

Committee: **Place Scrutiny Committee**
 Date of meeting: **17th October 2023**
 Report Subject: **Climate Change, Net Zero Annual Report 2022/23**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Helen Cunningham, Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member Environment**
 Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Interim Chief Executive**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	Virtually w/c 2.10.23	09.10.23			17.10.23	29.11.23		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Annual Net Zero Report 2022-23 updating on progress made on climate change including presenting the Council’s carbon footprint.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Net Zero Annual Report relates to two national Net Zero targets: Net Zero 2030 for the Welsh Public Sector (organisational emissions) and Net Zero 2050 for all of Wales (territorial emissions). Our organisational emissions are the carbon emissions produced by delivering our services, while Blaenau Gwent’s territorial emissions include all the carbon emissions released within the borough, from homes, transport, businesses etc.

2.2 Net Zero 2030

Our [Decarbonisation Plan](#) was adopted in September 2020 at the same time we declared a Climate Emergency. The plan addresses our organisational emissions with the aim of making our full contribution to the ambition of a Net Zero Public Sector in Wales by 2030. The Plan identifies eight transitions, based on our carbon footprint data. Each of these transitions represents a coherent area of action with its own distinct low carbon technologies, business models and infrastructure. The Annual Report outlines the actions identified for each transition.

2.3 Carbon Footprint

Our overall carbon footprint has risen significantly this year, largely due to spend on rail infrastructure improvements to the Ebbw Vale line, which will of course have climate benefits for Blaenau Gwent in the long-term. This is a major one-off construction project that represents a real rise in our emissions. However, typically our overall carbon footprint is not suitable for year-on-year comparisons because it includes spend based emissions that are calculated

based on national average carbon factors and as a result cannot capture year-to-year changes in our performance.

- 2.4 It is possible to track the annual progress of our direct emissions, which are the element of our carbon footprint that we have the greatest control over. These are the emissions that are either directly released through our operations (e.g. fuel burnt in our fleet) or through our consumption of electricity (e.g. street lighting). There has been a 6% fall in these emissions compared to last year and a cumulative 16% fall over the three years since our 2019/20 baseline. Following a rise in emissions last year post-COVID 19 an overall downward trend in emissions has resumed.

	tonnes CO ₂ e/year				Change from Base Year	Change from Last Year
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23		
Direct Carbon Emissions	14,750	11,793	13,087	12,336	-16%	-6%

While this fall in direct emissions represents real progress the reality is that achieving Net Zero 2030 will require additional finance and resources beyond our current capacities.

2.5 Net Zero 2050

There are already a number of actions taking place across the council to cut territorial emissions. However, similar to our position for organisational emissions prior to developing our Decarbonisation Plan, we do not have a clear overview of our actions total impact or any gaps in relation to Net Zero 2050. Our Climate Group has begun the process of developing a Net Zero 2050 Framework document to address this gap. It is proposed that the framework will be structured around the four themes that emerged from the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly in 2021: energy, housing, nature and transport. Engaging with partners and the public will be crucial to Net Zero 2050 as the large majority of territorial emissions are not within our direct control.

2.6 Policy Context

Wales has set a series of 5-year [carbon budgets](#). The first carbon budget (CB1) ran from 2016 to 2020 and set a target for an average reduction of 23% against the 1990 baseline. This target was exceeded with a 27.8% reduction. The current carbon budget 2 (2021-2025) sets a target for an average 37% reduction. The most significant factor in Wales meeting CB1 was the closing of Aberthaw power plant. There are no further one-off reductions of this type available, and the UK Climate Change Committee [reported](#) this year that Wales is not yet on track to meet its targets for the second half of this decade and beyond.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Option One

That the Committee considers the progress made and supports the report.

Option Two

That the Committee considers the progress made and provides specific recommendations.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The Net Zero Annual Report covers one of the four priorities in the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan 2022/27, 'respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities.' It is also central to one of the two objectives of the Gwent PSB Well-being Plan, 'We want a climate-ready Gwent, where our environment is valued and protected, benefitting our well-being now and for future generations.'

The Net Zero Annual Report and our Carbon Footprint are submitted to Welsh Government on an annual basis as part of Welsh Public Sector Net Zero Reporting.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The council has mainstreamed achieving Net Zero across service areas, rather than identify distinct decarbonisation projects and budgets. However, as each transition progresses, costs will be identified to deliver these actions and will require separate reports from business leads for consideration of the investment required. It is anticipated that investment decisions will need to be taken by the Council, Welsh Government and wider partners to enable local action. There could also be significant costs from being left behind in some transitions as the availability of fossil fuel-based options decreases and their price increases.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

5.3 ***Legal***

The UK has put its commitment to reach Net Zero 2050 into law.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

Officers with specialist skills and knowledge are likely to be required to deliver key elements of Net Zero. Staff engagement will be a key enabler in what is really a programme of transformational change.

5.5 ***Health and Safety***

No direct implications from Net Zero targets.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Full Carbon Footprint Calculations attached Appendix A

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Net Zero 2050 is closely tied to the council's wider well-being goals, for example, making housing and transport zero carbon in Blaenau Gwent is part of a wider transformation of these services to improve resident's well-being.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

Our Net Zero 2050 work is heavily informed by [Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly](#). In March 2021 44 residents of Blaenau Gwent got together online to discuss the question 'how can we tackle climate change in Blaenau Gwent in a way that is fair and improves living standards for everyone?' The 44 Assembly Members were chosen at random to be representative of people in Blaenau Gwent (in terms of age, gender, where they live, type of housing etc.) The Climate Assembly met for a total of 23 hours online, hearing evidence from over 20 experts (from academics to local residents), and voted on recommendations they created themselves, five of which received the 80% support needed to become official recommendations.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

Achieving Net Zero requires long-term planning and investment decisions to develop zero carbon infrastructure and avoid carbon lock-in.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

Addressing increasing revenue costs from rising energy prices and a reliance on fossil fuels. It is important that decarbonisation and whole life cycle costs (both financial and carbon) are considered in all capital spending decisions, so that the Council is not locked into new carbon intensive infrastructure with high long-term running costs.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

We are working with partners on climate change in Blaenau Gwent through the Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership Climate Mitigation Steering Group (currently via Local Area Energy Plan workshops) and Gwent Well-being Plan/Climate Ready Gwent. Work on regional projects is already underway, where public bodies in Gwent face similar challenges and can pool resources, such as EV charging and the Gwent Green Grid. Working with Aneurin Leisure and Blaenau Gwent schools whose emissions are part of our carbon footprint.

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

Delivery of transitions cuts across different service areas.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

Direct focus of report.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***

Not required as this is a progress report and does not relate to strategic decisions.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 All Net Zero 2030 actions are built into service area business plans. The Climate Group receives Transition Focuses at their meetings to monitor progress of all transitions in greater detail. These are then included in the Annual Net Zero Report.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 – BGCBC Net Zero Report 2022/23*