



**REPORT of  
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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**to  
COUNCIL  
12 DECEMBER 2024**

**REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S NET ZERO CARBON EMISSIONS TRAJECTORY AND  
AMBITIONS**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To update the Council on the work and considerations of the Net-Zero Working Group in relation to the Council's current ambition to be 'a carbon neutral District and a Net Zero Council by 2030'.
- 1.2 To seek agreement from Members to revise the Council's current ambition in order to ensure that it can be delivered practicably with regard to existing legal agreements, available budget / resources and available technology.
- 1.3 To seek a mandate from Members to revise the Council's Climate Action Strategy 2021-2030 to ensure that it accurately reflects the actions being taken by the Council to achieve net zero carbon emissions.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) That Members consider and note the challenges and barriers identified by the Net-Zero Working Group which are likely to prevent the Council fully decarbonising its assets and activities by 2030;
- (ii) That with consideration of these issues, and with regard to the current national and county policy agenda, that the Council agrees to adopt and publish the revised Climate Emergency Statement attached in **APPENDIX A**;
- (iii) That that the Climate Action Strategy 2021-2030 be revised to include a series of published milestones that will set out how the Council will reduce emissions as and when it is able to practicably do so but by no later than 2050;
- (iv) That Officers revise the current 'Climate Pledges' within the Climate Action Strategy and Climate Action Plan to ensure that they remain relevant to residents, businesses and community groups;
- (v) That the revised Climate Action Strategy be brought back to the Council for consideration and adoption in Spring 2025.

**3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES**

- 3.1 Members will be aware that at the Council meeting on 11 July 2024, officers presented a report on the Council's net-zero carbon emissions including a report

detailing the Council's baseline emissions and an outline of the potential challenges and barriers which may prevent the Council from achieving net-zero by 2030.

- 3.2 As outlined in this paper, in the baseline year (2022 / 23), the Council emitted 1,199 tonnes (t) Carbon Dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) as a result of its activities and operations. Approximately 43% (514 tCO<sub>2</sub>e) was emitted from leased assets including the Council's leisure centres, 35% (418.1 tCO<sub>2</sub>e) was from Council travel including the Council's refuse fleet and around 13.5% (161.8 tCO<sub>2</sub>e) was associated with the use of Council buildings and facilities.
- 3.3 The report outlined that, were the Council to fully decarbonise its assets and activities (implementing the best-case scenario), CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions could be reduced to approximately 119 tCO<sub>2</sub>e. This remaining carbon emission would need to be offset.
- 3.4 To achieve this level of decarbonisation by 2030, the Council would need to invest significantly in decarbonisation technologies and the necessary changes would need to be implemented at pace (commenced within the 2024 / 25 financial year) and there would be significant, currently unbudgeted, costs.
- 3.5 A number of barriers to achieving net-zero by 2030 were also identified including:
  - the recent purchase of diesel refuse vehicles (delivered in May and June 2024), which have an 8-year lifespan.
  - the procurement of a new leisure contract resulting in uncertainty around the decarbonisation of these assets until such time as a contract has been awarded.
  - uncertainty around future investment in the Princes Road Offices until decisions have been made over its long-term use and viability.
- 3.6 Following discussion of this report, Members agreed the creation of a Member and Officer Working Group to consider the Council's route to net-zero and as appropriate make recommendations to Council on its strategy for achieving net-zero. This Working Group comprises the following Members and Officers:
  - Councillor J C Stilts- Chairperson of the Working Group
  - Councillor D O Bown
  - Councillor R H Siddall
  - Councillor U G C Siddall-Norman
  - Councillor P L Spenceley
  - Richard Holmes (Director of Service Delivery)
  - Hannah Wheatley (Assistant Director - Place and Community)
  - Nick Chapman (Head of Environmental Health, Waste and Climate)
  - Claire Williamson (Technical Lead - Climate Action)
- 3.7 The Net Zero Working Group met on 9 September and 15 October 2024.
- 3.8 The Working Group has initially sought to focus on what is required for the Council to achieve full decarbonisation (as outlined in the trajectory to net-zero). The Working Group has sought to adopt an evidence-based approach to fully understand the relative advantages / disadvantages, associated costs, resourcing implications and barriers to decarbonising each key element of the Council's assets and activities.

