

**Environment and
Sustainable Communities
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

20 January 2023

**Ecological Emergency
Update**



**Report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate
Change**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of Environment and Sustainable Communities (ESCOSC) with a progress update regarding the Ecological Emergency strategy and action plan.

Executive summary

- 2 Following a request from Cabinet at its meeting on 13 October 2021 the ESCOSC undertook two Special meetings to consider if Durham County Council (DCC) should declare an ecological emergency.
- 3 The committee agreed at its special meeting on the 14 February 2022, having considered detailed information from the Neighbourhoods and Climate Change Service Grouping and from key partners on the biodiversity decline in various habitats and species across the county, to recommend, that DCC declare an ecological emergency.
- 4 In addition, members of the committee agreed that the following additional recommendations would be made to Cabinet:
 - a) That Durham County Council develops an Ecological Emergency Response Plan to address both how the council will revise its own practices, and also how it will work with the wider community to tackle the ecological emergency. Producing the Ecological Emergency Response Plan will involve conducting a fully detailed cross service review to identify actions (with associated costs) and targets to be undertaken by DCC with relevant partners (a similar process was

undertaken in relation to the development of the Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP)).

- b) That the Ecological Emergency Response Plan is a standalone plan initially, and then over time as it develops, is merged with the Climate Emergency Response Plan.
 - c) To progress the development of the plan, Cabinet ensures that best ecological practice is integrated across all Council services and in doing so considers the inclusion of ecology in the implications sheet that accompanies all DCC committee reports.
 - d) When declaring an ecological emergency, the need for engagement and consultation should be articulated and request that the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change:
 - i. Raise awareness of biodiversity decline in County Durham and promote various educational activities undertaken by DCC, partners and community groups to tackle this issue.
 - ii. Ensure engagement with community and special interest groups and interested individuals, as part of any consultation arrangements and in relation to the future development and delivery of the action plan.
 - e) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives regular updates on the progression of the plan and once developed, monitors progress against the actions and targets contained in the plan, on a regular basis.
 - f) That the review of the progress made against the recommendations contained in this report will be undertaken six months after the report is considered by Cabinet.
- 5 It was recognised by Members that work was ongoing in relation to the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and that the committee would need to be kept updated on its progress.
- 6 At its meeting on 14 December 2022 Cabinet received an initial Strategy and Action Plan for Council activities in response to the declaration of an ecological emergency by Cabinet and the additional recommendations included in the ESCOSC report considered by Cabinet at the meeting on the 6 April 2022.
- 7 The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on the 14 December 2022 is attached as appendix 2 for members consideration.

Recommendations

- 8 That Members of ESCOSC:

- a) Receive the report and the attached Cabinet report at appendix 2 and provide comment on the progress made on the strategy and action plan.
- b) That a further progress update is scheduled to come to a future meeting of the committee.
- c) That the committee also receives progress updates on the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy with the first update scheduled for the ESCOSC on the 12 May 2023.

Background

- 9 Cabinet at its meeting on the 13 October 2021, considered a report on the international and national declines in natural habitats and species. The report requested that scrutiny undertake a review and that an initial report came back to Cabinet within six months, making a recommendation in relation to a declaration of an ecological emergency.
- 10 The ESC OSC agreed at its meeting on the 24 November 2021 to add this review activity to its current work programme and that two special meetings of the committee would be held where members would be provided with evidence of biodiversity decline at an international, national, regional and local level.
- 11 At the special meeting of the ESC OSC held on the 14 February having considered the information provided in the detailed report and supporting presentation from the Service Grouping, together with the additional detail provided in presentations from key partners, members were asked to consider their recommendation to Cabinet concerning declaration.
- 12 The ESCOSC recognised the natural assets and accomplishments, but utilising evidence such as condition of designated semi-natural habitats in County Durham, data from Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and Water Framework Directive (WFD), data on surface waters as well as atlases produced by relevant specialists, concluded that many of our habitats and species are in decline, mirroring international and national trends.
- 13 Members of the ESC OSC agreed at the meeting held on the 14 February 2022 to recommend that DCC declare an Ecological Emergency and that further additional recommendations be made to Cabinet as outlined in paragraph four above.
- 14 At the meeting of Cabinet on 6 April 2022 having considered the report from the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and

Scrutiny Committee it was agreed that an Ecological Emergency for County Durham would be declared, and it was requested that an initial action plan on Council activities in response to the declaration and the further additional recommendations be provided within six months. The report attached at appendix 2 responds to that request and was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 14 December 2022.

Conclusion

- 15 The report and initial action plan at appendix two addresses key areas of County Council activity required to deliver against an ecological emergency drawing across all Council services that impact and can influence the state of our environment.

Background papers

- [Consideration of an Ecological Emergency in County Durham Cabinet 13 October 2021](#)
- [Declaration of an Ecological Emergency Cabinet 6 April 2022](#)
- [Appendix 2: ESCOSC Consideration of an Ecological Emergency Cabinet 6 April 2022](#)
- [Ecological Emergency: Outline Strategy and Action Plan Cabinet 14 December 2022](#)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

This is a key issue addressed in the report.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable