

Committee: **Public Services Board Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **25th February 2021**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Climate Mitigation Steering Group**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Nigel Daniels**

Report Submitted by: **Michelle Morris (Managing Director, BGCBC)**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	X	14.02.21			X			PSB SSG

1. Purpose of the Report

To present the establishment of the Blaenau Gwent Climate Mitigation Steering Group established by the PSB.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Climate Change was identified as a priority in the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan 2018 to 2203 under the 'look after and protect the environment' well-being objective. In January 2020 the PSB approved the establishment of a Blaenau Gwent Climate Mitigation Steering Group (Steering Group hereafter) as part of the board's on-going work programme.
- 2.2 Climate mitigation means taking actions that will reduce man-made climate change. This includes both action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (e.g. renewable energy) and to absorb greenhouse gases in to the atmosphere (e.g. planting trees). The role of the Steering Group is to develop a borough wide (or area-based) mitigation plan to keep territorial emissions (all emissions produced within Blaenau Gwent) within a science based carbon budget calculated on the basis of Blaenau Gwent's fair contribution to international climate reduction targets.
- 2.3 The PSB agreed that in the first year the aims should be:
- Steering Group will be established and operating.
 - Science based carbon budget for Blaenau Gwent set.
 - Agree vision/direction of travel.
 - Identify and outline key issues for public engagement in relation to decarbonising in Blaenau Gwent.
- 2.4 The Steering Group, which is being led by the Council's Managing Director, includes strategic decision makers from partner organisations. Following a delay due to COVID-19, the first meeting took place in October 2020 (followed by a second meeting in December 2020). It has been agreed that the Steering Group will initially meet every two months.

- 2.5 Membership is expected to evolve as the Steering Group develops, with community representatives from Blaenau Gwent Youth and 50+ forums attending the second meeting, while representatives of other organisations in sectors who have significant influence on carbon emissions in Blaenau Gwent will be invited to attend in the future.
- 2.6 Topics covered in the initial meetings included: draft terms of reference (see Appendix); the development of the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly; and a Question and Answers session with Professor Andy Gouldson from Leeds University who has been involved with establishing a network of similar climate groups in other local authority areas in the UK.
- 2.7 This year the UK will be hosting the annual COP (Conference of Parties) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); known as the 2015 Paris Agreement, which committed to keep global temperature rises to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with the ambition to limit them to 1.5°C. This target was chosen as an approximate indicator of dangerous levels of climate change. Global average temperatures have already risen by 0.9°C, with further rises inevitable due to carbon already emitted. Therefore, achieving this target requires that emissions peak as soon as possible and reduce rapidly thereafter. This year COP is significant as it is the first five-year review of the Paris Agreement, as part of which, countries are expected to tighten their carbon budgets. The Agreement also encourages local authority areas to set their own carbon budgets.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1**

For the PSB Scrutiny Committee to consider and accept the overview report and supporting appendix on the establishment of the Steering Group.

Option 2

For the PSB Scrutiny Committee to consider the overview report and supporting appendix on the establishment of the Steering Group, and make specific recommendations for the PSB to consider.

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

The work of the PSB Climate Mitigation Steering Group delivers on a key high-level action in the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan. The long-term implications of climate change mean that it is also central to our responsibilities under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. In particular, that in accordance with the Sustainable Development Principle public bodies must 'act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. It will also play an important part in our response to the climate emergency.

5. Implications Against Each Option

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

There is no specific budget for the Steering Group. The intention is that by co-ordinating partners' actions to reduce carbon emissions, the group will reduce costs in the long-term, for example, through avoiding duplication and achieving economies of scale.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

It is recognised that the Steering Group will not have the resources to be the lead delivery body for borough wide climate mitigation, so emissions reductions will ultimately be reliant on the actions of partner organisations and other key bodies and agencies (both public and private). However, currently there is no organisation monitoring either the cumulative impact of local climate actions or how this impact relates to an overall target for the borough. Without the group putting these mechanisms in place, there is a significant risk that the Council and other partners' climate actions will not realise their maximum potential benefit.

5.3 **Legal**

Emissions reductions in Blaenau Gwent contribute to statutory five-year UK climate budgets required by law under the Climate Change Act 2008. So far five UK carbon budgets have been set up to 2032. The Committee on Climate Change has reported that the first and second carbon budget were met and the UK is on track to meet the third (ending 2023), but is not on track to meet the fourth or fifth budgets. Wales has set its own five-year carbon budgets under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, with the third carbon budget running to 2030.

