

Wednesday, 13 September 2023

Report of the Leader of the Council

Staffordshire Sustainability Board Update

Exempt Information

None.

Purpose

To adopt the draft Staffordshire Adaptation Strategy which has been developed in conjunction with the Staffordshire Sustainability Board.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. That the draft Staffordshire Adaptation Strategy at appendix 1, is endorsed.
2. To endorse the preparation of an Adaptation Plan for the Borough.

Executive Summary

There is now enough evidence to support the notion that climate change is the most severe threat humankind has ever faced. The effects of climate change are already affecting human and wildlife populations globally. As the effects of climate change continue to increase, so too does the need for adaptive and mitigatory action.

It is important to acknowledge the distinction between climate change mitigation and adaptation. Climate change mitigation refers to the implementation of measures which seek to reduce the levels of greenhouse gases being released into the atmosphere. The Borough Council will be preparing a Climate Change Action Plan which will seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, across its operations.

However, even if the emission of all greenhouse gas stopped today, the levels that already exist in the atmosphere would continue to drive climate change for at least the next thirty years. Adaptation is about implementing measures to adjust to the changing climate and our response to increasing frequency and severity of weather events.

Across the UK, we expect to see:

- warmer and wetter winters
- hotter and drier summers
- more frequent and intense weather extremes

Climate change effects are already being experienced such as the increase in frequency and severity of extreme weather events, including high temperatures and heat waves, storms, excessive rainfall and flooding, and high winds.

In October 2021, the Government revealed its new Net Zero Strategy. Published to follow on from the 2008 Climate Change Act, the Net Zero Strategy sets out the steps that will be followed to enable the UK to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. The importance of climate adaptation is echoed throughout the document, with the following being stated **“While reducing emissions, we must also adapt to the inevitable changes in our climate, ensuring that policies supporting net zero are resilient to current and future climate risks”**.

The Staffordshire Sustainability Board, which was established in 2022, requested that Staffordshire County Council lead on the delivery of an Adaptation Strategy for Staffordshire. The draft strategy, Appendix 1, has been prepared by collaborating with the Staffordshire districts and boroughs.

Draft Staffordshire Adaptation Strategy

Climate change has the potential to impact council services. This means looking at all the things we do and thinking about how to make them more resilient to climate change to protect people's lives and livelihoods.

The Vision for the draft strategy is: *A resilient Staffordshire will be an attractive, safe and healthy place to live and work offering an excellent quality of life, thriving environment and prosperous economy.*

By signing up to the draft strategy the Borough Council will be agreeing to the following ambition, which is to:

- Recognise that adapting to climate change is a vital part of planning for the future and will consider adaptation planning across all council services.
- Understand the risks and vulnerability climate change poses to Staffordshire, the places we live and work and how these can be made more resilient to climate change.
- Adopt a flexible pro-active approach to adaptation to account for the dynamic and uncertain future climate change scenarios and significance of the impacts.

The draft strategy includes a range of objectives across key themes for Staffordshire Councils to reduce exposure to climate change risks and capitalise on new opportunities. The draft strategy focusses on four key themes. Each theme in the strategy looks at what the issues are, and what could be done about it. Within the appendices, the risks and opportunities are outlined and are listed as a guide for Adaptation Plan preparation.

Four themes:

Critical infrastructure and buildings: The damage caused by extreme weather events can disrupt business and the councils' ability to provide reliable services for the local community. It is important to make sure our built environment is resilient to these climate-related hazards. This means thinking about where and how we build new structures, and how we maintain existing ones. For example, heatwaves increase the risk of natural fires starting on grass verges and have caused the tarmac on some roads to soften. Storms

have led to landslides blocking routes and flooding roads especially in low lying areas and floodplains.

Green infrastructure, like parks and street trees, and blue infrastructure, like rivers, wetlands and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) can help protect and enhance our built environment against our changing climate. Incorporating these features into good building design will make our infrastructure and buildings more robust and better able to withstand climate-related hazards.

Summer heat, especially that experienced in 2022 can make living and working spaces uncomfortable and can be a danger to health, especially the vulnerable. Nature based solutions, such as green spaces and SuDs have an important role to play in providing natural cooling for example.

Natural environment and green spaces: Warmer temperatures increase the vulnerability of species to pests and diseases and increase the risk of invasion from exotic species. Hotter drier conditions increase the risk of wildfires which can cause serious damage to habitats and communities. In addition the timing of our seasons is changing and affecting the availability of food for many species at crucial times of the year, especially breeding and migratory species. We need to increase our understanding of species habitat requirements to create more resilient environments. Improving the quality, diversity and size of habitats and connectivity will help species move through the landscape as the climate changes.

Our open spaces are not only valuable for biodiversity, they can also reduce air pollution and provide recreational space for people to enjoy. Extreme weather conditions can erode footpaths, wash out bridges and create landslips making access to our open spaces and footpaths hazardous or impassable, increasing pressure on resources.

New ways of managing access to these open spaces need consideration, moving away from costly hard engineering solutions to identifying how best to adapt to the changing conditions.

Health, wellbeing and safety: Vulnerable and elderly people, especially those in deprived areas, are most at risk. Urban areas are particularly vulnerable due to the urban heat island effect. In 2022, extreme heat days in England and Wales led to a 10.4% increase in death rates compared to non-heat periods.

