

**Minutes of the Climate Emergency Taskforce  
(virtual teleconference)  
17 November 2021 (6.00pm – 8.00pm)**

**Present:** Councillor Matt Bryan, Councillor Paul Bowers, Councillor Christine Warner, Councillor Gina Lewis, Councillor Jill Houlbrook, Councillor Gillian Edwards, Councillor Robert Cernik, Councillor Neil Sullivan, Will Pearson, James Latham, Susannah Gill, Barbara Dean, Alison Amesbury, Gemma Davies, Steven Hughes, Simon Dowell, Mark Thompson, Adam Briggs, Rebecca Collins, Niall MacFadyen, Paul Nolan, Charlotte Harris.

**Apologies:** Councillor Simon Eardley, Andrew Lewis, Charlie Seward, Melissa Crellin, Phil McCabe, Ged Barlow.

**1 Welcome and introductions**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the teleconference meeting.

**2 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Simon Eardley, Andrew Lewis, Charlie Seward, Melissa Crellin, Phil McCabe, Ged Barlow.

**3 Declarations of interest**

- No new interests were declared.

**4 MINUTES**

**DECIDED: That**

(1) the minutes of the Climate Emergency Taskforce held on 6 October be approved.

**5 Public Questions**

There were no requests for public speaking time submitted.

**6 Fuel Poverty, Barbara Dean**

Barbara Dean, Chair of the Poverty Truth Advisory Board, noted that the Board had been dealing with poverty for the last 6 years. Barbara provided a powerful statement regarding the impacts of fuel poverty, noting the all-encompassing effects of having insufficient fuel. It does not solely relate to heat, but also relates to electricity, which can lead to not having access to the internet, being cut off from employment and opportunity. Equally, those in fuel poverty are forced to make incredibly challenging decisions about whether to heat their homes or to eat. Barbara noted that society does not cut people off from water, but is willing to see people lack warmth and electricity.

**7 Fuel Poverty Update**

Councillor Bryan and Alison Amesbury, Head of Housing at the Council, thanked Barbara for her impactful contribution. Alison delivered a presentation on fuel poverty in Cheshire West and Chester. Alison described that the Government's fuel poverty strategy and definitions have changes significantly over the last 20 years, with the latest national directive focusing on Low Income Low Efficiency

(LILEE) housing stock. The fuel poverty strategy target is to ensure as many fuel poor households as reasonably practicable achieve minimum FPEER Band C by 2030. Fuel poverty is tracked annually by the English Housing Survey, which takes account of the physical condition of a sample of the housing stock. In Cheshire West, the latest available data is from 2019, 12% of households are in fuel poverty, this constitutes 17,869 of 149,439 households.

Across the area, fuel poverty is experienced in both urban and rural areas, the highest rates of fuel poverty are seen in LSOAs in urban areas. It is likely that rural fuel poverty is attributable to property age and fuel types. EPCs in Cheshire West were presented, the majority of properties are D (39.1%). Alison described the Council motion in July 2021 to tackle fuel poverty, which set out the aspiration to end fuel poverty by 2030. Further to this, Alison described current measures, including the Green Homes Grant scheme, National Grid First Time Central Heating Fund, the Green Doctor Service the ECO Flex scheme and the Affordable Warmth Steering Group.

In the discussion phase, Cllr Lewis discussed that the poorest people in our communities accessed fuel via meters, and requested that this be explored, i.e. how to reduce the use of meters. Cllr Lewis also requested that the fire authority be kept 'in the loop' as to how to contact the Council regarding fuel poverty. Cllr Bowers asked how ending fuel poverty by 2030 would be achieved in relation to the Council's housing stock. Cllr Houlbrook asked where there was a single point of contact for fuel poverty advice. Alison noted the works underway for the Council's housing stock via ERDF and Green Homes Grant funding in relation to the first question.

On the latter Alison noted the HELP scheme, which administers the Household Support Grant, and also agreed with Cllr Houlbrook's point that more needed to be done to bring together this information into a one-stop shop. Cllr Warner noted the importance of not installing insulation without ventilation, due to examples of past practice wherein damp and mould had been caused by the installation of insulation. Cllr Donna Okell from Willington Parish Council described the work that Parishes can do to raise awareness of fuel poverty, and offered to collaborate with the Council on this work. Arnold Wilkes noted a number of opportunities for the Council to pursue regarding home energy efficiency.

