

OPEN

Environment and Communities Committee

30 January 2025

Wider Borough Carbon Action Plan 2025-2030

Report of: Tom Shuttleworth, Interim Director Planning and Environment

Report Reference No: EC/12/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 In line with Cheshire East Council's Corporate Plan priority of green a target was adopted for the borough of Cheshire East to be carbon neutral by 2045 at the Full Council meeting of 20th October 2021.
- 2 This report and the appended action plan detail how the Council will use its influence to progress this target over the next five years.
- 3 Also appended to this report is the annual update report detailing the council's progress towards its operational target to be carbon neutral by 2027.

Executive Summary

- 4 In March 2024 a draft wider borough carbon action plan was brought to this committee and permission was given to seek feedback through a public consultation.
- 5 Following two months of consultation with members of the public, the action plan as annexed hereto as Appendix 1 has been amended to reflect the views expressed and a final version is now presented for adoption by this committee.

- 6 Adoption of the action plan will require the council to commit to resourcing the actions proposed to ensure that progress is made towards the 2045 borough wide carbon neutrality target.
- 7 The council continues to make progress towards its target of being carbon neutral for its own operations by 2027 with several projects being within the delivery phase. The programme remains on course to meet its target but this remains contingent on all potential projects being delivered.
- 8 Since baselining of the council's carbon position was undertaken in 2019 the council has reduced its own emissions by 15.3%. The council now offsets almost 52% of its emissions through insetting projects within the borough.
- 9 This update will also be provided to the council's Economy and Growth Committee who will be asked to note the progress made and to consider a recommendation to renew the council's partnership agreement with The Mersey Forest which is shortly due to expire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Environment and Communities Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve and adopt the Wider Borough Carbon Action Plan 2025-30 and delegate authority to the Head of Environmental Services to make necessary modifications to the Plan, subject to annual status updates to the committee.
2. Specifically to agree and endorse the overarching recommendations within the plan, namely:
 - a. All strategies, plans and policies created or refreshed by the council to incorporate carbon reduction and climate change considerations as a key element of their outcomes.
 - b. A member of each service area (and teams where relevant), to have carbon reduction as an element of their key roles and responsibilities. These officers to then form together an ongoing Carbon Board chaired by the council's Head of Environmental Services.
 - c. Cheshire East Council will continue to use its influence to encourage and enable carbon reduction activity to take place across the borough of

Cheshire East and throughout the council's own procurement supply chain.

- d. Cheshire East Council will consider the impacts to vulnerable groups for any policy or action that will be taken and where applicable target interventions and advice at affected groups.
3. Approve that a Climate Change Member Working Group be constituted under the remit of the Committee in accordance with the Terms of Reference contained at Appendix 4.
 4. To note the progress made towards the council's target to reach operational carbon neutrality by 2027 as detailed in Appendix 5.

Background

- 10 In May 2019 Cheshire East Council committed to being a carbon neutral council by 2025 and to influence carbon reduction across the borough. In May 2020 we adopted our Carbon Action Plan which set out how we will achieve this. Following this the Council adopted the UK100 pledge committing to the borough of Cheshire East being carbon neutral by 2045.
- 11 The council commissioned a carbon baseline study and menu of options for carbon reduction which reported in 2023, indicating that the baseline footprint of the borough of Cheshire East is approximately 2,845 ktCO₂e.
- 12 Following the acceptance of the Wider Borough Carbon Baseline report in 2023 the council has continued to progress work towards the 2045 borough wide carbon neutrality target by developing an action plan for the first five years (2025-2030).
- 13 The action plan focuses on carbon emissions in the following areas: Domestic Buildings, Non-domestic Buildings and Industry, Transport, Agriculture and Land Use, Waste, and Energy Supply.
- 14 The action plan contains the below principles for action:



Evidence-based

Linking actions back to the carbon footprint and emission modelling that has been carried out, to ensure the actions are guided by an understanding of the type and scale of interventions needed. This will also help with monitoring progress and impact.



Inclusive

Ensuring actions consider equity in order to improve the lives of those most marginalised and vulnerable in society and that climate action does not leave communities behind or negatively impact some groups of society.



Localised

Consideration of local priorities to ensure that actions tackle local concerns and use local opportunities. Actions are tailored to the specific context of Cheshire East and the borough's strengths to ensure they are relevant.