- 3.9 Officers have agreed to support this work by seeking to commission appropriate technical studies of the Council's key sources of carbon emissions (as outlined in paragraph 3.2 above). Such reports will identify the scale of the challenge to fully decarbonise the Council's activities including identifying realistic timescales for necessary changes, nature and scale of infrastructure works, potential resource requirements and indicative budget costs. Where possible Officers will also outline interim steps and "quick wins" that can help the Council make cost effective changes to reduce emissions in advance of a fully completed decarbonisation scheme.
- 3.10 The Council has already obtained a technical report identifying the measures needed to decarbonise the Princes Road Offices, Princes Road Depot and the Prom Park Depot. This report was presented to the Working Group on 9 September 2024. The findings of this report will be brought back to Council as an options paper in Spring 2025. However, it has been identified that it may take up to four years (i.e. anticipated completion by 2029) to implement all of the required changes for the Princes Road Offices and depots. Such work would be subject to the Council successfully obtaining a 'Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS)' grant (not guaranteed), appropriate match funding being provided by the Council (currently a minimum of 12%), sufficient technical resource being allocated to the delivery of the project and is dependent on a decision by members on the future of the offices themselves. Were a PSDS grant not available for this work anticipated costs for the required decarbonisation works is anticipated to be around £1.8 million.
- 3.11 The Working Group has agreed that a similar technical study is required to assess the challenges to transition our vehicle fleet to net-zero. Officers are currently in the process of commissioning this work with an anticipated outcome date of March 2025.
- 3.12 Whilst this technical report is not yet available, there are a number of challenges associated with decarbonisation of the Council's direct vehicle fleet and those of its contractors:
- 3.13 At the Council meeting on 30 March 2023, Members agreed to extend the Council's contract for the provision of Waste and Recycling Services. As part of this contract extension, Members agreed for the Council to purchase 22 waste vehicles to enable the provision of the contract until 2032. These new vehicles are all diesel and in accordance with the agreed payback schedule are not due for replacement until after 2032.
- 3.14 It is unclear that existing Hydrogen or Electric Vehicle (EV) technologies are suitable for use within Maldon District. Whilst it is anticipated technology will continue to improve; a detailed viability assessment would be required.
- 3.15 Electric waste vehicles currently cost approximately £580,000 compared with £130,000 for a 26t diesel equivalent. Whilst EV fuel (charging) and servicing costs are significantly cheaper than the diesel equivalent, the Council would need to understand how this change would be funded.
- 3.16 Significant infrastructure changes would be required at our current Waste Depot both to increase power capacity and to ensure sufficient space to install EV charging infrastructure. Alternatively, a secondary site may be required.
- 3.17 Changes to contractor vehicles would need to be specified as part of a contract (either as a requirement for bidding or as a term of contract). This in turn may increase the cost of any contract tender and may limit those who are able to bid for a contract.

- 3.18 The Council's leased assets and particularly its leisure centres are currently the largest contributor to Council emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>e. Whilst the Working Group will seek to adopt a similar evidence-based approach for these assets, it has been agreed that officers will not undertake a technical assessment of what is required until such time as the future operator has been determined.
- 3.19 Following consideration of the technical challenges outlined above, the uncertainties in respect of current and future technologies and currently available resources (both officer and budgets), the net-zero working group has concluded that at present the Council is unable to fully decarbonise its assets and activities by 2030.
- 3.20 Furthermore, the difficulties and challenges identified during the Council's own assessments are likely to be replicated by its residents and local businesses. As a result, the Working Group considers that the Council's current ambition to be "a carbon neutral District by 2030" is unachievable.
- 3.21 Members will be aware that Essex County Council has set a 2050 carbon neutral target for the county. National policy set by central government also appears to be aligning with this date. Whilst these dates should not dictate Maldon District Council's ambitions, it is important to recognise that local and national policy will have a significant influence on the Council's ability to deliver its net-zero agenda.
- 3.22 Having regard to the information presented above, the Net-Zero Working Group now suggests that the Council considers a revision of its current ambitions to be a carbon neutral District and a net zero council by 2030 and that it considers adoption of a revised 'Climate Emergency Statement' as detailed in **APPENDIX A** to this report.
- 3.23 As outlined in **APPENDIX A**, the Working Group considers that the wording of the Council's aspiration should be changed to:
- "To develop a Climate Action Strategy with the aim to transition to a carbon neutral District and a net zero Council as quickly as practicably possible (but no later than 2050) having appropriate regard to Council finance, available resources and obtainable technology".
- 3.24 Subject to members agreeing the revised 'Climate Emergency Statement,' it is proposed that officers conduct a comprehensive review of the Council's Climate Action Strategy and Climate Action Plan to be presented to the Council in spring 2025.
- 3.25 This review shall include the development of realistic and measurable milestones for the phased reduction of carbon emissions produced by Council assets and activities between 2025 and 2050. These milestones will be aligned to relevant dependencies such as service contracts, purchase agreements, technological requirements, available funding and will provide clear assurance as to how the Council intends to reduce its carbon emissions.
- 3.26 Encompassed with the Climate Action Strategy review the Council will also seek to revise its Climate Pledges with the intention of making them more relatable to its residents, local businesses, and visitors. The Council will seek whenever possible to identify clear and measurable indicators of progress that are tied to quantifiable reductions in carbon emissions.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The Council's current ambitions to be a carbon neutral District by 2030 and ensure that all strategic decisions, budgets, and approaches to planning and regulatory decisions are in line with a shift to net-zero carbon by 2030. These targets were set by the Council in its Climate Emergency Statement on 4 February 2021 and they are not legally binding.
- 4.2 Several significant barriers have been identified that will impact upon the Council's ability to achieve net-zero by 2030 including financial resources needed to convert / upgrade buildings and change vehicles, availability and applicability of technology, relevant expertise, and constraints of national policy.
- 4.3 With consideration of the challenges identified the Net-Zero Working Group has concluded that the Council is unable to decarbonise its own assets by 2030. Equally similar challenges are likely to be experienced by residents and local businesses and consequently the Council's current ambition to be "a carbon neutral District by 2030" is unachievable.
- 4.4 The Net-Zero Working Group is recommending that the Council recognise the constraints and difficulties identified and agree to adopt a revised Climate Emergency Statement as outlined in **APPENDIX A**.
- 4.5 If this revised Climate Action Statement is agreed, Officers will seek to undertake a full revision of the current Climate Action Strategy to include clear and measurable milestones for the reduction of Council emissions and a review of the existing Climate Pledges.