## **8 Land Action Plan**

Susannah Gill from the Mersey Forest presented the Land Action Plan. Susannah noted the Council's wide-ranging climate emergency declaration and how this had shaped the Council's priorities. Equally, she noted the nature emergency that had been declared and how this inter-linked with the Climate Plan. The vision of the Land Action Plan was set out, to act immediately so that by 2045 all land in west Cheshire helps to tackle the climate and nature emergencies.

This spans both reducing and storing emissions, and adapting to inevitable changes. There are 68 actions within the plan, with a mix of nature based, green infrastructure, natural capital and land use solutions. A wide range of teams across the Council and with partners will be required to co-deliver the Plan. Examples of actions included reviewing the Council's land holdings, targeting interventions using the Natural Capital Audit and reviewing the Council's tree replacement policy. Types of actions for climate services included promoting low carbon and

regenerative farming, promoting anaerobic digestion with CCUS, increasing woodland management and protecting 30% of land for nature by 2030. Case studies were presented including Grosvenor farms, Northwich woodland and Mill Brook Natural flood management in Tattenhall. Susannah noted the engagement approach, and that the consultation period ran between 1 Nov and 12 Dec, encouraging people to take part in this consultation.

Following the closure of the consultation, the team would work towards the Plan being adopted in February 2022 at Cabinet. Simon Dowell from Chester Zoo welcomed the Plan and discussed the achievability of the 30% for nature target, and noted the national debate that was ongoing regarding this, advocating that AONBs should not be included in the definition of protected. Adam Briggs from the NFU welcomed the work that had gone into the Plan, and felt that deliverability was a key consideration – there was a need to translate this into specifics in terms of what farmers could and should do to achieve these targets.

Fiona from the Cheshire Federation of Women's Institutes noted the Government's aspirations regarding tree planting of 30,000 hectares per year, and questioned where these trees would be planted and how to request them. Fiona also asked whether the Council used peat compost, and Cllr Bryan stated that he was fairly confident the Council did not, finally Fiona noted the poor condition of the Greenway in Chester, this was raised with Cllr Paul Bowers, member for Helsby, who was on the call.

Susannah Gill discussed that in relation to the 30% of Land for Nature target, that the Council does not have a set opinion and is inviting contributions from stakeholders in order to form a position. Susannah discussed that based on Liverpool John Moores University Research that currently 11.5% of the borough currently has some form of nature designation. It was noted that the Government's perspective was that AONB's and national parks should be included, and that by the Government's definition 27% of land currently had some form of designation. Charlotte Harris of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust discussed that the Trust's perspective that 30% of land should be well managed for nature by 2030. It was discussed that the Wildlife Trust fed back that 21% of land in the borough currently had space for nature, though not all of that was protected.

Will Pearson noted that a Land Use Project Manager had been appointed to manage the delivery of the Land Action Plan. Cllr Christine Warner asked whether Officers were interfacing with Reaseheath College, and Cllr Bryan noted that via the Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission the Council was engaging with educational providers and other key partners to drive forward this agenda.

## **9 Climate Emergency Response Plan Annual Report:**

Will Pearson provided the Taskforce with an update on the annual report in advance of the report to Council in December 2021. He discussed the rise in emissions that had been observed in the latest available data between 2018 and 2019, from 3,692.7 mtCO<sub>2</sub> to 3,856.8 mtCO<sub>2</sub>.

The best available evidence suggests that this was linked to changing energy prices and temporary factory closures during 2018. Will provided an update on the Council's organisational emissions, which have dropped significantly, from 26,779

tCO2 in 2019-20 to 17,196 tCO2 in 2020-21, primarily due to the switch to renewable electricity the Council has undertaken. He also described that the Council had set 1,086 tCO2 of offsets in motion.

In addition to the purchase of renewable energy, Will outlined the borough's achievements over the last year, including the implementation of new policies on wildflower verges, the £5.8m public sector decarbonisation scheme, HyNet track one status, £3m via the Green Homes Grant Programme, the Trees for Climate programme and more. Slipped actions included supporting business to sign up to a net zero carbon buildings commitment and communicating climate change to businesses, both of which had slipped due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the prioritisation of the delivery of business support grants.

Examples of performance included emissions from the industrial sector, which had declined from the baseline, walking, which had seen a 2.9% decrease, and household waste, which had increased due to more people staying/working at home. The next steps for the annual report were to be presented to Council in December 2021, and a refresh of the Plan in February 2022.

## **10 Next Steps:**

The topic of the next Taskforce in Spring 2022 was agreed to be Circular Economy and Energy.