Collaborative

As outlined on previous pages, collaboration with stakeholders is key for achieving borough targets. Actions should seek to bring together stakeholders, create partnerships and remove barriers for others.

- 15 Summary - For Cheshire East to meet its 2045 target the council can use its influence and powers to accelerate action across the borough. Implementing the action plan will require significant resource, including collaborating with various groups so actions are implemented successfully and fairly. It is important to monitor the impact of actions to understand the progress towards the 2045 target.
- 16 In conjunction with the action plan a monitoring framework has been established to assess the impact that the council's actions are having.
- 17 It is recognised that much of the activity within the action plan is characterised as enabling activity. It is considered that this will provide a basis from which to increase more directly targeted actions during the next 5 – 10 years. It is intended that each service with the council will take responsibility for the influence of carbon reduction related to their service area. A member of each service to form a wider borough carbon officer group reporting to the carbon board and member steering group.
- 18 It is also clear that the reduction of all areas of carbon emission within the boundaries of Cheshire East is not within the control of the council. There is therefore a focus on building relationships and enabling activities to allow those with the control over the emitted carbon to reduce it.

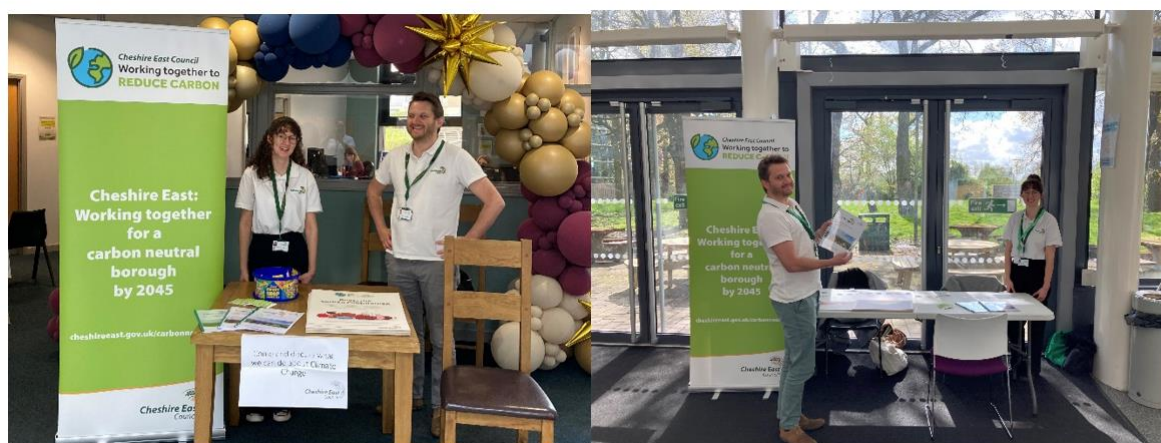
- 19 While the action plan has been in development a select group of projects has been undertaken to begin the process of reducing the borough's carbon footprint using the resources and influence of the council.
- 20 Cheshire East Council, in collaboration with Cheshire West and Chester Council and Warrington Borough Council, launched a Solar Together campaign. This resulted in some 240 households in the borough having solar panels fitted to the roof of their residential property.
- 21 Cheshire East Council has successfully applied for grant funding schemes to allow local councils and community groups to understand the routes to carbon reduction of their buildings and apply for capital assistance to begin the retrofit work needed. The Low Carbon Skills Fund grant provided 8 town councils with heat decarbonisation plans for their building and the Shared Prosperity Fund grant has provided a revenue facility for approximately 20 heat decarbonisation plans or energy performance certificates for community buildings within the borough. There is also a capital allocation to provide community groups with up to 75% of the capital required to retrofit their buildings to reduce the carbon footprint.
- 22 It is intended to replicate the model of Cheshire East assisting with grant funding to allow individuals, groups, businesses and councils to carry out their own decarbonisation activities.
- 23 Cheshire East Council is also taking steps to understand the carbon footprint of its procurement activities and use this information to influence the companies within its supply chain. As an area of highest influence this reduction in the carbon associated with procurement spend will need to continue.

