

## Adapting to Climate Change in Stockton on Tees

The effects of climate change and extreme weather events pose a very tangible threat to the infrastructure and environment within the Borough of Stockton on Tees.

Stockton relies heavily on its industrial heritage which has long provided economic stability for the area. More recently a growing culture and tourist industry has sprung up with the hugely successful Stockton Riverside Festival, and Take to the Tees events. The Borough also comprises valuable areas of biodiversity with important wetland areas, nature reserves and an RSPB centre thriving alongside the chemical industries of the Tees estuary.

Stockton Borough Council recognises the importance of forging a robust climate change adaptation action plan, which will not only create a plan of adaptive action for its own service delivery, but would form part of a Tees Valley wide approach to climate change adaptation.

**NI188 – Planning to Adapt to Climate Change.** NI188 is a National Indicator calling for local authorities to report on their preparedness to manage the risks to service delivery, local infrastructure, local communities, businesses and residents, associated with a changing climate.

Local Authorities are required to report the level they have achieved each year from a baseline of Level 0 through to Level 4.

Reporting is via a self assessment matrix and is submitted to Defra at the end of each financial year. The first submission of NI188 was in 2009 and reported on action up to the end of March 2009.

The following is a brief overview of the steps Stockton Borough Council took to achieve Level 3 reporting on NI188 Planning to Adapt to Climate Change.

## **Baseline, Level 0 - Getting Started**

*“The Authority has begun the process of assessing the potential threats and opportunities across its estate and services (for example, flood and coastal resilience plans, emergency planning, community risk registers/strategies etc) and has identified and agreed the next steps to build on that assessment in a systematic and coordinated way<sup>1</sup>.”*

Active buy-in from the outset was essential for the acceptance of the need for adaptive capacity building across the council. Stockton Borough Council already had a well established Carbon Management Team, made up from managers from all service areas. Monthly meetings are held to drive forward the delivery of the carbon management plan. It was decided to continue to use this group of well embedded and climate change aware people to communicate the need for adaptive measures to run alongside mitigation.

In addition we sought the active involvement of the Policy Performance Management Team and our Cabinet Member for the Environment.

The Policy Performance Team assist and advise the Corporate Management Team and Service Groupings in developing and delivering effective policies and strategies in support of the Council's overall aims and objectives.

To give a more rounded view of how the processes of NI188 still to be addressed could be implemented within the council structure, progress made so far was reviewed against the remaining requirements for NI188 by the Environmental Policy Team and the Policy and Performance Team. An action plan and implementation time-scale was then devised.



### **Extend learning resources and workshops beyond the ‘usual suspects’**

Inviting the Cabinet Member for the Environment and members of the Policy Performance Team to attend the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) NI188 workshops helped them gain a much better understanding of both climate change adaptation and the processes of NI188. Which in turn helped the process of embedding adaptation policy across council strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> LRAP Guidance Notes for NI188

## Level 1: Public commitment and prioritised risk-based assessment

*“The Authority has made a public commitment to identify and manage climate related risk. It has undertaken a local risk-based assessment of significant vulnerabilities and opportunities to weather and climate, both now and in the future. It can demonstrate a sound understanding of those not yet addressed in existing strategies and actions (e.g. in land use planning documents, service delivery plans, flood and coastal resilience plans, emergency planning, community risk registers/strategies etc ). It has communicated these potential vulnerabilities and opportunities to department/service heads and other local partners and has set out the next steps in addressing them.”*

### Develop an informative Local Climate Impact Profile

Stockton’s Local Climate Impact Assessment has proved a very useful tool for highlighting the local impacts of climate change and extreme weather events. It has been invaluable during engagement with schools, community groups, Local Strategic Partners and businesses as well as the Council’s own officers and cabinet members.

The Stockton LCLIP was conducted following the UKCIP guidance. Evidence from the North East Climate Change report was also used, as were results from a locally based questionnaire examining the public perceptions of climate change.

