

## **Report of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Climate Change Standing Overview Group of 25 October 2022**

### **1. Introduction**

The Standing Overview Group of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee meets regularly as an informal information sharing and member development session where issues are presented to the councillors to raise awareness and increase knowledge. The Standing Overview Group considers key updates and pertinent issues from across different services, with the aim of developing Members' knowledge, and bringing to the forefront any areas which may benefit from further scrutiny.

Any action points arising from the sessions are reported back to the next formal Committee meeting.

This report outlines the topic(s) covered at the meeting of 25 October 2022, highlights the key points raised during discussion and details any agreed actions.

### **2. Recommendation(s)**

The Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee accepts this report as an accurate record of the meeting.

### **3. Attendance**

Councillors: A Dewhurst (Chair), C Slade (Vice Chair), Y Atkinson, J Berry, M Asvachin, J Hodgson, I Roome

Officers: Dan Meek (Director of Estates and Valuation & County Land Agent), Annette Dentith (Principal Waste Manager, DCC), Wendy Barratt (County Waste Manager, DCC) and Doug Eltham (Environment and Sustainability Policy Officer)

Scrutiny Officer: Fred Whitehouse

### **4. Summary of Discussion**

#### **4.1 Socioeconomic impacts of climate change on the farming sector**

Members received a presentation from Dan Meek on the socioeconomic impacts of climate change followed by discussion / Q&A.

Key points from the presentation included:

- agriculture alone accounts for around 9% of the total UK emissions, i.e. 46MtCO<sub>2</sub>e (million tons CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent). A large proportion of this is the production of methane by ruminant livestock; and the release of nitrous oxide due to high or inefficient fertiliser use.

- The impacts of climate change on the farming sector are varied, and include:
  - Flooding and droughts; namely changes in weather and increased occurrences of extreme weather events risking crops, including reducing the amount of time per year that crops can be grown. This could contribute to food shortages or limit the range of food that can be grown for much of the year.
  - Pests and diseases; for instance, the continued prevalence of avian flu in the UK (previously considered a seasonal biosecurity risk) has been linked with changes to the climate. Warmer weather is also likely to increase the survivability of pests and diseases in winter and negatively impact livestock, including causing heat stress and therefore reducing milk production, as an example.
  - Accelerated changes in food consumption behaviour; with the UK's Climate Change Committee (CCC) aiming to reduce consumption of meat and dairy, and more investment going into meat and dairy replacement products, there is likely to be less demand for these foodstuffs which may force farmers to diversify more. Since 2008 meat and dairy production has reduced by 36%, a trend that is likely to continue.
  - Changes in, and competing for, land use; as more land is used for environmental projects such as solar farms and carbon offsetting via sequestration, this will reduce the amount of available land for farmers to use for more traditional agricultural purposes.

Discussion points after the presentation included:

- The potential role of hydroponics (growing plants without using soil, by feeding them on mineral nutrient salts dissolved in water) in agriculture. Members were advised that interest in the area was definitely growing and that future investment may well be seen in this area, where urban areas were already seeing an uptick in 'vertical farming' using this method. However, given the rural nature of Devon, demographic and population considerations, and the particular grade of most of Devon's land (being most suitable for animals and livestock), as well as hydroponics being very investment cost-heavy, this may not be a suitable route for the county.
- The use of pesticides. There was immense pressure on the Government to ban neonicotinoids; as well as pressure on the County Council to do the same with glyphosate.
- The importance of balancing climate considerations and sustainable farming alongside ensuring farmer livelihoods are protected. It was

stressed to Members that it was not being advocated to get rid of all carbon emitters and that despite the focus on ensuring farms are as net-zero as possible, there is a recognition that a significant amount of carbon produced from agriculture would need to be offset.

- The Farms Estate is trying to procure funding to do a full carbon and natural capital assessment to inform how close it was to achieving net-zero and illuminate in more detail the actions required to get there.

#### **4.2 Carbon impact of the Waste Management**

Members received a briefing paper and presentation on the Carbon impact of the Waste Management Service, led by Annette Dentith and Wendy Barratt. This was followed by a discussion.

Key points from the presentation included:

- The carbon impact of Waste Management is small compared to other areas with the waste hierarchy (reduce, reuse, recycle, dispose) incorporating actions that naturally reduce carbon emissions.
- Devon is largely meeting the targets set by the CCC around the reduction of all waste including food and that going to landfill, an increase in recycling and using anaerobic digestion for food waste.
- Devon is the second-best performing county in England for recycling, having been at approximately 55% recycling since around 2010.
- The Devon Carbon Plan includes proposals for waste such as:
  - encouraging behaviour changes;
  - community projects such as repair cafés and community fridges;
  - embedding local social and environmental value into tendering procedures; and
  - creating a sustainability strategy for local policy makers to reduce, reuse, recycle and recover resources.
- The Waste Management team undertake lots of campaign work such as their most recent Halloween campaign work which aimed to encourage people to use, rather than dispose, of their pumpkin innards.
- Eunomia had been commissioned to undertake work to look at the carbon impact of the Devon districts; their results founds that 'reuse', 'dry recyclables' and 'organics' were all a net benefits to carbon (carbon-negative); and that when including HWRCs (Household Waste and Recycling Centres), the total net impact of consumption-based emissions is carbon-negative. However the measurements used must be of territorial-based emissions which means that any reuse and recycling done outside of Devon, which is the vast majority of it, cannot be included in calculations.

- Work had also been commissioned for the University of Exeter to look at the county's energy from waste plants and ascertain how emissions from these plants could be reduced. A number of suggestions were made including reducing the amount of plastics in residual waste which the Devon waste management service has been prioritising. Government policy such as the Plastic Tax should also help this.
- Waste analysis work is currently ongoing, the results of which will illuminate further the impact of the service's efforts to reduce recyclable materials such as plastic in residual waste.

In the discussion, key points that arose were:

- District heating, whereby areas are heated by residual energy / heat produced from the waste management system, and its current limitations. More specifically, more funding would help in developing the infrastructure as well as the Government implementing stronger policy that would mandate the use of district heating by developers.
- White goods; Members queried where these fit into the system. Large white goods are generally recycled at HWRCs, and smaller white goods were encompassed in WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) recycling whereby these are collected and the metals inside extracted for reuse. This is a producer compliance scheme meaning that this does not come out of the public purse.
- Anaerobic digestion; sludge (sewage byproduct) is currently anaerobically digested by Southwest Water, where Devon primarily anaerobically digests slurry and food waste.

Councillor A Dewhirst  
Chair, Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee

Electoral Divisions: All

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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

Nil

The meeting began at 2.01pm and ended at 4.03pm.