Consultation and Engagement

- 24 A period of public consultation was carried out over April and May to assess the response of the public to the draft action plan and to discover if any changes were required.
- 25 The consultation was publicised on the council's website and through social media. Paper copies were also placed in all of the borough's libraries.
- 26 To ensure maximum engagement groups and organisations thought to be particularly impacted were contacted directly by email and provided with a link to the consultation and asked to complete it. Assisted by our Communities team and our Economic Development team this direct contact included disability groups, housing providers, business groups,

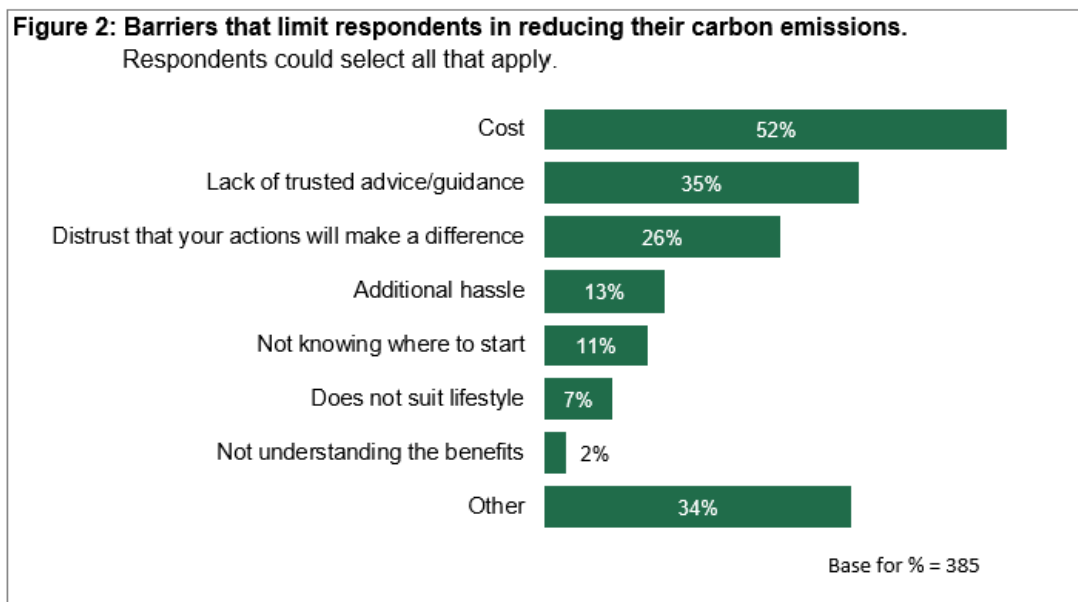
community groups, youth organisations, agricultural businesses, environmental groups, transport operators and waste organisations.

- 27 Briefings were held for council members, town and parish councillors, and council officers.
- 28 Four in-person public consultation events were held at Cheshire College South and West, Macclesfield College, Crewe Market Hall and Macclesfield Leisure Centre. The events at Crewe Market Hall and Macclesfield Leisure Centre were advertised through Social Media.



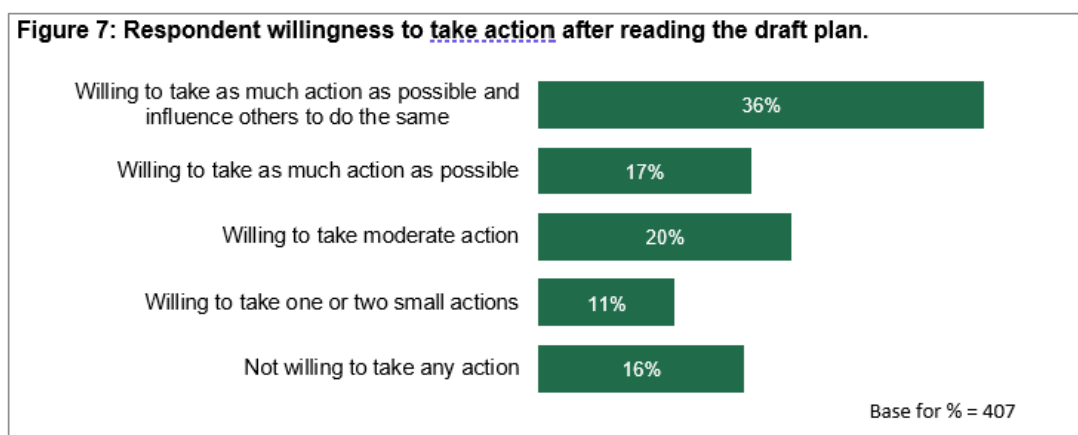
- 29 A report detailing the responses received to the consultation has been published on the Cheshire East Council website and is appended to this report (Appendix 2).
- 30 In total 404 responses were received to the consultation. Of these 80% agreed that climate change is an important issue and 74% agreed that the council should be using its influence and resources to reduce carbon emissions across the borough.
- 31 The majority of respondents agreed that the actions proposed within the draft plan were the right actions for Cheshire East Council to focus resource on (64%-77%).