## **5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2023 - 2027**

### **5.1 Supporting our communities**

- 5.1.1 The Council is a key facilitator and 'leader by example' of the district wide transition to net-zero. The Council has a key role in demonstrating to local businesses and residents how it is possible to fully decarbonise its assets and activities.
- 5.1.2 Climate change will affect all residents, businesses, and visitors of Maldon District. As a Local Authority, the Council has a vital role to play in achieving national net zero targets. The Council as an anchor organisation is uniquely placed to provide vision and leadership to local communities by raising awareness, influencing behaviour, and being a driver for local action that makes a real difference to the local environment.
- 5.1.3 Unfortunately, analysis of the Council's baseline emission data has indicated that the Council is unable to meet its current ambition of being net-zero by 2030 in a financially responsible and sustainable way. It is appropriate for the Council to acknowledge the challenges it has encountered and to amend our current ambition to an alternate target that is realist and achievable.

### **5.2 Smarter finances**

- 5.2.1 The Council has an obligation to manage public finances responsibly and ensure that it achieves best value from its infrastructure investments. Analysis of the Council's baseline carbon emission data suggests that significant and currently unbudgeted investment is required if the Council is to achieve net-zero by 2030. The approach

proposed in this report seeks to spread the required infrastructure investments for decarbonisation across a longer more sustainable investment period. Whenever decarbonisation investment will be aligned to coincide with identified changes in service (new contracts) or already identify investment programmes (i.e. replacement of fleet vehicles). This will minimise the impact on Council finances whilst ensuring continuous progress towards net-zero.

### 5.3 **A greener future**

5.3.1 This report advocates a data-based approach to inform the Council's journey to decarbonisation.

### 5.4 **Provide good quality services.**

5.4.1 This report attempts to balance the Council's need to maintain day to day operational services with an ambition to achieve net-zero carbon emissions as quickly as possible and at the latest by 2050.

## 6. **IMPLICATIONS**

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The report acknowledges challenges in the Council delivering on its current ambition to become a net-zero district by 2030. It is recognised that whilst the Council is not solely responsible for district wide carbon emissions any delay in fully decarbonising Council activities may be seen as exacerbating the impact of climate change on our residents.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – The impacts of climate change are predicted to disproportionately impact upon the poorest in society (for example those least able to adapt to increase flood risks) and consequently any delay to achieving net zero may have an impact on equality.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – A methodical and informed approach to operational net zero helps to reduce the risk of carbon emission increases and helps the Council to be better prepared for when future climate and environment legislation and standards come into force.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – This report considers how the Council will realistically deliver full decarbonisation of its activities and assets with consideration to realistic financial constraints. A methodical and informed approach to operational net zero and the creation of decarbonisation plans will help with future funding applications.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – This report recognises resource constraints applicable to the delivery of net-zero initiatives by the Council and advocates a more sustainable approach to the delivery of decarbonisation activities.

#### Background Papers:

[The Council's Climate Action Strategy 2021-2030](#)

#### Enquiries to:

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