

Forward Plan reference number: FP/915/12/20

Report title: Response to Climate Action Commission's Interim Report	
Report to: Cabinet	
Report author: Councillor David Finch, Leader for Essex County Council	
Date: 16 March 2021	For: Decision
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Essex County Council (ECC) established the Essex Climate Action Commission in May 2020 to set out a roadmap in response to evidence that climate-change is the single, biggest issue facing Essex.
- 1.2 The Commission published its Interim Report in October 2020, which brought together their recommendations from the meetings held to date on the following themes:
 - Adapting to an already changing climate;
 - Transport; and
 - the Built Environment.
- 1.3 The Interim Report was welcomed by Cabinet on 24 November 2020. At that meeting, Cabinet agreed that a more detailed and considered response to the Commission's interim report was to go to Cabinet in early 2021, which would include those recommendations that can be agreed as priorities to action as opposed to those which require a more significant action plan to be developed, discussions with partners or a more detailed cost analysis.
- 1.4 This paper is ECC's formal response to the Interim Report of the Climate Commission, recognising that work in this space continues at pace and therefore the actions listed are not exhaustive.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Note the current programme of climate action (Appendix A) we are making in response to the recommendations made in the Essex Climate Commission's Interim Report.
- 2.2 Agree that ECC has a policy to transform its estate to have Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 ; creating an electric vehicle strategy for Essex; and the setting up of a Net Zero innovation network.

- 2.3 Agree that officers will report annually to Cabinet on Essex County Council's greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilience measures.
- 2.4 Agree that officers will report annually to Cabinet on greenhouse gas emissions and climate reliance measures across Essex.
- 2.5 Agree that Cabinet Members will bring an update, on a rolling rota basis, on progress made in their portfolio to address the climate challenge, following the publication of the final report of the Climate Commission in summer 2021.

3. Summary of issue

- 3.1 Climate change is the single biggest threat facing Essex. The UK is statutorily committed to achieving Net-Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 (referred to in the report ongoing as Net Zero). Essex continues to experience the impacts of a changing climate year on year with increasing levels of flooding, drought and overheating.
- 3.2 The Climate Action Commission was announced in October 2019 by the Leader, and the inaugural meeting was in May 2020. The Commission's Interim Report, published in October 2020, set out the first suite of ambitious recommendations for Essex, which would enable a move towards Net Zero.
- 3.3 This was welcomed by Cabinet on the 24th November 2020. Cabinet agreed the recommendations highlighted below were a priority.
- 3.4 The Commission's recommendations are not simply for ECC, but embrace actions by District, Borough, City, parish and town councils; businesses, residents, charities and community groups. The ECC response includes working with partners and stakeholders; supporting businesses, residents and communities to take action; and lobbying Government for key policies and funding support.
- 3.5 ECC has and continues to develop a significant programme of work to respond to the Commission recommendations, which is set out in Appendix A under a number of key areas - Green Recovery, New Homes & Communities, Existing Buildings and Regeneration, Resistance to Coastal and Surface Water Flooding and Extreme Weather, Transport and Highways, Energy and Waste, Rural Communities and Land, as well as Community Engagement.
- 3.6 Appendix A is not an exhaustive list. Additional Climate Action is planned, which requires further discussions with partners and/or additional funding discussions. Appendix B lists all of the recommendations made by the Commission in their interim report. It is important to note that a number of these recommendations are for other public sector bodies, businesses, charities, community groups and residents to deliver. However, ECC can certainly play a role in helping facilitate these calls to action.

3.7 ECC's programme of Climate Action continues to evolve. The climate crisis is a long running challenge and will not be resolved in a few months. ECC is committed to ensuring that reducing greenhouse gases and building climate resilience is a core part of how ECC manages operations, delivers services and manages procurement in the long term.

4. Options

4.1 Do Nothing – However, ECC has publicly committed to the Climate Change Agenda, first by championing Essex's Climate Action Commission to drive change within Essex, then by allocating funding from the Climate Action Reserve to ensure key Projects are delivered.