5.4 **Human Resources**

Running the Steering Group will require officer time from the Council and other partner organisations.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

The table below shows the 12-year trend in territorial carbon emissions for Blaenau Gwent as a whole.

Blaenau Gwent	2005 kt CO₂	2017 kt CO₂	Change %
Industry and Commercial	170.7	98.7	-42
Domestic	182.4	107.7	-41
Transport	88.3	79.4	-10
Total	435.7	283	-35

For context, this 35% reduction is greater than the reduction in 70% of UK local authority areas. Emissions per head in Blaenau Gwent are 4.1 tonnes CO₂, the second lowest figure in Wales, well below the Welsh average of 7.9 tonnes CO₂. These figures are based on emissions produced within Blaenau Gwent and partly reflect falling levels of industry.

On an alternative approach of counting emissions on the basis of where they are consumed, Blaenau Gwent emissions per head in 2011 were 10.6 tonnes CO₂e, slightly below the Welsh average of 11.1 tonnes CO₂e. Reflecting both that carbon consumption is much more evenly distributed than production, and the extent to which UK carbon production has been exported overseas.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Supporting public well-being by delivering a just transition for Blaenau Gwent. Responding to climate change does not just mean a technological transition but also a social transition. A just transition means ensuring that the benefits of decarbonisation are fairly distributed and supporting those who may lose out in some changes.

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

A number of partners, including the council, have already run public consultation processes about a range of specific projects and actions aimed at reducing carbon emissions (e.g. location of vehicle charging points), and these types of exercise are likely to continue in the future. However, it is also important that the public are involved in deciding the overall approach to reducing emissions across the borough as a whole. The Steering Group is well placed to carry out this type of public engagement and respond to the findings. In this context, it is important that the engagement does not ask the public to answer technical questions (e.g. *how many solar panels will Blaenau Gwent need?*), and focuses on exploring public opinion about the general principles that will inform these technical decisions (e.g. *what factors should inform planning decisions about where solar panels are located?*). The upcoming Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly in March 2021, which is the first to be held in Wales and is fully funded via the Welsh Government, will provide a good opportunity to start the process of gathering this type of public opinion about climate action in Blaenau Gwent.

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

The work of the Steering Group will facilitate long-term planning by setting a carbon budget for Blaenau Gwent informed by climate science.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

Decisions about infrastructure made now, can commit us to future carbon emissions for many years. This carbon lock-in can also have financial consequences, as we may become tied into purchasing increasingly expensive carbon based power sources and materials. A clear pathway to decarbonisation can help avoid carbon lock-in and prevent future emissions

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Steering Group will enable partners to co-ordinate their actions to maximise impact in areas such as active travel and renewable energy where they form part of larger networks across the borough. It will also compliment working at regional scale, where climate change has been identified as priority, for example Climate Ready Gwent and the Cardiff Capital Region Energy Strategy.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

Carbon reduction also compliments other PSB priorities, such as the foundational economy, in areas such as housing and food.

6.8 ***EqIA***

Poorer neighbourhoods tend to be disproportionately exposed to environmental risks. Likewise, at the individual level many people with one or more protected characteristics are likely to be less able to benefit from new low carbon technology due to the up-front costs, even though they tend to have lower carbon footprints already. Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out as required on specific future climate adaptation projects.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Monitoring arrangements for the Steering Group will align to the existing arrangements in place for all PSB related business for updates and exceptions reports being presented via the lead to the PSB. Furthermore, appropriate monitoring will be considered as part of the forward work programme for the PSB Scrutiny Committee.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Draft Terms of Reference for the Blaenau Gwent Climate Mitigation Steering Group (Appendix 1)*

APPENDIX 1 - Blaenau Gwent PSB Mitigation Steering Group Terms of Reference

Amended Draft following meeting in December 2020

Background and Context

In January 2020 Blaenau Gwent PSB agreed to establish a climate mitigation steering group, to develop a long-term plan covering all carbon emissions in Blaenau Gwent. This reflects PSB partners' long-term commitment to Blaenau Gwent playing its full part in taking action to achieve Wales's target for Net Zero emissions by 2050, consistent with climate science and the Paris Agreement target to limit global average temperature increases to 'well below 2°C', aiming for 1.5°C, relative to pre-industrial temperatures.

