

Forward Plan reference number: FP/829/10/20

Report title: Acknowledgment of the Essex Climate Action Commission's Interim Report	
Report to: Cabinet	
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Date: 24 November 2020	For: Decision
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Without action to reduce the county's green- house gas emissions, temperatures are set to rise to catastrophic levels in just 25 years.
- 1.2 The climate is already changing with Essex experiencing higher temperatures, water shortages and more flooding. As climate change accelerates, these impacts will continue to worsen and drive degradation of our green space and agricultural land, impacting significantly on all Essex residents.
- 1.3 In October 2019, Essex County Council announced the formation of the Essex Climate Action Commission, which brings together national and international experts on climate change, from academics to scientists to business leaders, to advise the Council on the steps that must be taken to reduce green-house gas emissions in line with the UK's statutory duty to be a net-zero country by 2050 and to mitigate the effects of Climate Change and help safeguard the future.
- 1.4 On 16 November 2020 the Essex Climate Action Commission published their interim report (see Appendix 1) for consideration by Cabinet, which brings together their recommendations from the meetings held to date on the following themes:
 - Adapting to an already changing climate;
 - Transport; and
 - the Built Environment.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Thank the Essex Climate Change Commissioners for their hard work and efforts in helping advise how the County of Essex can best take Climate Action.
- 2.2. Agree to accept and welcome the interim report of the Essex Climate Action Commission as at appendix 1.
- 2.3. Agree to prioritise the consideration of its recommendations.

- 2.4. Agree that a more detailed and considered response to the Commission's interim report is brought to a meeting of Cabinet early next year, which would include those recommendations that can be agreed as priorities to action, which require a more significant action plan to be developed, discussions with partners or detailed cost analysis, and which might require some further questions to be asked of the commission by the Council.

3. Summary of issue

- 3.1. In recognition of the global threat posed by Climate Change, at Full Council on 08/10/19, the Leader announced in his Executive Statement the creation of a formal independent cross-party commission, to be called the Essex Climate Action Commission.
- 3.2. The Commission met for the first time, virtually, in May 2020, chaired by Lord Randall and comprised of 37 other highly respected Commissioners, drawn from a wide cross-section of society; academia, the media as well as the public, private and third sectors (see Appendix 1 for Full membership). The two co-chairs were members of and nominated by the Young Essex Assembly to represent the views of young people.
- 3.3. As stated in its Terms of Reference, the Commission's purpose is to:
- Identify ways in which ECC can mitigate the effects of climate change, improve air quality, reduce waste across Essex and increase the amount of green infrastructure and biodiversity in the county by drawing on in-house expertise, commissioning research and forming new external partnerships.
 - Explore how we attract investment in natural capital and low carbon growth. The Commission will be provided with regular updates on the status of the year one recommendations.
- 3.4. The Commission was set up for an initial period of two years and was tasked by ECC to produce an interim report to Cabinet halfway through the first year of inception (November 2020), making a further report to Cabinet, complete with a set of full recommendations, at the end of the first year on a net zero action plan for Essex (May 2021). In the second year, the Commission will monitor the implementation of the recommendations in year one and provide further advice and guidance on an investment plan for Essex, as it moves to a sustainable, net zero economy.
- 3.5. The meetings of the Commission are organised around the six core themes:
- Adapting to an already changing climate
 - Transport
 - The built environment
 - Energy and waste
 - Land use and green infrastructure

- Community engagement

Each workstream has between 6 and 8 Commissioners who lead a topic area in conjunction with an ECC lead officer to support them. The working group develops an evidence pack and a set of initial recommendations to take to the full commission for discussion. Each working group meets every two/ three weeks.

- 3.6. Attached to this Cabinet Paper is the Essex Climate Action Commission's Interim Report (Appendix 1), which was published on 16 November 2020 and brings together their recommendations from the meetings held to date: Adapting to an already changing climate; Transport; and the Built Environment.

4. Options

In receiving the interim report of the Essex Climate Action Commission, there are 3 options to consider.

4.1. Option 1 - Do not accept the report (Do nothing)

This is not recommended – climate change remains the greatest threat to humanity and would have a significant impact on the County of Essex. In not accepting the interim report, this would greatly undermine the Council's public commitment to Climate Action and erode trust with Essex residents.

4.2. Option 2 - Accept the report and recommendations in full

This is not the recommended option, as the Council needs to consider how best to incorporate the Commission's recommendations into a pragmatic climate action plan.

The interim report includes 93 recommendations, which range from the broad to the very specific. As well as the significant number of recommendations, the actions suggested by the commission arguably touch on the working practices and priorities of every single Council function and service. In addition, no formal costings have been undertaken, as yet, for many of these recommendations. A programme of work should be undertaken to better determine the impact of accepting each recommendation, on both the Council and Essex residents.

4.3. Option 3 – Accept the report and respond to the recommendations in full at the January 2021 Cabinet (This is the recommended option)

It is recommended that Cabinet accept and welcome the interim report, as well as prioritising the consideration of the recommendations contained.

Essex County Council has already shown itself to be a Local Authority that takes climate action very seriously. A few examples of this include building the first carbon net zero school in the County, conversion of all street lights to LED to reduce energy usage, committing to plant 375,000 trees over the next 5 years

and using innovative low carbon techniques, such as 'Warm Tarmac' and award-winning 'Natural Flood Management.' The Council have also spearheaded behaviour change campaigns to encourage residents to recycle, avoid single use plastics and minimise car use, by walking and cycling more.

It is therefore also proposed that a further report is made to Cabinet early in the new year with a considered response to the Commission's interim report, which would list the following:

- which recommendations can be agreed as priorities for action,
- which recommendations require a more significant action plan to be developed, conversations with partners or require more work to understand the full costs of the recommendation
- which recommendations might require some further questions to be asked of the Commission by the Council

A full response to the Commission's recommendations will take place after the publication of the final Commission year 1 report in May 2021.

5. Issues for consideration

5.1. Financial implications

5.1.1 Essex County Council has committed an initial £5m to start funding the work of the Commission. This money is held in a reserve. The recommendations in the interim report do not specifically recommend how this £5m should be attributed.

5.1.2 A full financial appraisal will subsequently follow and support each of the recommendations at the relevant stage.

5.2. Legal implications

5.2.1 This report is without legal effect and it therefore has limited legal implications. It will be important to ensure that any future decision to accept recommendations has full regard to the need to adopt

6. Equality and Diversity implications

6.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 6.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 6.3 The equality impact assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

7. List of appendices

Appendix 1: Interim Report of the Essex Climate Action Commission

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment

8. List of Background papers

None