

## Partnership Council for Wales – 25<sup>th</sup> November 2024 – WLGA Climate Change Support Programme Update

### Purpose

1. This report provides an update on the work of the five task and finish groups established by the Climate Strategy Panel (CSP), supported by WLGA's Climate Change Programme<sup>1</sup>. It identifies progress against the 'public sector route map to net zero'<sup>2</sup> and commitments in the 'Net Zero Wales' carbon reduction plan for Carbon budget 2 for 2021-25 (see Appendix 1). It also looks ahead to the support councils will need during Carbon Budget 3 (2026-30).

### Summary

2. The key points in this paper are as follows:
  - All four decarbonisation task and finish groups set up by the CSP have made good progress against the commitments made. A range of support has been provided, with good engagement from councils.
  - This has helped councils move along the route map for the public sector. However, progress is not uniform and take-up of available support and sharing of good practice needs to be encouraged. Only then will we be able to start to match the criteria for being 'well on our way' in the 2022-26 phase of the route map.
  - Increased focus has been given to adaptation (including service and community resilience to climate change risks). Councils fed into the Welsh Government's recently launched adaptation strategy and will continue to support with its implementation.
  - A range of other cross-cutting work and bespoke support to local authorities has been provided and examples are given in the report.
  - With Welsh Government funding for the WLGA programme due to end next March, Partnership Council is asked to consider extending the programme for a further period. It will provide continued assistance for councils on their path to 2030, including inputting to plans for Carbon Budget 3 and (ii) looking at community mitigation and adaptation measures linked to Wales' and the UK's wider 2050 net zero target.
  - Other forms of support (e.g. from the Low Carbon Heat Grant and the Welsh Government Energy Service) will continue to be important too.

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government has been providing support to enable WLGA to deliver a Climate Change Support Programme since 2021, with annual allocation of between c£300,000 to £360,000.

<sup>2</sup> [Net zero carbon status by 2030: A route map for decarbonisation across the Welsh public sector](#) . The route map sets out three phases identifying where public bodies should aim to be at each stage as follows: 'moving up a gear' (from 2021-2022); 'well on our way' (2022-2026) and 'achieving our goal' (2026-2030).

## **Background**

3. Since the last report to Partnership Council (March 2024), each group (chaired by a council Chief Executive) has reported to the main CSP on progress against their respective Net Zero Wales commitments. A headline summary of progress is included below.

## **Progress against commitments**

### **(a) Procurement**

4. Progress to report on procurement has been as follows:
  - Researching social care decarbonisation including analysing spend data and emissions hotspots and investigating approaches. Guidance will be developed on targeted strategies for emissions reductions including best practice case studies.
  - Researching and supporting the use of Carbon Reduction Plans including reviewing existing guidance and challenges, engaging with policy stakeholders, and developing new guidance for councils and their suppliers. This new guidance will include effective supplier engagement practices and value in emissions reporting.
    - Five local authorities are participating over these two work-streams which will report in Quarter 4 of 2024-25: Newport, Powys, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, and Bridgend.
  - Mapping net zero activity and tools across local authorities to aid collaboration, avoid duplication and inform the future workplan.
  - Engaging with Welsh Government (Commercial Procurement and Public Sector Decarbonisation) on key work areas including the Welsh Procurement Policy Note 06/21 and moving to tier 2 carbon reporting.
  - Presenting the work of the group at the 'Procurex Wales' collaborative event (5<sup>th</sup> November 2024).
5. The work of the group led to a review of the commitments made in NZ Wales, resulting in an increased focus on procurement linked to social care. In relation to the route map, partial progress has been made but emerging good practice amongst those 'well on our way' needs to be shared and spread before councils can claim to be 'achieving our goal'.

### **(b) Transport**

6. Progress to report on transport has been as follows:
  - A Grey Fleet Process Map has been produced by Grant Thornton to support councils with their grey fleet (personal vehicles driven for business purposes)

transition to electric vehicles and other forms of active and sustainable travel.

- A sustainable travel hierarchy resource has been developed for WLGA by Welsh Government Energy Service with Energy Savings Trust to promote the co-benefits of active and sustainable travel and suggest ways in which councils' business travel and staff commuting can be reduced or swapped to more sustainable modes. Three local authorities are highlighted in the case studies: Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, and Bridgend.
- Welsh Government Energy Service's annual report 2023-24 includes case studies on local authorities' collaborative procurement for electric vehicles (originally brokered by the CSP) and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's electric fleet.
- As an average across local authorities, close to 10% of the fleet is now EVs. However, progress differs between councils and vehicle types. For example, heavy commercial and refuse collection vehicles have a much lower adoption rate than cars and light vans. WGES are now providing six-monthly reports to monitor change.