The role of good building design and blue and green infrastructure for our new and existing properties and neighbourhoods are important for providing natural cooling and access to cool spaces during extreme heat days. To help improve local air quality and provide a more comfortable space to live, work and for recreation we need to consider ways to better integrate blue and green infrastructure and better building design across Staffordshire. Conversely, extreme cold weather can lead to excess winter deaths caused by poor-quality, poorly-insulated, and inadequately heated housing.

People who work solely or predominantly in the outdoors are more exposed to the extreme weather conditions. These people need to be protected as much as possible to minimise any risk to health while at work. New ways of working may need to be considered to ensure appropriate protection methods are in place for all staff.

Additionally planning and responding to extreme weather events can place significant pressure on staff resources. Planning for these events by having appropriate plans, risk assessment and climate related response cover in place may need greater consideration.

Local economy: Extreme weather events and changing weather patterns can disrupt business operations due to premises overheating and flooding and can cause disruption to staff travel and the supply chain.

Climate change, and in particular extreme weather events being experienced across the world can impact the local economy through increased risk of price volatility for imported materials and commodities. Businesses should consider ways to build greater resilience into operations to remain competitive and reliable. We can help to encourage change by finding out what type of climate related challenges businesses face and sharing good practice information.

As climate change resilience is increasingly adopted across all sectors new business opportunities will arise in the green economy and ecosystem services. There is an opportunity to consider how we can support residents in gaining appropriate skills to take advantage of these forthcoming opportunities.

Appendix 1 of the draft strategy sets out in more detail the risks and opportunities associated with each of the four themes and the outcomes, for example how Staffordshire Council's can adapt to those risks and opportunities.

Next Steps

It is a high-level strategy aimed at guiding and leading all authorities across Staffordshire in a consistent and coherent manner. Through identifying priorities and working together Staffordshire Councils will build a more resilient society and economy. This will provide people with a safe, comfortable place to live and work.

In the first instance the Staffordshire Sustainability Board requires all Staffordshire authorities to get the draft Adaptation Strategy approved by the relevant cabinets. The logical next step would be to work on our own adaptation plan.

For example, adaptation will need to be embedded into the Borough Council's policies, plans and strategies. Risks would need to be actively managed to ensure the policy framework keeps pace with the changing climate. Decision making would need to consider the resilience to the impacts of the changing climate on service delivery, particularly severe weather. As a Borough Council we would also need to focus on developing, innovating and adopting good practice.

Options Considered

None.

Resource Implications

There is a limited retained fund of approximately £60,000 allocated to support all climate change related work, while this should be sufficient to commence this work, it is likely a further policy change will need to be considered within the 2024/25 budget process to ensure this work becomes embedded into council policy.

Legal/Risk Implications Background

None

Equalities Implications

None

Environment and Sustainability Implications (including climate change)

It is in the interest of the council to provide adaptation measures which will increase the resilience of the council's own services, local communities, and biodiversity.

Background Information

The Staffordshire Leaders Board has committed to work collaboratively across Staffordshire to successfully achieve net carbon zero in line with each local authority's climate change declarations. The purpose of working collaboratively is in recognition that across Staffordshire the influence of individual local authorities will be limited, however jointly, with other Councils and organisations across the public and private sectors, notable impacts will be achievable. A Staffordshire Sustainability Board (SSB) takes the lead on coordinating activity that will enable, influence and facilitate economic sectors across Staffordshire to start the journey to Net Zero. An officers group comprising senior officers from each Staffordshire authority support the Board.

Under the 2008 Climate Change Act, the UK Government is required to update and publish a Climate Change Risk Assessment every five years. This document has been updated and published and is called the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2022 (CCRA). The document identifies eight priority risk areas which are likely to impact the UK as the climate continues to change. To lessen these impacts, adaptive measures need to be implemented.

The 8 categories include:

- The impact on habitats and species.
- The impact on health of the soil.
- Risk to natural carbon stores and removal of carbon from the atmosphere, known as carbon sequestration.
- The impact on local crops, livestock, and commercial trees.
- The impact on getting food, goods and vital services.
- How people and the economy will be affected.
- The impact on people's health, wellbeing, and productivity.
- The impact from other countries.

The National Adaptation Programme (NAP) sets out how the Government will respond to the risks set out in the Climate Change Risk Assessment. This document sets out the role local government plays in helping the UK to respond and adapt to the climate change risks. The NAP states that "Many of the risks identified in the CCRA and set out in chapters 2-5 of this NAP and many of the impacts arising from climate change are relevant to the responsibilities and functioning of local government".

The West Midlands Climate Change Risk Assessment and Adaptation Plan 2021-2026 (Sustainability West Midlands) looked at these risks and opportunities that climate change could cause in the West Midlands region. They have identified some high-level actions that can be taken to help adapt to these changes.

The information from this plan has been used to understand the risks and opportunities specific to Staffordshire. This is the basis upon which the Staffordshire Adaptation Strategy has been prepared, following a request from the Staffordshire Sustainability Board

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List of Background Papers

None

Appendices

Appendix 1: Staffordshire Adaptation Plan