



Rochford District
Council

REPORT TITLE:	Declaring A Climate and Ecological Emergency
REPORT OF:	Cllr Michael Hoy, Executive Lead Member for Resources, Climate Change & Economy

REPORT SUMMARY

This report sets out the rationale for the Council to declare a climate and ecological emergency and seeks the Council's agreement to such a declaration. The report also outlines the Council's response to climate change including developing its action plan to achieve net zero carbon status for the Council's own estate by 2030 and for the Rochford District Area by 2040. To support this the report also proposes renaming and refocusing the existing Climate & Sustainability Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. To Declare a 'Climate and Ecological Emergency' acknowledging that the Council needs to prevent a climate and ecological catastrophe.**
- R2. To confirm the Council's commitment to achieving net zero carbon status by 2030 for its own estate, and by 2040 for the Rochford District area, and pursue efforts to achieve net-zero CO2 emissions even earlier and protect and enhance biodiversity.**
- R3. To rename the Climate & Sustainability Committee to the Climate Emergency Committee.**
- R4. That the Council lobby for further funding and policy changes at a national level to support the delivery of the Sustainability Strategy.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION**1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 In February 2023 the Executive approved the Sustainability Strategy which sets out the high level approach as to how Rochford District Council can achieve its declared aims of achieving carbon neutrality within its own activity by 2030 and District wide by 2040.
- 1.2 However, the current administration has expressed concern that the Sustainability Strategy, in its existing form, does not give significant weight to the gravity of the situation which is facing all communities across the planet when addressing climate change.

2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Special Report, published in October 2018, states that we have just twelve years to limit global warming to 1.5°C. This can only be achieved with ambitious action from national and local government, the private sector and local communities and requires that CO2 emissions fall from their 2010 levels by 45% by 2030, reaching net zero by 2045.
- 2.2 A global temperature rise of 1.5°C is now considered the threshold for dangerous climate change. This was the finding of a Special Report by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which highlighted the impact that a rise of 1.5°C would have compared to 2°C, or more.
- 2.3 Human activities are estimated to have already caused a 1°C increase in average global temperatures compared to pre-industrial levels and we are already seeing the consequence of this warming through more extreme weather, rising sea levels and diminishing Arctic sea ice, among other changes.
- 2.4 The IPCC's report warns that, whilst at 1.5°C climate impacts will be greater than they are at present and include some devastating consequences, even half a degree more will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty with some impacts, such as the loss of ecosystems, potentially being irreversible.
- 2.5 Furthermore, the report emphasises that current nationally stated mitigation ambitions, as submitted under the Paris Agreement (2016), are not enough to limit warming to 1.5°C and deep, rapid reductions in emissions will need to be made well before 2030, reaching 'net zero' by 2050.
- 2.6 The UN issued a report in October 2022 saying that there is no credible path to 1.5C limit <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129912>.

Because carbon dioxide (CO2) accumulates in the atmosphere over time, the final amount of CO2 left will depend on when the cuts have been made. A net

zero target allows for some form of offsetting by CO2 removal or ‘negative emissions’, for example, through afforestation or technological approaches such as carbon capture and storage. However, leaving the deepest cuts until closer to 2050 would mean a greater reliance on CO2 removal techniques, the effectiveness of which are unproven at large scale. Given that the planet is currently heading for 3°C warming, keeping to 1.5°C will require “rapid and far reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems” (IPCC,2018).

- 2.7 All governments (national, regional and local) have a duty to limit the negative impacts of climate breakdown, for the benefit of the population for which they are responsible. UK Councils therefore need to pursue ambitious reduction targets and seek to achieve carbon neutrality as quickly as possible.
- 2.8 Declaring a Climate Emergency is an acknowledgement of the scale of the problem and a recognition of the urgency for change. In particular, it will require Government to ramp up policies and introduce clear, stable and well designed policies to cut emissions, backed by the financial mechanisms to deliver.
- 2.9 There are multiple benefits of transitioning to a low carbon economy. These include benefits to people’s health from better air quality, less noise thanks to quieter vehicles, more active travel, healthier diets and increased recreational benefits due to changes to land use. There are also a range of economic benefits associated with the development of low carbon products and services including electric vehicles, finance and engineering and carbon capture and storage with potential benefits for exports, productivity and jobs. Conversely, the costs to the economy and society of not taking action are predicted to be significantly higher and pose a real threat to sustainable development and eradicating poverty.

Climate Emergency Declaration

- 2.11 The Council recognises that it has a role to play in helping to achieve emissions reductions, both from its own operations and by acting as a leader and catalyst for community-wide action. The Council acknowledges that achieving the necessary emissions reductions across the District will require strong support, not only from Central Government, but also from citizens, businesses, charities and other public bodies.
- 2.12 Therefore, it recommends that Council declares a ‘Climate Emergency’ and endorses the commitments to:-
 - Work toward achieving net zero CO2 by 2030 for the Council, and by 2040 for the Rochford District area, and pursue efforts to achieve net zero CO2 emissions even earlier;
 - Work with Government departments to ensure the necessary policies (such as tighter building regulations), powers and funding are put in place to achieve a net zero CO2 target;

- Establish a Climate Emergency Committee which will further develop the clear action plan of the Sustainability Strategy – setting out a costed suite of practical actions which demonstrate the Council's initial phase of delivery toward net zero CO2 emissions and enhancing biodiversity and which define its leadership role in promoting community wide action including:-
 - Working collaboratively across the Council and engaging with individuals, community groups, businesses and other partners in the district, including young people, who should have a voice to help shape our future;
 - Lobbying London Southend Airport to work towards Jet Zero for 2035 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jet-zero-strategy-delivering-net-zero-aviation-by-2050>;
 - Lobbying Central Government to urgently provide funding and implement necessary policy changes;
 - Producing a bold plan of action that is realistic, measurable, and deliverable;
- Report to Full Council by July 2024 (and then annually) on progress made;
- Ensure that all Council decisions, budgets and approaches to planning decisions are in line with a shift to net-zero carbon emissions by 2030; and
- To measure our progress using Council Climate Scorecards <https://councilclimatescorecards.uk/councils/rochford-district-council/>.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 At this stage there are no additional resource implications but progressing the commitment will require the Council to identify resources to drive the action plan and to invest in new measures, including those which will have a pay back in financial terms (as well as quality of life terms).

4.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The Executive is bound by the earlier decisions taken in February 2023, therefore the Committee will be appointed in line with the previous resolution:-
- That a Climate & Sustainability Committee of 9 Members be established on a politically representative basis.
 - That the Climate & Sustainability Committee meets on a quarterly basis.

The Executive does have the power to amend the name of the Committee, as set out in this report.

5.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 5.1 There are no additional resourcing implications, but progressing the commitment will require the Council to identify resources to achieve the aims set out.

6.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 6.1 There is a risk of raising expectations, through stating aims that may not be achievable, once the level of resourcing required is determined.

7.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

8.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The implications are included within the body of this report.

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SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
The Executive	February 2023
Overview & Scrutiny Committee	February 2023