7. The above developments demonstrate good progress against the commitments in NZ Wales. They have also provided councils with support to help them advance along the 'route map' but progress now depends, to an extent, on take-up of the support that is available.

### **(c) Buildings**

8. Progress to report on buildings has been as follows:

- A quantitative piece of research is concluding with Local Partnerships (LP), commissioned jointly by Welsh Government and WLGA. This is collating a wide range of data on councils' buildings, fleet and street lighting and producing a Net Zero Scenario Planner with capital costs for each local authority to aid strategic decisions relating to decarbonisation.
  - All 22 local authorities submitted data covering a total of 4,368 sites.
  - The capital cost of delivering decarbonisation, insulation and renewable energy would be more than £1 billion [£1,059.7 million].
  - Currently, exploring data sharing between this survey and Welsh Government's assessment of the education estate in Wales.
- A qualitative piece of research on the decarbonisation of public sector buildings by Miller Research for WLGA considering the scale and progress of councils' actions to rationalise and decarbonise their buildings.
  - 20 local authorities participated.
- 54 low carbon heat projects for 11 local authorities reached financial close in 2023-24 (£16.3m investment, £14.8m of which through Welsh Government's Low Carbon Heat Grant – originally brokered by the CSP).

- In 2023-24, 42 projects for 19 local authorities supported by Welsh Government Energy Service.
  - Case studies include photovoltaic programme in schools (Torfaen); installation of heat pumps in council offices (Isle of Anglesey); heat pumps in schools (Carmarthenshire); and electric fleet (Merthyr Tydfil).
9. Progress is behind schedule in relation to the NZ Wales commitment to develop a strategic plan. However, used together, the Miller Research and LP work will now enable such a strategy to be developed. The Low Carbon Heat Grant has enabled several councils to switch key buildings to low carbon forms of heat, with valuable learning in the process. However, the scale of work required is vast compared to the funding available. It is clear work will need to be prioritised and linked to estate rationalisation plans. Good progress has been made in relation to low carbon heating under the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme for new/refurbished schools. Overall, whilst some areas are 'well on their way' there is still a lot more work and investment needed if we are to 'achieve our goal' as per the route map.

#### **(d) Land use**

10. Progress to report on land use has been as follows:

- The Land Use Digital Mapping Tool, to help councils understand the carbon sequestration impact of their land holdings and the potential to improve it, is being updated following the initial pilots and feedback.
  - This will be followed by the provision of technical training on the use of the Geographic Information System (GIS) tool to all local authorities, delivered for WLGA by Costain and DataMapWales.
  - The programme is promoting land carbon management training to senior, policy and specialist services managers which will take place during Quarter 4 of 2024-25, delivered for WLGA by Netherwood Sustainable Futures.
  - The group is advocating to Welsh Government for further involvement in the Net Zero Skills agenda in terms of policy direction and Sector Roadmaps.
11. The group has addressed and made good ground on all the commitments in NZ Wales, with ongoing work to raise awareness of, and encourage action on land-based carbon sequestration. NRW (represented on the group) are taking forward work on peatland restoration and associated training. Whilst this needs to be embedded in councils before it can be claimed we are 'well on our way', the building blocks are now in place.

## **(e) Adaptation**

12. Progress to report on adaptation has been as follows:

- The task and finish group has contributed to the recently launched Welsh Government Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales 2024, including the key actions being taken by local government (see Appendix 1).
- The sub-group is developing a range of local government commitments in the same vein as the Net Zero ones. These commitments will be presented to Leaders for endorsement and inform the future work programme in this area.
- Taking forward recommendations on adaptation from a report prepared for WLGA by Miller Research on Local Government progress with the delivery of climate change activities.
- Developing and delivering an adaptation session for Wales Climate Week (11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> November 2024), sharing early examples of practices in Wales.