The Stockton LCLIP contains –

- *Database of local climate impacts over the past decade*
- *Local perception of climate change*
- *Predicted climate change for the Tees Valley*



#### Use your LCLIP

The Stockton LCLIP was used to put forward a presentation to Service Heads and the Senior Management Team at a Climate Change stakeholder event. Real weather events from the LCLIP were used as a focal point for Department and Service Heads to assess potential threats to their own service delivery during a workshop exercise. The information gathered from this stakeholder event was used to inform a Climate Impact Risk Assessment for each service area.

The populist view is that people don’t appreciate that climate change is happening and that people don’t feel it is having an impact on their local area or lifestyle, and that effects won’t be felt for many years to come. However our Stockton survey suggests that residents **do** perceive climate change to be a real local threat that is happening now. Two thirds of respondents were concerned about climate change in Stockton and strongly believe (92%) that something can be done about it, with the main responsibility falling on national government.

## Level 2: Comprehensive risk-based assessment and prioritised action in some areas

*The Authority has undertaken a comprehensive risk based assessment of vulnerabilities to weather and climate, both now and in the future, and has identified priority risks for its services. It has identified the most effective adaptive responses and has started incorporating these in council strategies, plans, partnerships and operations (such as planning, flood management, economic development, social care, services for children, transport etc). It has begun implementing appropriate adaptive responses in some priority areas. In its role as a community leader the council has started working with its LSP encouraging identification of major weather and climate vulnerabilities and opportunities that affect the delivery of the LSP's objectives.*

### Developing a Risk Based Assessment

A stakeholder workshop was held which was attended by senior managers and heads of service. They were given weather scenarios based on real severe weather events which had recently affected Stockton. Each was asked to address how each impact would affect their own service delivery, and what adaptive actions they felt needed to be taken, both short term and long term.

Feedback from the workshop identified priority risks and adaptive actions which lead to the completion of a bespoke risk based assessment for each service area within the Council, covering risks to staff welfare, public health and liability, infrastructure and financial impacts of changing service delivery. What was immediately evident from the workshop is that many managers and heads of service are much more comfortable with viewing adaptation as a risk management procedure rather than a climate change issue.

The same workshop format was used to engage with our Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP), encouraging partners to focus on how weather events and climate change would impact their own business, service or community group.

This service specific risk assessment was then used as the focus for meetings with senior managers and service heads to agree upon priority actions for immediate consideration, as well as future risks and appropriate adaptive actions which were to be included in the Adaptation Action Plan.



### Promote active engagement in all areas

By actively engaging all service areas in the action and target setting process ensures that adaptive actions are realistic, and deliverable. Additionally it ensures that service areas will take ownership of the delivery of their own actions, and helps the embedding of adaptation into business plans and service improvement plans.

### **Level 3: Comprehensive action plan and prioritised action in all priority areas**

*“The Authority has embedded climate impacts and risks across council decision making. It has developed a comprehensive adaptation action plan to deliver the necessary steps to achieve the existing objectives set out in council strategies, plans, investment decisions and partnership arrangements in light of projected climate change and is implementing appropriate adaptive responses in all priority areas. This includes leadership and support for LSPs in taking a risk based approach to managing major weather and climate vulnerabilities/opportunities across the wider local authority area.”*

Stockton Borough Council's Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan consists of four main objective areas; and details action, roles & responsibilities, and timescales for each objective.

- Objective 1: Minimising Flood Risk in Stockton-on-Tees.
- Objective 2: Adapting Stockton's Built Environment to improve resilience to a changing climate
- Objective 3: Managing and enhancing Stockton's green infrastructure to improve resilience to a changing climate
- Objective 4: Resilience Planning and Community Awareness Raising.

Once priority adaptive actions had been agreed upon and included in the Adaptation Action Plan they also began to be included in to business continuity plans and individual service improvement plans.

The Adaptation Action Plan was designed to be an integral part of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan and actions to adapt to climate change sit directly alongside carbon mitigation actions.

The Climate Change Action Plan also sits within the Tees Valley Climate Change Strategy and, together with the four other local authorities who make up the Tees Valley Climate Change Partnership – Middlesbrough, Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland and Hartlepool - Stockton Borough Council is working towards a strategic Tees Valley approach to the challenges of climate change.