



Environment and Sustainability Panel

Item

9

6 December 2023

Report of	Head of Sustainability	Author	Ben Plummer
Title	Council Climate Action Scorecards Summary		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Climate Emergency UK, a not-for-profit co-operative published their Council Climate Action Scorecards, an assessment into climate and environmental action by all UK local authorities, in October 2023. The Council received a score of 34% in this assessment, which was higher than the district council average of 29%.
- 1.2 Analysis of the Council's scorecard was completed. This identified several positive actions including energy performance of the Council's housing stock, work on developing shared travel methods (e.g. electric scooters, electric car club) and efforts to phase out use of glyphosate and reduce mowing of green spaces.
- 1.3 The assessment also identified several notable gaps in the Council's performance on tackling climate change. Whilst much of this action that can be taken is restricted by limited staff and budget, there are many actions that the Council could consider to improve its climate and environmental performance.
- 1.4 Several actions are already being taken to address the gaps in the scorecard. These include:
 - Beginning to offer a service for residents to access support and funding on domestic energy efficiency through getting access to the 'Better Housing Better Health' helpline provided by the National Energy Foundation.
 - Receiving support from Essex County Council about how we can request higher building standards than the minimum building regulations, aiming for net zero homes through planning policies.
 - Producing a more detailed greenhouse gas emission report, that details our calculation methodology.
 - Developing an elearning course for staff on environmental awareness, alongside arranging training for members on carbon literacy.
 - Using peat free compost in our parks.
 - Taking part in a pilot to help understand ways we can reduce the environmental impacts associated with the delivery of events.
 - Delivering kerbside food waste recycling for residents. The assessment identified the Council as not offering this but this has been queried with Climate Emergency UK and the mark will be awarded retrospectively.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 This report is intended to outline the results of the Council Climate Action Scorecards and the ways in which the Council is already addressing some of the identified gaps in

the assessment where we were not awarded points. Councillors are welcome to advise on ways we could try and achieve further action on climate change, or comment on the methodology and scoring of the scorecards.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The report is for information only and it is not suggested there is any decision that needs to be made on the back of this report.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Not applicable

5. Background Information

Background to the Climate Scorecards

- 5.1 Climate Emergency UK are a not for profit co-operative who set up to help provide support to local authorities and other organisations who were making climate emergency declarations. Their aim is to provide supporting resources to help local authorities take action on their declarations, whilst also acting as a critical friend to hold local authorities accountable for the climate action they are implementing.
- 5.2 In 2021 they conducted an exercise to rate all UK local authority climate action plans with the results published in January 2022. In this exercise, the Council received a score of 52% which was above the district council average score of 43%. We then strengthened the content of our action plan on the back of the feedback provided by Climate Emergency UK and published a new version in January 2023.
- 5.3 Climate Emergency UK then wanted to assess how well local authorities are actually **implementing** climate action (rather than just plans). Therefore, they created a methodology and criteria, with a range of supporting organisations, that outlined actions that local authorities could take on climate change and environmental issues to assess them against. This was called the 'Council Climate Action Scorecards'. Local authorities were then scored against these criteria in Spring 2023 and the results published in October 2023.

Methodology

- 5.4 The methodology of questions developed was created with help with organisations such as Ashden, Friends of the Earth, Council officers and other consultants.
- 5.5 The methodology was split into seven sections; Buildings & Heating, Transport, Planning & Land Use, Governance & Finance, Biodiversity, Collaboration & Engagement and Waste Reduction & Food. Each section had different weightings dependent on the local authority type and based on how much control and influence they were considered to have over this and the associated impact on emissions.
- 5.6 Individual questions were then also weighted on a scale of 1-3 depending on the level of impact on emissions reduction. Each question had a different number of marks that could be gained, with some having different levels of criteria to show improved performance on a question (e.g. the percentage of Council homes that have an EPC of C – This question was out of 3 marks, with 1 mark given if 50% were EPC C, 2 marks if 60% EPC C and 3 marks if 90% or more were EPC C). Some questions were given 'penalty points' if the Council was seen to be taking or approving an action that would lead to an increase in emissions (e.g. Has the council approved, expanded or built a high carbon transport project since 2019?).
- 5.6 Data to produce the scorecards for each Council was collected through a variety of means including Freedom of Information requests, nationally available data sources (e.g. from UK Government) and from publicly available data on the Council's website, local media and more. Actions taken between 1st January 2019 – 31st March 2023 were reviewed.
- 5.7 A full detailed methodology that expands on the points above is available to view [here](#).

