthesise existing legislation, review existing corporate documents and identify opportunities for Thurrock to integrate into its climate change objectives. The study also outlines initiatives to focus on in the Local Plan, recognising Thurrock as a growth area and the desire to achieve growth without increasing emissions. There are two further key documents that are in need of updating: the Climate Local Plan and the Carbon Management Plan. Work

on scoping the updates required and identifying resources for the work is now underway.

Clean Growth and the local Economy

- 3.7 While Climate Change and reducing emissions is a significant challenge it also brings with it opportunities to promote new technology and new industries that will create jobs and prosperity in the future. Generating clean growth is an important focus for Government in terms of economic policy and is reflected as a key priority in the refresh of the Thurrock Economic Development Strategy – Backing Thurrock. Thurrock is a key growth area for the country and the opportunity to do things differently, to attract new kinds of businesses, to promote new skills and jobs can align with the focus on addressing climate change.
- 3.8 The Council has a strong track-record of supporting businesses to put in place mitigation measures around climate change. For the past five years the Council has led the energy efficiency work package of Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE), delivering energy efficiency advice and financial support to small businesses throughout the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) area. Opportunities to build on this work and help businesses transform will be considered by the Climate Change Partnership and by the Officer Group as part of the work programme.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Tackling climate change is one of the most important and challenging issues we currently face. As a local authority, there is an imperative for us to address our own emissions and to assist local communities and businesses to do the same. By acting on climate change and embracing the principles of Clean Growth it is possible to achieve our goal of net-zero emissions but also to have a positive effect on the prosperity of the borough.
- 4.2 This report sets out a collaborative approach to tackling climate change utilising the recently established Climate Change Partnership and Officer groups. In that spirit Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked comment on the approach and activity being taken.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The programme of work conducted by the Climate Change Partnership allows each aspect of action plan's development to be scrutinised and for value to be added before moving to the next. This iterative process ensures that the broadest set of priorities including COVID recovery, economic development, employment, health, learning, community and wellbeing are all considered and at every stage. The final plan will be subject to usual the approval process but will have had the added benefit of several rounds of scrutiny and subsequent endorsement.

5.2 The Climate Change Partnership will consider who and how to consult on the emerging plans as part of its work programme.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 Both climate change itself and the remedies employed to combat it will have a significant effect on all communities within Thurrock. Similarly, as a theme that cuts across many areas of the council its impact is already widespread. The collaboration and coordination of activity are key components of success that will be greatly enhanced as we build capacity and a central resource in this area.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Senior Management Accountant

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. As the work of the Climate Change Partnership progresses there are likely to be financial implications to the strategy and the recommendations made. The Finance Directorate will need to be kept informed and consulted at all stages in development of the strategy.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. There may be legal implications arising from the work of the Climate Change Partnership and these will need to be considered in due course.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities

Climate change is ubiquitous in nature but its effects will vary considerably among differing communities and individuals. The final Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and to ensure positive outcomes for all regardless of their protected characteristic.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None.

- 8. Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None.

- 9. Appendices to the report**

None

Report Author:

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