## **(f) Cross-cutting work and bespoke support to local authorities**

13. Progress to report on wider work has been as follows:

- Supporting a net zero 2030 review by the Isle of Anglesey County Council, delivered by Netherwood Sustainable Futures. The review includes an analysis of existing corporate documents and 1:1 discussion with a range of senior managers and will make recommendations for delivery over 2025-2030.
- Streamlining Ambition North Wales's earlier work on reducing emissions and supporting biodiversity with North Wales Growth Deal projects into a business case methodology for all local authorities. Training, covering an introductory session and more detailed sessions for contributors and approvers of business cases, is being delivered over October and November 2024 in association with Arup and Grant Thornton.
- Providing the Vale of Glamorgan Council with land carbon management training, delivered by Netherwood Sustainable Futures, which brought together a range of senior reporting officers to discuss managing the council's green spaces to support net zero.
- Current bespoke support work with Carmarthenshire County Council (sustainable travel related to estate re-organisation) and Torfaen County Borough Council (developing land use recommendations based on ecological assessments to inform asset management strategy).
- In conjunction with the Wales Centre for Public Policy, we have published 'A local authority-led transition to net zero' review. The resource focuses on two principal areas: how local authorities can prioritise action on climate change; and innovative financing solutions to support local authorities to transition to net zero. The content of the review will be included in future leadership sessions through this programme to facilitate further discussion with councils.

## **Working towards the 2030 public sector net zero ambition and Carbon Budget 3**

14. In all these areas of work progress, then, is being made both against the NZ Wales commitments that were signed up to by councils and the 'route map'. Further progress will continue to be challenging considering budgetary constraints all councils face. However, some of the measures can save money and/or generate income over their lifetime, as well as opportunities through collaborative procurement, and these are key messages to local authorities through this programme.
15. A business case for continued funding for the WLGA Climate Change Support Programme is currently being developed for submission to Welsh Government. It includes provision to enable WLGA to continue its support for the work of the five groups. It will include a proposed budget so that further work can be commissioned where identified as necessary and useful by councils. That might be for all 22 councils (and, where appropriate, National Park Authorities) or for individual councils/groups of councils where lessons learned can be shared with all. In each case, the groups will continue to offer support (i) on the path to 2030, including inputting to the planning for Carbon Budget 3 and (ii) looking at the community mitigation and adaptation requirements linked to Wales' and the UK's wider 2050 net zero target.
16. Continued support for councils via other means, such as another year of financial support from the Low Carbon Heat Grant and the ongoing assistance provided by the Welsh Government Energy Service, will be equally important. Likewise, following Welsh Government's funding for Local Area Energy Plans to be developed in all 22 council areas over the last year, it is critical that ways of advancing those plans are agreed. The decarbonisation of energy supplies and improved access to green energy supply throughout Wales will underpin efforts to move towards net zero in councils' transport, buildings, land, and efforts to procure from low carbon and local suppliers. In taking those plans forward, though, the resilience of supply must be at the forefront of thinking, with adaptation requirements applying to our future energy generation and distribution as much as all other areas (e.g. future proofing for severe weather events).

### **Recommendation**

17. It is recommended that Partnership Council notes the progress made by the CSP task and finish groups and signals its support for continuation of the WLGA Climate Change Support Programme as set out in paras 15 and 16, given that current funding comes to an end next March.

## APPENDIX 1 – Local government commitments

The commitments made by local government and included in Net Zero Wales are shown in the table below.

Net Zero Wales LG Commitments
<b>Buildings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Develop and deliver a strategic plan for decarbonising local authority estate.</li></ul> <p><u>Ystadau</u> Cymru as strategic lead;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Strategic plan for decarbonising buildings by end of 2023.</li><li>- All public buildings supplied with low carbon heat by 2030.</li><li>- All new public sector buildings are built to net zero standard.</li></ul>
<b>Procurement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Develop understanding of emissions profile of all procured goods and services by end of 2022.</li><li>- Carbon reduction specifications in all new or reviewed contracts.</li><li>- Focus on a number of priority contracts and share learning re. decarb across LAs by end 2022 – to develop a decarb approach to be applied to all contracts by 2023.</li></ul>
<b>Mobility &amp; Transport</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Build on fleet reviews and develop plans for transforming fleet, inc. EV charging infrastructure, all new cars and light goods vehicles ULEV by 2025, reduce carbon footprint of buses, taxis and private hire vehicles to zero by 2030.</li><li>- Grey fleet review to be completed by end of 2022 (working with WGES)</li><li>- Support remote working where possible, at home or in hubs. Encourage active travel and public transport.</li></ul>
<b>Land Use</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Map out local authority land holdings by April 2022 to identify types of land and their potential for carbon sequestration, renewable energy and flood management.</li><li>- Carbon sequestration seen as a core purpose for public land by leaders.</li><li>- Develop 5 year training and apprenticeship programme and peatland restoration to support the supply chain.</li></ul>

## Adaptation

The Adaptation task and finish group, which held its first meeting in March 2024, is supporting the delivery of the Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales 2024 through four areas of focus:

1. Partnership and Collaboration
2. Service Resilience
3. Community Resilience
4. Leadership