Scorecard results

5.8 The Council's overall score was 34%, greater than the 29% average district council score and achieving the highest score for a district council in Essex. The outline scorecard, showing the scores for each section, compared with the average district council score is shown in the table below. Scores for all Councils can be viewed on the [Climate Emergency UK website](#).

Section	Colchester City Council score	Average District Council score
Buildings & Heating	45%	42%
Transport	56%	9%
Planning & Land Use	15%	23%
Governance & Finance	38%	24%
Biodiversity	25%	22%
Collaboration & Engagement	54%	42%
Waste Reduction & Food	17%	23%

- 5.9 It should be noted that despite the scorecards being created in such a way that it makes the comparison like a 'league table' of local authority scores, it should be reflected that different Councils will have their own unique challenges to taking climate and environmental action, and some will have greater focus and resource on some areas of tackling climate change (e.g. transport, energy) than others. This is reflected in the Local Government Association's position on the Council Climate Action Scorecards exercise which can be viewed [here](#). It should also be made clear that some of the actions within this assessment do fall outside the full direct control of the Council.
- 5.10 A full breakdown of how many marks the Council got for each question in the scorecards can be seen in appendix A. This will be used and referred to in the results analysis section of the report. You can also view this on the [Climate Emergency UK website](#), where you can also see the full criteria and marks for each question.

Results analysis

- 5.11 This assessment is useful for highlighting several areas of good performance for the Council. It is worth highlighting that in the transport section, the Council scored the 4th highest score out of all district councils (186 in total). Specific points of good performance identified in the scorecard include:
- Energy performance, and emissions targets, for the Council's own housing stock
 - Support for households to receive funding/support for retrofitting their own homes
 - Delivery of several different shared transport schemes (e.g. ebike hire, escooters, ecar club)
 - Phasing out of glyphosate and reductions in mowing regimes on green spaces
 - Presentation and reporting of work completed through the Climate Emergency Action Plan
 - Partnership working with institutions in the borough like schools and local businesses
- 5.12 However, the report did identify actions that the Council was not implementing at the time of the assessment. These are identified through the lower scoring questions and sections in Appendix A. Each section will be analysed in turn to identify where the

Council is working on addressing the gaps identified in the assessment, and also where further action will be required for other actions.

Buildings and Heating

- 5.13 From appendix A, there are obvious gaps with low marks on questions 1.2, 1.5, 1.8, 1.9 and 1.12. On 1.2, the Council could procure a 100% renewable energy tariff with a recognised provider, however this would come at an increased uplift compared to the current tariff when electricity prices are already high. We do already procure a 'Zero Carbon for Business' tariff with EDF Energy but this was not considered by Climate Emergency UK to meet the criteria for a 100% renewable energy tariff. On 1.5, we have delivered some work on retrofit training with Essex County Council (ECC) but it is not something we currently have a co-ordinated approach on and perhaps could be handled better at a county level to develop improved retrofit skills support across Essex. For 1.8, previous attempts have been made to hire a staff member to help enforce the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards in the Private Rented Sector but this was unsuccessful. For question 1.12, we have not had the capacity to support community renewable energy projects, however we have been supportive of the energy efficiency support work delivered by Community Energy Colchester.
- 5.14 We are addressing question 1.9, by partnering with the 'Better Housing, Better Health' helpline service offered by the National Energy Foundation to help refer customers to support and funding to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and/or save money on their energy bills. This work began in September 2023, after the assessment period.