- 32 Respondents indicated the barriers that limited their ability to reduce their own carbon emissions. This information has been added to the action plan to inform future decision making.



- 33 Consultees were asked to suggest additional areas of influence and these have been included within the final version of the report, these included reviewing speed limits, encouraging less consumption and encouraging car sharing.

- 34 Consultees were asked to rate their willingness to take action following a review of the draft plan with responses shown below. 16% were unwilling to take any actions which equates generally to the number of respondents commenting that the council should not be focusing on climate change. 73% of respondents were willing to take moderate action or more.



Next Steps

- 35 Subject to the decision to adopt the final Wider Borough Carbon Action Plan 2025-2030 the carbon team will lead the following work packages across the council which have been agreed with relevant directors and heads of service.
- 36 The wide ranging nature of the programme will require resources which will need to be identified and considered alongside the council's financial position, corporate plan priorities and the transformation programme. The paragraphs below indicate the type and scale of the resources potentially required.
- 37 The immediate priority will be to identify the carbon lead within each service area and to establish these into the Carbon Board chaired by the council's Head of Environmental Services. For the five year action plan to be successful all resources will need to be in place by the end of the 2025/26 financial year. Any new proposed staff resources or spending commitments not currently included for in the MTFs will be subject to the normal business planning process and decisions where required delivered under the relevant committee.
- 38 Housing, Procurement, Economic Development and Highways will have urgent training and resource requirements that will need to be prioritised to achieve the impacts required.
- 39 Procurement officers and council commissioners will be provided with training to accurately assess the validity and impact of contractor's carbon reduction plans and commitments. This training will be provided through a combination of internal expertise and outside consultants and is included within the revenue requirement noted within the finance section of this report.
- 40 Housing will require additional 1 FTE post to develop a programme of domestic retrofit advice and delivery, these being one Policy Officer and one Delivery/Technical Officer. Retrofit of domestic properties is a focus of a great deal of necessary activity. The council's Housing Team has been successful in obtaining and discharging ECO4 and Home Upgrade Grant funding for residents who are unable to afford retrofit measures through their own resources. There is a need to develop a provision of guidance and delivery options for those who are able to fund retrofit activity but have no knowledge of how to source advice.
- 41 Highways and Transport will require Transport Planners with the equivalent of 1 FTE posts responsibilities spread over the Transport Planners team to carry out a full transport network review. This will allow a holistic review of the barriers and opportunities associated with moving people out of private cars for more journeys. This will be a permanent requirement.

- 42 Resource equivalent to 1 FTE will need to be provided in Economic Development to provide signposts to trusted sources of advice, source and administer additional funds similar to the Shared Prosperity Fund providing funded decarbonisation plans to businesses and a contribution to the capital costs of implementing the recommendations.
- 43 The transition to a low carbon economy will require changes to the job opportunities available to school and college leavers and this will require a focus on different skills areas. Cheshire East Council does not currently hold a skills provision and will need to work with training providers to ensure appropriate courses and a future appropriately qualified workforce contributing to the green economy.
- 44 The nature of the activity proposed within the action plan and the need to provide information to residents, businesses and groups and the further need to build consensus it will be necessary to develop a co-ordinated programme of communications activity will be required and therefore a Communications Business Partner to develop the campaign.
- 45 The increased requests of the agricultural and countryside sectors to promote nature recovery and regenerative farming methods will require an increased resource equivalent to 1 FTE within the countryside service.
- 46 Governance of the programme will be through the Carbon Neutral Programme Board under the chair of the Head of Environmental Services. An annual update report will be provided to the Environment and Communities Committee.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 47 The council has a corporate objective to be green and a target for the borough to be carbon neutral by 2045. It will not be possible to achieve the carbon neutral target without taking action as described within this action plan.
- 48 The overarching objectives listed in this paper as recommendations provide a framework within which all activities will take place. Carbon reduction is a wide ranging suite of activities and it is not possible to separately list every one. Having this agreed framework will allow all council activity to be reviewed through the lens of its carbon impact and provide a consistent approach.

