

Research on the impact of the COVID -19 pandemic and a shift to more agile working, on Public Health Wales' Carbon Footprint

Introduction:

Climate change is the biggest threat facing humanity and disproportionately affects disadvantaged and vulnerable populations.

In Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations Act places a duty on health boards and public bodies to contribute to national well-being goals for a healthier, more equal and prosperous Wales.

The Welsh Government published a NHS Wales Decarbonisation Strategic Delivery Plan in 2021, to support achieving a carbon neutral public sector by 2030.

The COVID-19 pandemic required a significant response from Public Health Wales and led to a large proportion of staff becoming permanently home-based.

Aim:

To calculate Public Health Wales' 2019/20 and 2020/21 carbon footprints to identify the impact of the pandemic and shift to more agile working on our carbon emissions.

Methodology:

- Business/site and travel emissions were calculated using internal data.
- A staff survey was undertaken to capture home working and commuting emissions.
- The study focused on; Procurement, Travel, Homeworking and Business/Site emissions.

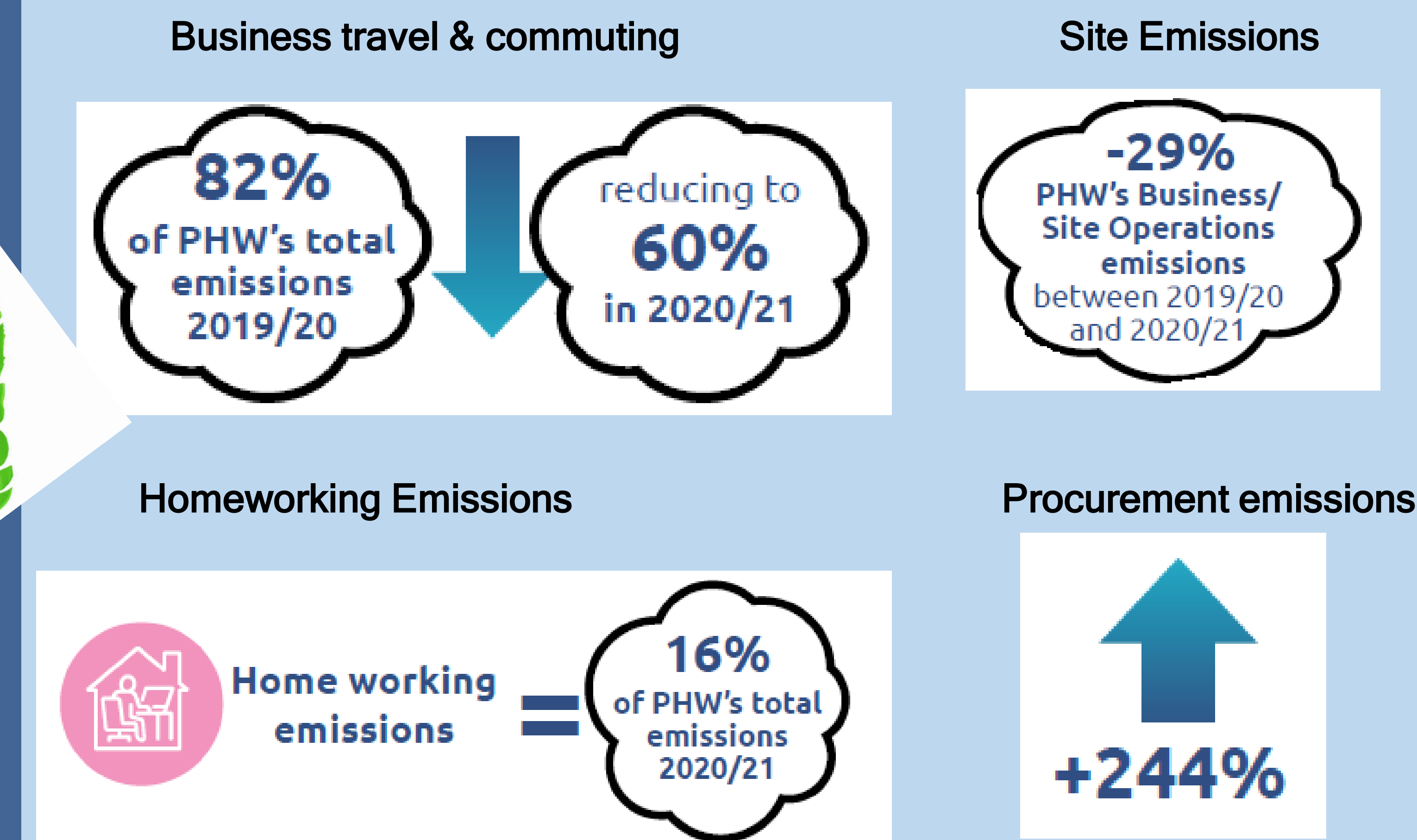


Results:

Comparing 2019/20 with 2020/21 Public Health Wales' emissions increased significantly, by 161%.

This was due to the increased procurement spend during 2020/21 linked to our response to the pandemic.

Excluding procurement, Public Health Wales' overall emissions reduced by 48%.



Key Recommendations:

- Where possible, look to reduce unnecessary travel
- Encourage staff to use public transport, and/or active travel options for commuting where possible
- Increase the proportion of energy sourced from green/renewable tariffs
- Conduct further research to better understand commuting and business travel emissions
- Include emissions from the use of all public transport modes

Conclusion:

Reducing emissions, and our impact on climate change will have a positive impact on health inequalities.

COVID-19 has been a wake up call for humanity, bringing incredible challenges and exposing inequalities in our economy and society. It has also sparked a renewed focus for sustainability, allowing us an opportunity to re-evaluate the way we work.

The health sector has a key role to play in addressing the climate emergency.

As a National Public Health Institute in Wales, we have a requirement to lead by example, as well as collaborate with other health boards and trusts to achieve an 'All Wales' approach to reducing emissions.

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