



Report to: Environment Committee, 2nd November 2021

Report of: Deputy Director – Corporate Policy and Strategy

Subject: PROGRESS UPDATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Environment Committee notes the content of this report.

2. Background

2.1 Following the declaration of the climate emergency in July 2019, the Environmental Sustainability Strategy for the City of Worcester was approved by this Committee in October 2020.

2.2 This Committee then approved the Action Plan for the first phase of delivery of the strategy in March 2021.

2.3 In order to ensure effective governance of the strategy and associated action plan, it was agreed that this committee would receive progress reports on the delivery of the action plan twice yearly.

2.4 This is the first of these reports.

3. Overall progress

3.1 Significant progress has been made on a number of the key actions within the Action Plan. Details for each action are provided in the Council's standard performance report format at Appendix 1, and the following sections of this report provide further commentary on a theme by theme basis.

3.2 In July 2021, this Committee approved an allocation of £20,000 from this budget for the Environmental Community Grants scheme. This scheme is to launch shortly and aims to spend this £20,000 by end of March, with the potential for a future request for further funds from the budget if the scheme has been successful with good outcomes.

3.3 The significant staff resource requirements for the Green Homes Grant has impacted on the ability to progress other projects. The continuation of the Green Homes Grant scheme, with the initial short deadlines, then extensions, have made it difficult to plan for recruitment of additional resource using the administration funding received for this project.

3.4 Now that there is some certainty on the future for the Green Homes Grant and Sustainable Warmth programme, it is planned to recruit additional staff resource for delivery of the funding in 2022-23. This will allow the Environmental Sustainability Officer to focus on delivery of the wider action plan.

4. Carbon Neutral City Council

- 4.1 Carbon emissions for 2020-21 were 1306tCO₂e. This shows a reduction of 24% from 2018-19 (and 21% from 2019-20). This is primarily down to the procurement of green zero-emission rated electricity. This means that the Council now records no emissions from electricity usage (using market based emission factors).
- 4.2 There was also a reduction of 9.6% in emissions from the fuel used by the Council's fleet and operations, however gas usage rose by 8.9%. Emissions from gas usage at the Crematorium represent 74% of the total emissions from gas usage, and emissions from the Crematorium rose by 12% from 2019-20 to 2020-21.
- 4.3 The Council's carbon emission calculations are currently limited to buildings and operations within the direct control of the Council. This therefore does not include the running of the leisure centre, community centres or other services delivered by external providers. Inclusion of these emissions is much more difficult but gives a more complete insight into total carbon generated by Council services. Consideration will be given to incorporation of these emissions in future years.
- 4.4 Freedom Leisure have undertaken a number of actions over recent years to reduce emissions, particularly at Perdiswell Leisure Centre, and set an example to other leisure centres for their energy management work. Teams regularly analyse the energy usage and act to further drive down usage.
- 4.5 Actions under this theme are progressing well, with free energy assessments from the European Regional Development funded programme being managed by Worcestershire County Council, the 'Public Energy Efficiency Programme', helping to identify potential energy saving and generation opportunities in some of the Council's buildings. It is clear that moving away from gas boilers will be a challenge for many sites.
- 4.6 Two new electric vans will soon be arriving on a long term hire for use by Environmental Operations, including a 3.5t tipper van and a 3.5t box van. Six electric vehicles are already in use by the Environmental Operations service. Investigations into the opportunities for electric or other zero emission vehicles to be deployed across the fleet, as vehicles are due for replacement, continue.
- 4.7 Recently new electric hedge cutters and other equipment has been purchased for the Streetscene team to replace equipment driven by petrol. These will result in zero carbon emissions and also improve air quality in the immediate vicinity, improving the working conditions for these staff.

5. Carbon Neutral Worcester

- 5.1 BEIS have published their latest figures for carbon emissions by local authority for 2019. This data shows a 5.85% reduction in CO₂ emissions between 2018 and 2019 (fall from 353.7ktCO₂ to 333.1ktCO₂).

- 5.2 This reduction has been driven by some major decreases, for example there has been a 28% reduction in emissions from electricity used by industry between the two years. This will be due to grid electricity becoming cleaner and also likely due to a decrease in usage too (as emissions from public sector and domestic electricity have only fallen by 7% and 12% respectively).
- 5.3 The primary actions over the last six months within this theme of the strategy have been the installation of rapid and fast chargepoints in St Martin's Gate, and the delivery of energy efficiency improvements to domestic properties funded by the Green Homes Grant.
- 5.4 The Green Homes Grant project is one of the projects within the Action Plan with the greatest quantifiable carbon emission reduction potential, and has come with significant external grant funding which will total over £1.5 million. This project has been extended a number of times and new phases announced. This means that instead of the 6 month project originally envisaged, this is now an 18 month project with another 12 months in the pipeline.
- 5.5 The reduction in emissions from the installation of energy efficiency measures in these domestic properties will not be realised until the figures are provided for 2021-22.
- 5.6 It is interesting to note that the number of ultra low emission vehicles in Worcester has greatly increased since the publication of the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy, which noted 173 ultra low emission vehicles licensed in the authority area at the end of Q2 2019. As of the end of Q1 2021, a total of 828 vehicles in this category had been registered, an increase of 378%. This growth, reflected across the country, provides a strong market for the use of the new chargepoints in St Martin's Gate.
- 5.7 Previously (in July 2020), this Committee had approved a spend of up to £7,000 from the budget for the feasibility study for a Worcester City Heat Network. This funding has not been required as the Heat Network Delivery Unit (part of BEIS) offered to fully fund the study. The consultants have presented the options for a heat network, and their recommendation, to the project group (which includes representatives from a number of partners) and this recommendation is being considered prior to finalisation of the consultant's report later in the autumn.

6. Sustainable Economy

- 6.1 The local economy, as well as national economy, continues to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst the Green Homes Grant funding for domestic properties will help with ensuring a green recovery to the pandemic, the relatively small number of contractors remaining in this market means that it is not possible to ensure a local benefit to this funding.

7. Natural Environment

- 7.1 The primary work over the last six months has been on the biodiversity action programme. This has progressed well and is being presented for agreement by this committee.

- 7.2 Following the success of the wildflower road verge trial on Dugdale Drive, led by the Worcester Environment Group, Environmental Operations have implemented additional wildflower meadow areas and also took part in the 'no mow' May initiative.
- 7.3 Over 6,000 trees were planted last winter, and these have continued to be maintained as required over the course of the year. Another 400 trees are expected to be planted over the course of winter in 2022/23 subject to the outcome of a funding bid.

8. Preparing for climate change

- 8.1 In line with the 2020 Annual Report in Flood Risk Management in Worcestershire produced by Worcestershire County Council, funding has been secured from the Government by the Environment Agency for flood protection measures in Worcester. £238,000 will be spent between protection for properties on Toronto Close and protection for the Hive from surface water flooding.
- 8.2 Flood Re, a joint initiative between the Government and insurers, have organised for the 'Floodmobile' to visit Worcester, showcasing property protection measures against flooding and highlighting the need for these.

9. Resource Efficiency

- 9.1 The county-wide social media campaign encouraging recycling, reduction of food waste, re-using items and zero waste has continued through Council communications with good levels of engagement seen in terms of comments and views.
- 9.2 As events restart, officers are ensuring a renewed focus on the reduction in single use plastics is taking place.
- 9.3 Many more opportunities for the recycling of soft plastics often used as packaging have been established by supermarkets over the last year and promotion of these via normal Council communication channels has taken place.

Appendix 1: Report from Pentana

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Background Papers: Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan for
the first phase of delivery