

Norfolk County Council

Date: **Tuesday 26 March 2024**

Time: **10 am**

Venue: **Council Chamber, County Hall, Martineau Lane,
Norwich NR1 2DH**

Supplementary Agenda

16.2 Climate Policy for Norfolk County Council – Report from the Scrutiny Committee **Page A2**

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Climate Policy for Norfolk County Council - Report from the Scrutiny Committee to the Leader of the Council

1 Background

- 1.1 At the meeting held on the 20 March 2024, members of the Scrutiny Committee received the proposed Climate Policy for Norfolk County Council. The policy was considered by Cabinet on the 4 March 2024, and it was agreed that it would progress to Full Council via the Scrutiny Committee for inclusion on the County Council's Policy Framework.
- 1.2 The Scrutiny Committee has a clear role in providing challenge to any addition or amendment to items that make up the policy framework. This is set out in section 11b of the NCC constitution, alongside guidelines around communication with members and the process leading to Full Council approval. The item must be considered by the Scrutiny Committee in good time, and the Committee are asked to provide a report to the Leader of the Council outlining a summary of discussions and any recommendations put forward by the Scrutiny Committee. This report will include details of any minority views expressed as part of the debate at the Scrutiny Committee. Having considered any report by the Scrutiny Committee, the Leader or Executive will agree proposals for submission to the Council and report to Council on how any recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee have been taken into account.

Summary of discussions

- 1.3 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste introduced the report.
- 1.4 The Cabinet Member stated that the UK had made significant progress towards emissions reduction, being the first country to enshrine Net Zero targets into law. Norfolk County Council set out a comprehensive climate strategy in June 2023, resulting in the county being independently ranked 2nd among county councils for its efforts to combat climate change. The Climate Policy restates the Council's countywide vision to align with the national trajectory to reach Net Zero by 2050, committing to a 50% cut in emissions by 2035.
- 1.5 The policy aims to illustrate that Norfolk was open for green investment, while taking a pragmatic approach towards the county's farming industry, given that Norfolk played a vital role in food production within the UK. In addition, the policy confirms the Council's commitment to make its estate reach Net Zero by 2030. There had already been a nearly 60% reduction in NCC's emissions compared to 2016/17 levels, with the Council striving to reach a 90% reduction by 2030, with the remainder being offset to reach Net Zero.
- 1.6 The following points were discussed and noted:
- A Committee Member commented that the proposed amendments to the

Council's Environmental Policy referred to "conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of Norfolk", along with "ensuring a clean and plentiful water supply". These were laudable aims; however concern was expressed that there was no mention of The Wash and North Norfolk Marine Partnership, who had identified a number of natural solutions to enhance water quality in the area, given that the North Norfolk Coast was designed as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Committee Member asked if it was possible that the policy document could be aligned with the aims of the Council's partners, while ensuring financial prudence for the population of Norfolk. Officers stated that the amendments to the Environmental Policy were limited to ensure there were no contradictions between it and the Climate Policy when both were eventually enshrined in the Council's Policy Framework. The team would aim to match environmental sustainability with financial prudence.

