

# Sustainability Policy

Most recent update: 02 April 2025

Our mission is to deliver high quality learning opportunities and support people into work. We are committed to inspiring, empowering and educating the communities we serve. It is therefore critical to our mandate that our business and activities are commensurate with a sustainable future.

Cheshire West and Chester Council's (CW&C) Skills and Employment team is committed to promoting and embedding environmental and sustainability measures within our governance frameworks, operations and practices and through our engagement with service users, staff and commissioned partners.

## Environmental Context

The Sustainable Development Goals are a set of 17 'Global Goals' developed by the United Nations as part of their 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. In 2016, the Paris agreement - the globally agreed ambitious, inclusive climate deal - was ratified. At CW&C, we are actively contributing to the growing network of organisations and communities working toward the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to no more than 2°C and this council declared a 'climate emergency' in 2019 with a clear mandate to take strong and impactful action within our borough. In order to achieve these goals and targets, everyone needs to play their part: governments, organisations and civil society.

As a publicly funded service, CW&C Skills and Employment team has a responsibility to lead by example and play an active role in making this a reality. We are well-placed to harness and utilise the energies of its staff, learners, partner organisations and funders to drive the sustainable development agenda in alignment with its core mission and values.

## Our Approach

We will use the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as our framework for embedding environmental sustainability into our work. Each of our organisational aims is connected to the SDGs and through our commitment to sustainable environmental practice we have created an action plan to work towards embedding the SDGs principles into our practice and culture. Tackling climate change and fostering sustainable development are two mutually reinforcing sides of the same coin; sustainable development cannot be achieved without climate action. Conversely, many of the SDGs are addressing the core drivers of climate change.

We want to support the growing green economy as well as local business communities, whilst ensuring value-for-money and the success of service provision. We also seek to align our approach with CW&C's commitments to improve the sustainability of its communities; putting sustainability at the heart of its decision making and service delivery.

## Our Commitments

We aim to positively impact on economic growth and social inclusion as our core focus within a framework of sustainability and environmental awareness in all our working practice and have set out the following core commitments:

- Focus all our work on increasing inclusion to build a thriving borough for all our residents, in line with the CW&C Inclusive Economy Strategy, Fairer Futures Strategy and our West Cheshire Skills and Employment Plan.
- Embedding 'green' principles within our working practice to enable our service users to develop the awareness, skills and values which support safer, healthier and greener communities.
- Creating a low carbon, energy-and-water-efficient office and working culture which contribute to the well-being of those using it, its local environment and community.
- Encouraging staff to work from home if able to do so, utilising virtual meetings where possible.
- Minimising waste and resources through adopting a 'circular' approach - buying reusable and recycled products and maintaining our culture of reusing and recycling.
- Working with local suppliers and service-providers which have clearly evidenced commitment to environmental good practice and continuous improvement, also encouraging reduced mileage for suppliers.
- Sharing and promoting examples of environmental goods and services to our partners and collaborators.
- Supporting the development of the Green Economy, identifying clear skills pathways from entry level upwards, working in partnership with other local skills providers, the creation of the escalator tool, future Skills Bootcamps and the Hynet partnership.
- Further develop our on-line offer to encourage inclusion and increase accessibility to our provision across the borough.

## Key Areas For Action

### For the curriculum

- Promote a more equal, inclusive society by designing and promoting curriculum that engages all adults with low prior attainment with a specific focus on priority groups that are currently under-represented in learning with a view to progressing them to positive outcomes including employment:
  - Long term unemployed
  - Adults with health conditions including mental health issues
  - Learners with a disability and/or learning difficulty
  - Adults with low prior attainment
  - Adults with low level Functional Skills
  - Adults who may be experiencing rural isolation
- Develop a targeted marketing strategy, utilising economic data to engage with non-traditional customers from Skills and Employment Hubs. These could include residents who may be in work but who may benefit from developing their skills, confidence and well-being to ensure that they reach their full potential, impacting positively on their own life and that of their families.