Transport

- 5.15 There were fewer gaps in this section. The main one identified was the lack of electric vehicle charge points in the borough. This will be addressed in part by work with ECC who developed their draft Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy which identifies the approach to implementing electric vehicle charge points, particularly in Council owned car parks and where residents do not have access to off street parking. The Council will work closely with ECC as this develops to ensure residents in Colchester benefit from this.
- 5.16 The Council did receive penalty points for questions 2.12a and 2.12b on exceedances of World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines for two air pollutants, nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter 2.5 (PM 2.5 – particulate matter is small airborne particles, that are not gases, produced from different sources that harm air quality and cause health issues. PM 2.5 is any particles smaller than 2.5 micrometres.). The Council is aware of poor air quality in several areas of Colchester, and these are designated air quality management areas where the Council measures air quality and reports on this annually. The Council are delivering many projects to attempt to improve air quality, for example running a no idling campaign, air pollution awareness campaign, piloting eCargo bike delivery studies, running home burning awareness campaigns and more. It should also be noted that all district council's got penalty marks for question 2.12b. The data used for marking these questions is available [here](#).

Planning and Land Use

- 5.17 There were many gaps in this section, and this was reflective across all district councils. It should be noted that at the time of writing the existing Local Plan, it was based on the evidence and regulations that existed at the time of its production. At that time it was very unclear if Councils could request to build to standards above building regulations, and the evidence base for building to net zero was much less developed. Several of these

gaps in this section will look to be addressed as part of the Local Plan review. Essex County Council have been developing the evidence base to show the technical, economic and legal feasibility of asking for net zero homes as part of planning policy. The intention is that each of the local planning authorities including Colchester City Council will be able to adopt a net zero homes policy with the guidance provided by ECC. This would help address questions 3.3a, 3.3b, 3.3c and 3.9 (the latter addressed by the fact the proposed policy from ECC suggests on site renewable energy generation should match energy demand of the development). Since the assessment the Council has also produced three supplementary planning documents on climate change, active travel and biodiversity which also respond to the questions and set out higher standards for these topics, albeit standards which are therefore for guidance and cannot be used as enforcement.

- 5.18 On the back of the above, the Council would have the opportunity to address question 3.2. We currently build new Council homes to Future Homes Standard 2025 but have identified in the new climate change supplementary planning document that we expect developers to build to higher standards, specifically the Low Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) standards that outline the requirements to make a home or building net zero. This should then apply to new Council homes we build.
- 5.19 The other gaps in the assessment will be considered as part of the Local Plan review process to determine their appropriateness and feasibility.

Governance & Finance

- 5.20 There were many gaps in this section, but we are already addressing several of the questions we didn't receive marks for. For example, questions 4.3a and 4.3b are addressed by the production of the Council's Greenhouse Gas Report for financial year 2022/2023. The reason why we lost the majority of marks for these questions was because we did not clearly state the methodology we used for our emissions calculations (which is addressed with the production of the detailed greenhouse gas report that is now on the [Council's website](#)).
- 5.21 We are working on question 4.6 by adapting our invitation to tender and bidder response document to acknowledge the Council's climate emergency declaration and ask for more information from suppliers about their environmental credentials and how they are reducing environmental impacts of the relevant contract they are delivering. This has been implemented from November 2023 and relevant responses will be assessed in the new year to see how suppliers are interpreting the questions and the quality of responses given.
- 5.22 We are addressing question 4.9 to some degree by providing a 4 hour carbon literacy course to councillors, including the portfolio holders, several committee chairs and all members of the Environment and Sustainability Panel. The portfolio holder for Planning, Environment and Sustainability along with the Head of Sustainability have also both attended a fully accredited carbon literacy course which took place after this assessment was completed.
- 5.23 We are aware of the gap considering the risks from climate change in our corporate risk register and this is going to be actioned on. We are also looking to take part in a Government pilot for reporting on climate adaptation at the local authority level, with support and guidance provided as part of this. This reporting may become common practice for local authorities in the future so this gives us an opportunity to get ahead with understanding the potential requirements of this.