- The Chair requested that review and expiry dates be included in the policy before it was ratified at the Full Council meeting on the 26 March 2024, as per the Council's constitution. Members discussed broader activity to include these for all policy framework items.
- A Committee Member praised the policy but expressed concern regarding the agricultural sector's contribution to emissions in Norfolk. Due to the significant amount of agricultural land in the county, reaching Net Zero would prove challenging. If Net Zero could not be reached by agriculture, this would place additional strain on other sectors in the local economy to reach Net Zero. The Committee Member asked what was being done by the Council to reduce emissions from the agricultural sector, as it appeared there was little room for targets to be missed. Officers acknowledged that agricultural emissions were higher in Norfolk than other counties, with land use emissions being the second highest in the UK due to the level of food production. However, land use emissions nationally were already considered Net Zero, offsetting Norfolk's contribution. This was balanced on a county by county basis. The Committee Member requested clarification as to how agricultural emissions were being forecast up to 2050. Offsetting emissions sector by sector would result in less headroom in achieving Net Zero across the board. Officers stated that agricultural emissions took into account not only inputs into the land, but also the use of diesel in farming equipment and other agricultural inputs. Agricultural inputs accounted for 20% of Norfolk's emissions, while land use emissions accounted for a further 14%. It was clarified that Norfolk's land use emissions were due to agricultural on its fertile soils rich in organic carbon. In addition, carbon sinks such as forests had to be considered when calculating net land use emissions across the country. Sustainable farming techniques and the use of environmentally friendly equipment would also see a positive effect.
- A Committee Member asked if the modelling within the policy took into account potential changes in people's diets, as eating less meat was considered one of three major driver in reducing emissions, along with decarbonisation of the power grid and reduction in aviation. Less meat production would see a significant reduction in land use emissions. The

Committee Member additionally asked what the Council was doing to encourage and support the public to change their way of living, while acknowledging that it would be improper to tell people what they could eat or not. The Cabinet Member stated that with its Net Zero commitments and actions, the Council was effectively acting as an influencer to effect changes in the way people lived in the community. It was acknowledged that approximately 80% of global emissions related to animal agriculture, while the Council would liaise closely with the agricultural sector to effect change in the future. The Committee Member suggested that a report on how Net Zero targets were being met should be brought to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

- A Committee Member commented that the Council needed to focus its influence on sectors such as transport and economic development, where a significant impact could be made towards reducing carbon emissions. It was felt unlikely that Council advice regarding diets would be taken seriously by the population. It was important that a different approach be taken towards the agricultural sector, due to the need to ensure food security in the country along with the opportunities it provided for Norfolk.
- A Committee Member asked how the Council's Net Zero targets would be measured and if there was a timeline for expected outcomes. An officer confirmed that the Council had a clear target to reduce gross emissions on its own estate by 90% to reach Net Zero by 2030. Government data for local area emissions lag by two years so are limited use in following progress. Guidance was awaited to understand expectations of local area contributions to meeting the UK's national net zero target. Cambridgeshire County Council is undertaking a pilot, funded by Innovate UK, to establish a framework to help local authorities understand what needed to be done with each sector to reach Net Zero. The Cabinet Member confirmed the policy was due to be reviewed again by Select Committee in Autumn 2024. It was hoped that measurements and outcomes would be clarified by this point. The team had developed Climate Action Plans across three tranches to track delivery of climate initiatives, with timescales built into them. Progress on delivering the tranches would be reviewed by the Infrastructure and Development Select Committee every six to twelve months.
- The Chair requested assurance that departments such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services had their own emissions reduction plans, as there was no reference to them in the report. An officer stated that emissions reduction in these departments would largely be through procurement, as a large quantity of the services were procured. Energy audits had been commissions for some of the Council's residential care providers to see where their emissions lay and whether buildings could be made energy efficient. A general guide for the residential care sector in Norfolk was to be drawn up to build a greater understanding. In addition, the Chief Executive Officer presently chaired a climate board which saw representatives from Adult Social Care and Children's Services regularly attend, along with other departments. This had driven the development of the Climate Policy.

- A Committee Member queried if the Council was ensuring that the electrical grid in Norfolk was fit for purpose. Officers acknowledged that grid capacity was a significant issue to be managed; however there was not a local area energy plan in Norfolk at present. The Council aimed to work alongside the National Grid and UK Power Networks to produce a plan of future grid upgrades to ensure that Net Zero targets were met.

Following discussion the committee noted the Climate Policy for Norfolk County Council, but made no formal comments or recommendations. No items were added to the Scrutiny Committee forward work programme as a result of discussions.

2 Actions and recommendations

- 2.1. No formal recommendations were moved or agreed by the committee regarding the content of the proposed Climate Policy for Norfolk County Council for consideration by the Cabinet Member or the Leader of the Council.