

Committee: **Place Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **22 October 2024**

Report Subject: **Climate Change, Net Zero Annual Report 2023/24**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Helen Cunningham, Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member Environment**

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Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
07/10/24					17/10/24	04.12.24		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present the Annual Net Zero Report 2023-24 (Appendix 1) 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.

Net Zero 2030

- 2.2 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 is again significantly higher than our base line 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 3% fall in these emissions compared to last year and a cumulative 19% fall over the four years since our 2019/20 baseline. Part of the reason for a reduced fall in emissions compared to the previous year was that the average carbon intensity of the national grid increased last year after consistent falls. This meant, for example, that although our buildings electricity consumption fell by 4% the related carbon emissions actually increased.

tonnes CO ₂ e/year	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	Change from Base Year	Change from Last Year
Direct Carbon Emissions	14,783	11,818	13,100	12,353	11,946	-19%	-3%

2.5

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.

2.6 Net Zero 2050

We recently adopted our [Net Zero 2050 Framework](#) document outlining what would need to be done to achieve Net Zero 2050 in Blaenau Gwent. The framework is 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 many of our territorial emissions are not within our direct control. The framework describes what needs to be done under each of the four themes to achieve Net Zero in Blaenau Gwent, which is dependent on significant additional resources being available, rather than describing what can be done to maximise carbon reductions within existing resources.

2.7 Wider Context

The UK has achieved its Third Carbon Budget, covering the period 2018 to 2022. The UK has now achieved all three of its carbon budgets to date, and its territorial emissions (excluding international aviation and shipping) are now less than half the levels in 1990.

2.8

The UK has committed to reduce emissions in 2030 by 68% compared to 1990 levels, as its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Agreement. It is the first UK target set in line with Net Zero. Now only six

years away, the country is not on track to hit this target despite a significant reduction in emissions in 2023.

2.9

The main reason for this is that more than half of the emissions reductions over the first three carbon budgets were from energy supply sectors. However, looking forwards the scope for further large carbon savings from the energy sector is more limited as it approaches Net Zero. As a result, more than three quarters of the required emissions reductions for the next three carbon budgets are expected to come from other sectors. In particular, contributions from transport, buildings, agriculture and land will need to accelerate fast as they are not currently reducing at a sufficient rate to meet the 2030 carbon budget.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Option One

That the Committee considers the progress made and recommends to the Cabinet that the report is published on the Council's Website.

Option Two

That the Committee considers the progress made and provides specific recommendations to the Cabinet prior to the report being published.

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 1.

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.

Furthermore, working with Aneurin Leisure Trust and Blaenau Gwent schools is crucial as their 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 a strategic decision.

7. *Monitoring Arrangements*

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

The carbon footprint data is presented to Welsh Government, along with other public service organisations, each year.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 Net Zero Annual Report 2023-24*