



**North Yorkshire County Council
Climate Change Scrutiny Joint Sub-Committee
24 July 2019**

Context for and approach to the work of the sub-committee

Report of the Democratic Services & Scrutiny Manager

Purpose of Report

1. This report presents introductory information in support of the agreed scrutiny review on climate change, and presents proposals for the way forward together with a suggested review timetable.

Introduction to Climate Change

2. Climate Change is the defining issue of our time. Our planet is warmer now than at any point in the past 800,000 years, and heating fast. This warming is caused by a build-up of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in our atmosphere, mainly due to the burning of fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas – and by cutting down forests.
3. Atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations are higher today than at any time in at least the past 650,000 years, and about 35% higher than before the industrial revolution.
4. There is over 95% certainty that human influence is the dominant factor in warming since the mid-20th century. To put this into perspective – scientists are as certain that humans are warming the planet as they are that smoking causes cancer.
5. Internationally, world leaders of governments, the private sector and civil society will come together in September 2019 to support the multilateral process of increasing and accelerating climate action and ambition. The Summit will focus on key sector where action can make the most difference—heavy industry, nature-based solutions, cities, energy, resilience, and climate finance. World leaders will report on what they are doing, and what more they intend to do when they convene in 2020 for the UN climate conference, where commitments will be renewed and may be increased.
6. Nationally, the UK's legally binding 2008 Climate Change Act (CCA) sets a legal framework for the UK to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050 and obliges the government to set out policies to adapt to climate change.

7. Adaptation policies are largely covered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), which is tasked with managing increasing risks in areas such as flooding, drought, heat, sea level rise and extreme weather – see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/climate-change-second-national-adaptation-programme-2018-to-2023>
8. Mitigation policy, falls under the responsibility of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), which last year released its “Clean Growth Strategy”, setting out policies aimed at cutting the UK’s emissions – see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/700496/clean-growth-strategy-correction-april-2018.pdf
9. In voting the UK’s Climate Change Act into law, the government’s judgment was that it was worth investing considerable sums to avoid dangerous climate change. The costs of meeting the Act, which were discussed from the outset and consistently estimated at around 1% of GDP, were to be offset by reduced climate impacts and other environmental benefits.
10. In 2016 the government reaffirmed its commitment to the Act by legislating the fifth carbon budget for 2028-2032. It also ratified the Paris Agreement, drawn up among nearly 200 countries with the goal of keeping warming ‘well below 2C’ by cutting emissions to net zero later this century. This meant that, far from weakening its climate efforts, the UK would have to raise its ambition. However, reaching net-zero emissions will be a huge challenge. Even the most ambitious application of all known options to reduce UK emissions would fail to reduce them to zero, the government’s Committee on Climate Change (CCC) says. That’s why it thinks the UK will need greenhouse gas removal options, often referred to as negative emissions, to balance the residual. The CCC already includes negative emissions in some of its scenarios towards the 2050 target. Now it is saying that these options “will be required” by the UK, and the world.
11. Most recently, across the country there have been an unprecedented number of Emergency Motions on climate change raised at local government level, acknowledging rising levels of concern and seeking greater action.
12. Regionally, the county of North Yorkshire is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change with, low-lying areas prone to flooding and a coast that is eroding. The impacts of climate change are predicted to result in the loss of critical infrastructure such as water, gas and electricity; communications including transport; buildings; and land productivity. These impacts are already happening with, for example, an increase in frequency of significant flood events in recent years.
13. In December 2009 the County Council issued a Statement of Intent to play its part in contributing to the national target of an 80% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050, with at least a 34% reduction by 2018-22. To do this the County Council set itself three objectives that it would:
 - i. Play a leading role in supporting a reduction in the contribution which North Yorkshire makes to climate change.

- ii. Work with the people, communities and other organisations in North Yorkshire to develop an effective response to the current and predicted future changes in climate resulting from greenhouse gas emissions.
- iii. Seek to ensure maximum value for money and efficiency savings from actions taken in response to climate change.

Background to Review

14. The objectives set in 2009 are just as relevant today. Most recently the Leader of the Council has tasked Executive Members and Scrutiny Members with examining what more the County Council could do to further those objectives and to ensure that organisationally the County Council is doing all it can to contribute to cutting emissions.

Purpose of this Meeting

15. This climate change sub-committee has been formed from the Council's 5 thematic overview and scrutiny committees. It has 14 members, who have volunteered to take on this scrutiny work, and includes county councillors with a broad range of scrutiny experience. It is non-partisan, and the sub-committee is not a standing committee of the Council. As such, there is an expectation that the work being done through the sub-committee is time limited.

Review Remit

16. The remit of the sub-committee is to:
 - Review existing work by the Council to reduce carbon dioxide emissions that result from its own activities and service provision
 - Identify possible actions that could be taken to further reduce carbon dioxide emissions that result from the Council's own activities and service provision.
 - Refer the findings and resulting recommendation(s) from this scrutiny review to the Executive.
17. The scrutiny of work that is done by the Council to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions is a large task. As previously referred to, it is not the intention to undertake an open-ended piece of scrutiny. As such, there are a number of factors that members may wish to consider that may help focus the scrutiny work, as below:
 - What can the Council directly influence through the way that it provides or commissions services either extending existing practices or adopting new ones?
 - What could be done in the short, medium and long term?
 - What actions could be taken that are cost neutral?
 - What actions could be taken that enable full cost recovery in the short to medium term?

- What local or regional groups or bodies could the Council work with?
 - What action could be taken across all local authorities or public sector agencies in North Yorkshire?
18. This is not an exhaustive list but seeks to emphasise practical things that could be done in the short term at no cost to the Council.
19. Recognising that tackling some of the bigger issues does not sit well with local politics, the Democratic Society has suggested taking decision making to the public through the introduction of Citizen's Assemblies. This would ensure an a-political approach to decision making on the difficult issues associated with climate change adaptation.

Risks & Implications

20. This review and the work of the Executive members provides an opportunity for the Council to establish itself at the forefront of carbon dioxide emissions work in rural areas, and to encourage the growth of the green economy locally.
21. Any risks associated with the recommended actions coming out of this review will need to be considered against the longer term wider risk to the council of doing nothing. There is also likely to be some financial and/or other implications associated with any recommended actions. These would need to be fully understood and weighed against any future costs to the County Council associated with the impacts of global warming, on a case by case basis.

Options

22. Dependent upon the outcome of the discussions at this meeting, there are a number of options available to the members, as summarised below:
- a) Complete the scrutiny review at the meeting on 24 July 2019 and make a series of recommendations to the Executive. The sub-committee no longer meets
 - b) Progress the scrutiny review at the meeting on 24 July 2019, make some preliminary recommendations to Executive and identify a number of lines of enquiry for further scrutiny either by the sub-committee or through one or more of the 5 thematic overview and scrutiny committees
 - c) Progress the scrutiny review at the meeting on 24 July 2019 and identify a number of lines of enquiry for further scrutiny through one or more of the 5 thematic overview and scrutiny committees. The sub-committee no longer meets.

Timetable for Review

23. If the sub-committee choose to proceed with options b or c above, members are asked to identify an appropriate timeframe for completion of the review work, so that the findings may feed in to future report to the Executive.

Recommendation

24. It is recommended that the sub-committee reviews existing work by the Council to reduce carbon dioxide emissions that result from its own activities and service provision
25. If possible actions are identified that could further reduce carbon dioxide emissions resulting from the county council's own activities and service provision, the sub-committee is asked to consider the options outlined in paragraph 22 above, and agree the most appropriate way forward.

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Background Papers:

Climate Change Briefing Note dated 9 July 2019