4.2 Adopt the response at appendix A

4.2.1 The proposed response at Appendix A represents a strong initial response to the Essex Climate Commission's Interim Report. It establishes a new work programme including new key commitments. Particular highlights of the response are:

- We have invested £1.7m as part of our ongoing programme of flood defence improvements and will invest a further £2.6m in flood defences next year, as part of our ongoing commitment to flood defences in Essex.
- We have secured £7.6m funding from Department for Transport for Active Travel in Essex including more dedicated cycleways, walkable neighborhoods and school streets.
- We are commissioning a new compendium on best practice and climate change policies to be incorporated into the Essex Design Guide.
- We have built four new school buildings which are EPC A+ rated and are taking forward a further 9 school building projects which will be low-carbon or Net Zero.
- Working with city, district and borough partners, to secure over £800,000 to install energy saving measures in 80 low income homes across the county by the end of March 2021 under the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme (GHGLADS).
- We have secured £1.4million to help Essex and other local authorities in England and France move towards a circular economy. Across the next two and a half years, the project will establish a circular economy model for local authorities, upskilling 2,000 socially and economically disadvantaged people, and engaging 78,000 individuals in behaviour change programmes to reduce their waste and increase their recycling rates.
- By the end of this current planting season, the Essex Forest Initiative will have planted 36,805 trees with farmers, charities, city, districts and borough councils, beating the target of 25,000 trees by 48%.
- We have announced a new £1m ECC fund to support residents and communities to take action directly on the climate challenge.

- We will continue to run our successful community energy campaigns – Essex Energy Switch and Solar Together.
- ECC to have **a policy to transform its estate** to have Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (20 years before the government's target of 2050).
- Commitment to produce an Electric Vehicle Strategy for Essex.
- Commitment to setting up a Net Zero Innovation Network (NZIN) to work together to create the partnerships and optimise the appetite for innovation in Essex, focusing on achieving Net Zero outcomes for the County.

4.2.2 The recommended option also includes a commitment that Cabinet Members bring a review of the measures undertaken in their own portfolios to address the climate challenge to cabinet over the next year on a rolling basis, following the publication of the final report of the Climate Commission in May 2021. This will ensure cabinet has full oversight of measures taken and planned across ECC.

4.2.3 As part of the recommended option it is proposed that ECC tracks progress against the net zero targets by producing annual reports showing progress in tackling greenhouse gas emissions and building resilience in its own estate and more broadly across Essex. This will enable ECC to measure its own performance, and also help track how well Essex, as a whole, is moving to a climate resilient, net zero future, in line with the Commission's recommendations.

4.2.4 Lastly, the recommended option recognises that this is an interim response to the interim report and a further full response to the Commission's recommendations will take place after the publication of the final Commission Year 1 report in summer 2021.

5. Links to Essex Vision

5.1 This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision

- Strengthen communities through participation
- Develop our County sustainably
- Connect us to each other and the world

5.2 This links to the following strategic aims in the Organisational Plan:

- Enable inclusive economic growth
- Help create great places to grow up, live and work

6. Issues for consideration

6.1 Financial implications

- 6.1.1 Decision FP/898/11/20 approved a drawdown from the Climate Change Reserve of £2.5m for additional resource (£2.1m) to support works reflected in 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 that are still to be delivered plus £400,000 of targeted capital investment
- 6.1.2 Flood improvement works are factored into the 2021/22 capital programme at £2.6m.
- 6.1.3 The financial commitments referenced in 4.2.2 have been approved in previous decisions and there are no additional recommendations incorporated in this report which seek approval to incur additional expenditure at this time.
- 6.1.4 There have been no detailed plans presented setting out exactly what will be required to achieve the Net Zero requirement for the ECC estate, detailed plans will be drawn up for future consideration. As such the potential resources to fund this have not been identified within the current medium term resource strategy and there is as yet no approval to spend outside of existing budget.

6.2 Legal implications

- 6.2.1 Individual actions will need to be authorised in conjunction with the constitution. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 the Council is under a duty to have regard to the duty to conserve biodiversity. The aims of the recommendations of the panel are designed to minimise climate change and thus conserve biodiversity.

7. Equality and Diversity implications

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 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).

- 7.3 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.

8. List of appendices

Appendix A – ECC's Response to ECAC Interim Report

Appendix B – Full List of recommendations made in the Essex Climate Action Commission's Interim Report

Appendix C - Equality impact assessment

9. List of Background papers

None