Aims of group

- Provide **public leadership** (towards achieving Net Zero) through commitment to a carbon budget for Blaenau Gwent calculated on an agreed methodology reflecting climate science and a fair share of emissions.
- Develop a **plan** to achieve this carbon budget for Blaenau Gwent. Based on identifying common approach to achieving key transitions in Blaenau Gwent, which complement and build upon the planned action within individual organisations and recognising that different emissions sources require action at different levels, from international to local.
- **Provide overview** of how different organisational, sector and regional/national strategies and targets contribute to achieving overall carbon budget for Blaenau Gwent. Enabling partners to understand how their actions contribute to decarbonisation of Blaenau Gwent as a whole. Including, proactively identifying and seeking to address gaps where emissions are not covered by existing strategies.
- **Engage public** in identifying their priorities and preferred approaches to reducing carbon emissions in Blaenau Gwent, and encourage and support action by public to reduce emissions.
- Monitor and **report** on progress of territorial climate emissions reductions in Blaenau Gwent.
- Work towards a **just transition** in Blaenau Gwent by monitoring to ensure benefits of decarbonisation are fairly distributed and identifying how to support those who may lose out from transition.
- To set up supporting arrangements to address key **transitions** as appropriate.

Membership and Meetings

Group Members will include:

- Representatives from PSB organisations who can contribute to strategic decision making about decarbonisation across Blaenau Gwent as a whole.
- Representatives of other organisations who have a central role in delivering key transitions in Blaenau Gwent (e.g. Energy, Transport).

- Experts from within the borough and beyond, who can inform the work of the group.
- Public and community group representatives, including representatives of Blaenau Gwent Youth Forum and 50+ Network.

The group will initially be chaired by a representative of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council as the strategic lead for project, who will appoint a vice-chair.

The group will initially meet every two months.

Group Member Roles and Responsibilities

Key roles and responsibilities will include :

- Represent the views of their organisation, sector or community and engage their organisation, sector or community with climate change and the work of the group.
- Use their experience, knowledge and skills, and commit their time to contribute to the work of the group.
- Actively participate in meetings, preparing in advance and contributing to discussion and sharing ideas.
- Participate in the development and implementation of the group work plan by focusing on the key decisions facing Blaenau Gwent in achieving net zero emissions.

Glossary of Key Terms

Adaptation – Action that helps cope with the effects of climate change - for example construction of barriers to protect against rising sea levels, or conversion to crops capable of surviving high temperatures and drought.

Carbon Budget – the cumulative amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions an area or organisation can emit over a period of time to keep within a certain temperature threshold.

Carbon Emissions/Greenhouse Gasses - Natural and industrial gases that trap heat from the Earth and warm the surface. The Kyoto Protocol restricts emissions of six greenhouse gases: natural (carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane) and industrial (perfluorocarbons, hydrofluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride).

Decarbonisation – Removal of carbon emissions producing processes from a sector or industry. In most areas decarbonisation is known to be technically feasible, but there can be high costs associated with transition to low carbon infrastructure and ways of working.

Just Transition - Decarbonisation is not only a technological transition but also a social transition. A just transition means ensuring that the benefits of decarbonisation are fairly distributed; and supporting those who suffer negative impacts.

Mitigation - Actions that will reduce man-made climate change. This includes both action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (e.g. renewable energy) and to absorb greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (e.g. planting trees).

Net Zero – A condition where there is no net release of CO₂; the amount of carbon taken out of the atmosphere and the amount released are identical.

Paris Agreement - A 2015 agreement setting out how countries will meet their obligations under the international treaty on climate change, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Its central aim is to keep global temperature rise this century well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5°C. All countries must set out their contributions to this target, called Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and local areas are encouraged to set out their own plans.

PSB (Public Services Board) - Brings together public service organisations (including local authority, health board etc.) to improve the well-being of current and future generations in Blaenau Gwent.

Territorial climate emissions – All the climate emissions produced in a specific geographical area, e.g. Blaenau Gwent.

Transition - System transitions are transformative changes in the methods of producing, selling, transporting and using goods and services. An historical example would be the replacement of horse drawn carriages with cars.