- Promote sustainable development within all curriculum areas, including amongst partner organisations including:
  - Mindful use of learning resources including technology to minimise waste
  - Green issues as discussion topics within classes
- Develop curriculum aligned to the emerging Green Economy aimed at our target learners and embedding into other topics where appropriate.

#### Within Skills and Employment offices, project delivery and learning centres

- Build sustainable development into our operating model with the responsibility for developing sustainable practice on everyone within the team.
- Move to 'Agile' working as part of wider council initiative aimed at rationalising corporate buildings and reducing costs. This will involve:
  - Increased levels of home working
  - Effective use of virtual meetings, reducing reliance on face to face and associated travel and office costs, and reducing emissions
  - Reduce use of printed resources
- Maintain awareness and minimise the environmental impact of our operations, reducing paper use and recycling learning materials where appropriate.
- Provide employees with the capabilities, knowledge and resources necessary to instil personal ownership and motivation to achieve environmental awareness as second nature through promotion of this policy.
- Work with partners to disseminate sustainable practices across the borough.
- Encourage local spend and maximise our positive impact on our local community, in line with CW&C Social Value aspirations.
- Endeavour to source local suppliers who adopt similar environmental practices.

#### *Energy*

The Skills and Employment team recognises the environmental impact of fossil fuel consumption. To reduce the energy consumption and the subsequent carbon dioxide emissions associated with operations, we will:

- Ensure all PCs are completely switched off each evening.
- Ensure that all lighting, heating and hot water systems are utilised efficiently and effectively (both in the home and at the office).
- Utilise the energy saving features of office equipment.
- Ensure that doors and windows are not left open unnecessarily.
- Utilise non-fossil fuel sources ie renewable energy, where possible.
- Use virtual meeting methods where possible to reduce personal car use or encourage car sharing where this is appropriate to networking events.

### *Water*

Water represents a valuable and finite natural resource and we recognise its value. We will:

- Ensure water is not wasted unnecessarily, such as taps left running.
- Encourage Buildings Ops teams to utilise water saving devices where possible, such as cistern capacity reducers in toilets.
- Utilise mains water coolers to replace bottled water.
- Encourage staff to use refillable water bottles.

### *Waste*

Excessive and unnecessary waste production results in environmental degradation, increased costs and the use of valuable landfill site space. We will:

- Minimise resultant waste material production impacts by separating waste streams and reusing or recycling materials wherever possible.
- Reduce paper consumption by keeping printing and copying to a minimum and utilising the back to back printing facility wherever possible.
- Ensure mono printing is the default norm.
- Ensure that waste that cannot be reduced or recycled will be disposed of using the best possible environmental solution.
- Avoid single use plastic in our centres and activities.

### *Resources*

Resource consumption represents the largest environmental impact for our service. Minimising the consumption of products, materials and services will reduce the natural resource consumption, packaging waste, energy for production and transportation. We will endeavour to:

- Use products and processes that assist in reducing the environmental life cycle impacts of activities, and those of clients, partner organisations and suppliers.
- Utilise products, services and materials which demonstrate the least environmental impacts i.e. recycled paper for printers and copiers.
- Buy Fair Trade products for office consumption wherever possible.

### *Transport*

Transport represents a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, i.e. carbon dioxide, in addition to noise pollution and road congestion on a local, national and global level. In recognition of this, we will aim to:

- Reduce the environmental impacts of fuel used by vehicles on council business by minimising travel, car sharing or other, more environmentally friendly, forms of transport. To be considered when identifying venues for any team events.
- Monitor staff mileage via travel spend analysis and actively seek out ways of reducing these costs where possible.



- Encourage the use of technology to facilitate virtual contact/meetings as an alternative to face-to-face meeting wherever possible.

*For capital build and refurbishment of existing buildings for project delivery and learning*

- Promote and deliver good sustainable practice in all new and refurbishment activities.
- Ensure that all procurement practices reflect social and environment as well as economic costs.
- Ensure that environmental conservation is a managed process within all building projects.
- Reduce the impact of travel on the environment.
- Comply with all relevant environmental legislation.
- Contribute to economic, environmental and social sustainability in the short and long term.