Other Options Considered

- 49 The council has adopted the target of borough wide carbon neutrality by 2045. The options are therefore to adopt the action plan to progress

towards this target, to not adopt the action plan but retain the target (the do nothing option) or to not adopt the action plan and resile from the 2045 target.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	It will be come increasingly difficult to achieve borough wide carbon neutrality if work is not started quickly. This will also prevent the borough achieving the associated co-benefits of carbon reduction.	The 2045 carbon target will not be achieved.
Resile from 2045 carbon target	If the council chooses to step back from the target the carbon reduction of the borough will depend solely on national actions.	Reputational risk to the council in stepping back from a target.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 50 As the Report notes, the recommended actions contained within follow on from the decision of Full Council in 2019 to commit to being a carbon neutral Council by 2025 and to influence carbon reductions across the borough. This report sets out the actions that the Council will take following on from the 2019 decision and carbon neutrality target.
- 51 The Climate Change Act 2008 confers a legally binding target (on national government rather than local) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 100% by 2050.
- 52 The Grant Funding referred to in the Action Plan as annexed hereto Appendix 1 will need to be reviewed by legal before committing to the conditions under the Grant Funding.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 53 The additional staff resource referenced within this paper will require a revenue increase to individual services to allow for recruitment. The service anticipates that this will initially total 4 x FTE (average G10 at penultimate point with on-costs) = £240,000 per annum.
- 54 An annual revenue provision will be required to cover communication campaigns, training and evidence gathering activities. The service anticipates a maximum additional annual revenue requirement of £150,000. There is currently no provision for this within the MTFS.
- 55 Recruitment of staff and other expenditure will be subject to availability of grants and new central government initiatives to wherever possible reduce the burden on the Council's budgets.
- 56 Any new proposed staffing resource or spending commitments not currently included for in the MTFS will be subject to the normal annual business planning process from 2025/26 onwards in order that they continue to be affordable. The current MTFS has no allocation relating to the 2045 target for borough wide carbon neutrality. These costs will be considered as part of the development of the MTFS 2025-29 and where appropriate savings from other budgets may need to be found to fund them.
- 57 There are currently no capital spending commitments associated with the borough wide action plan. Where capital projects are developed it will be necessary for these to source grant funding to cover their entire cost, the acceptance of some of which due to value may be the subject of further committee approvals.

Policy

- 58 The recommendations within this report are reflective of the priorities within the council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 and the vision for an open, fairer, greener Cheshire East.

<p>An open and enabling organisation</p> <p>(Include which aim and priority)</p>	<p>A thriving and sustainable place</p> <p>A great place for people to live, work and visit</p> <p>Reduce impact on the environment</p>
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 59 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is appended to this report

Human Resources

- 60 The requirement for all services to have a carbon champion may require a small amendment to some terms and conditions.
- 61 Recruitment to any new roles will follow the normal processes, subject to budget availability.

Risk Management

- 62 A programme level risk register will be held and owned by the Head of Environmental Services to ensure a wide view of risks is maintained.
- 63 It should be noted that the requirement for additional experienced and competent staff resources within key service areas is critical to the successful delivery of the Plan, hence their affordability and availability is a key risk.
- 64 Larger individual projects will also maintain a project specific risk register.

Rural Communities

- 65 It is recognised that rural communities have different needs with regards to issues such as transport and domestic heating solutions and may require particular focus.
- 66 A need to develop regenerative agricultural practices will particularly impact the rural community.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 67 As part of the wider communications strategy plans are in place to engage with children and young people through various channels.

Public Health

- 68 It is expected that reductions in carbon emissions and associated pollutants will have a positive impact on public health.

Climate Change

- 69 The matters within this report are concerned with reducing the council's carbon footprint.

Access to Information	
Contact Officers:	<p>Ralph Kemp – Head of Environmental Services</p> <p>Ralph.kemp@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p> <p>Emma Williams – Carbon Manager</p> <p>Emma.Williams2@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p>
Appendices:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wider Borough Carbon Action Plan 2025-30 (incl. detailed action list and monitoring framework) 2. Consultation Report 3. Equality Impact Assessment (post consultation) 4. Climate Change Member Working Group – Terms of Reference (for approval) 5. Carbon Neutral 2027 Programme Update
Background Papers:	<p>Carbon Neutral Progress Update - March 2024</p>