Biodiversity

- 5.24 One of the lost marks in here are because there was a lack of public information available to justify that we met the marks. On 5.1, the compost and soil conditioner we do use is peat free and is composed of farmyard manure, therefore it is expected that we would have received this mark had this information been in the public domain. On 5.5, we did used to have a target for increasing tree cover but this was removed as part of the changes to the Woodland and Biodiversity Project to prioritise work to enhance biodiversity. Also, we do have targets for increasing canopy cover in the Local Plan, reflecting the aim for increased tree planting where appropriate across Colchester.
- 5.25 The other marks not gained were to do with implementation of biodiversity net gain (BNG). The Council has already had requirements for meeting minimum 10% BNG since July 2022 when the local plan was adopted, ahead of the mandatory introduction in January 2024. The Council has tried on several occasions to hire an ecologist for the Planning team but has been unsuccessful. ECC have now hired an officer that will help all the Essex local authorities with supporting the implementation of BNG and helping to understand BNG plans submitted by developers. The Council is not currently requiring a higher BNG threshold than the minimum 10% but this could be considered as more evidence comes out about its achievability in Essex which is being worked on by the BNG working group in the Local Nature Partnership.

Collaboration & Engagement

- 5.26 The main gap identified as part of the assessment was the lack of ongoing engagement with residents about our climate emergency action plan, and consideration on how these actions will impact residents most affected by climate change (questions 6.5a and 6.5b). As part of many of our projects such as those on sustainable travel and biodiversity, we do provide opportunities for residents to hear about our projects and get involved in supporting them to develop their own community projects through an asset based community development (ABCD) model. However, there is a gap for residents to be able to hear about and influence the whole climate emergency action plan as a whole. Any method that could be chosen to increase engagement would need to have careful thought given to ensure it is impactful and enables the community to feel empowered to take their own climate and environmental action. If recommended by councillors, the Council could look to do a review of participation initiatives conducted by other local authorities to determine suitability and effectiveness.

Waste Reduction & Food

- 5.27 This section was another low scoring section for the Council, but the Council is taking action to address some of the actions in this section. For example, in response to questions 7.1a and 7.1b, the Council is taking part in a pilot project to look at better ways to incorporate sustainable policies and asks for event providers to minimise the impact of delivering events. This will be in collaboration with Maldon District Council and Colchester Events, with the project being run by Vision 2025, the official outdoor events industry environmental steering group who have developed in draft the '[Green Events Code](#)' which aims to provide a set of best practice standards and targets for sustainability at outdoor events.
- 5.28 For questions 7.3, 7.4 and 7.4b, it is arguable that activities associated with food fall outside of the remit of the Council. Supporting this point perhaps is that only 58/186 district councils got marks for 7.3, 12/186 for 7.4a and 22/186 for 7.4b, indicating that it isn't an action many district councils are currently prioritising.

5.29 The only other way the Council can gain more marks on other parts of this is by increasing recycling rates and reducing residual waste production. The Council already has one of the lowest waste production levels in the UK, and notably only 1/186 local authorities got full marks for question 7.9. The Council's recycling rate is also above the average UK recycling rate, but ways to improve this will be revisited as part of the Recycling and Waste Strategy work.

5.30 It should be noted that on question 7.7, the Council does provide a kerbside food waste recycling collection for the majority of residents and not getting awarded a mark for this question was an error on the part of Climate Emergency UK. This has been queried and we will be getting this mark for this and the results amended appropriately soon.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

6.1 There are no equality, diversity and human rights implications of this report.

7. Strategic Plan References

7.1 This report is about actions being taken on climate change and the environment, hence linking to the 'Respond to the climate emergency' theme of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

8. Consultation

8.1 There are no consultation considerations of the report.

9. Publicity Considerations

9.1 There are no publicity considerations of the report.

10. Financial implications

10.1 There are no financial implications of the report.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

11.1 There are no health, wellbeing and community safety implications of the report.

12. Health and Safety Implications

12.1 There are no health and safety implications.

13. Risk Management Implications

13.1 There are no risk management implications.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

14.1 This report outlines the Council's performance on the Council climate action scorecards which does show the good work the Council is already doing to tackle climate change and reduce environmental impacts across the city. However, areas for improvement have been identified and comments on these have been addressed in the above report.

Appendices

Appendix A: Colchester City Council's Full Climate Action Scorecard