

Divisions Affected - All

Performance Scrutiny Committee – 11 March 2021

Climate Action Update

Report by Jane Portman, Senior Responsible Officer Climate Action and Corporate Director

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Performance Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to
 - (a) note the publication of the council's Climate Action framework in response to the climate emergency declaration
 - (b) note the progress made in delivering the Climate Action Programme.

Executive Summary

2. In response to the climate emergency, Oxfordshire County Council has committed to:
 - transform our organisation to be zero-carbon by 2030
 - work within our wider sphere of influence to enable a zero-carbon Oxfordshire by 2050.
3. A Climate Action Framework has been developed to guide the mobilisation of a cross-organisational Climate Action Programme. The framework recognises zero carbon as integral to the council's 're-start, re-cover, re-new' post-COVID approach, underpinning resilient and future-proofed communities, infrastructure and economy.
4. Progress has been made in the delivery of the Climate Action Programme, across its three areas: becoming a climate neutral council, operating at net-zero carbon by 2030 and enabling a zero-carbon future for Oxfordshire.

Climate Action Update

Introduction

5. Oxfordshire County Council declared a climate emergency in April 2019, pledging to be carbon neutral by 2030 for its own operations and estate.

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6. The climate emergency declaration was followed by a public commitment in November 2019 to prioritise action on climate change across the council's decision-making, services and activities.
7. This paper introduces the framework that has been developed to inform the council's approach to climate action and provides an update on the work being done through the joint Climate Action Programme.

Climate Action Framework

8. The Climate Action Framework (Appendix 1) has been developed through engagement with a range of stakeholders – staff, managers and directors, and Climate Action Cabinet Advisory Group.
9. The framework:
 - Recognises zero carbon as integral to Council's 're-start, re-cover, re-new' approach, underpinning resilient and future-proofed infrastructure and economy, and linked to shaping liveable, healthy communities.
 - Sets out a mobilisation phase, identifying priority work areas and deliverables, and moving to integrate climate action into the council's business-as-usual approach through organisational development.
 - Sets out that our own estate target will be delivered through an invest-to-save approach, coupled with an innovation strand to support the business models and technologies needed to address more challenging areas.
 - Reflects the evidence base of the Countywide Energy Strategy calling for a halving of countywide emissions by 2030 and net-zero by 2050.
 - Acknowledges the significant step change in activity and focus of investment required to achieve the targets desired, as well as the role of wider stakeholders including central government.
10. A carbon management plan for the council's own estate net-zero target is currently in development. This plan will identify a series of interim targets on route to 2030, a project pipeline and assessment of the scale of any 'technology gap' in getting to net zero and subsequent offsetting needs.
11. A review of the Oxfordshire Low Carbon Economy report – now titled Oxfordshire Zero Carbon Economy report – will re-new the evidence base for decarbonisation trajectories and investment in the County.

Progress on delivering the Climate Action Programme

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12. Based on OCC's and CDC's Climate Action Frameworks, a joint cross-organisational Climate Action Programme has been developed, aiming to realise efficiencies and share good practice in delivering our climate action priorities. The Programme covers three areas:
 - (a) **Becoming climate active council:** aligning key corporate strategies and policies with climate action commitments, integrating climate considerations into business planning and decision making, equipping staff and leadership to take action.
 - (b) **Operating at net-zero carbon by 2030:** developing action plans to reduce energy usage and carbon emissions across estate, fleet, highway assets, and staff mileage; mobilising adequate resourcing to deliver such plans; supporting schools to deliver against their climate targets; working with suppliers to minimise the carbon emissions impact of our purchasing.
 - (c) **Enabling a zero-carbon future for Oxfordshire:** leveraging the council's influence, strategic policy roles and partnerships to accelerate the transition to zero-carbon across transport and connectivity, smart local energy systems, energy efficient homes, natural carbon management, and waste reduction.
13. Significant progress has been made towards integrating Climate Action into the council's strategies, decision making and service planning:
 - Commitment to a zero-carbon future is a cross-cutting theme of the Corporate Plan, connecting priorities such as healthy place shaping; equality, diversity and inclusion; active travel; digital connectivity; EV infrastructure; local energy systems; and green economic recovery
 - Property strategy reviewed to support climate action objectives
 - Investment strategy reviewed to align investment decisions with commitment to make climate action a 'top priority in decision making' and to deliver our own estate and countywide reduction targets
 - An Equalities and Climate Impacts Assessment accompanied the 2021-2022 budget savings proposals
 - A prioritisation tool for infrastructure schemes was designed with Climate Action as one of its core criteria
 - Service planning templates reviewed to include Climate Action as a key theme.
14. The following initiatives contributed towards our goal of reaching net zero by 2030 across our estate and activities:
 - Green grid electricity contract for corporate estate and maintained schools started in October

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- 1,410 streetlights converted to LED in November-December, bringing total to 29.5%
 - Energy audits funded by the Low Carbon Skills Fund at 11 OCC sites to inform invest-to-save programme
 - Application submitted to Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) for £2.13m for heat decarbonisation and energy efficiency projects in our estate and 4 maintained schools, with further 3 supported to submit their applications
 - Solar PV, battery storage and heat pump funded by PSDS installed at Benson Library, allowing the site to go off gas grid
 - Investment team looking at solar investment
 - New design standards for new build and refurbishment under development, in line with Climate Emergency Design Guide Standard
 - Social value policy under development as part of our commitment to work with suppliers to minimize carbon emissions impact of our purchasing
15. Through the council's statutory roles and wider influence, we're developing projects, plans, and strategies that contribute to a zero-carbon future for Oxfordshire:
- Established Active Travel Hub
 - £2.9m in grant funding obtained for Active Travel projects
 - Oxford Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan approved
 - Vision for Local Transport and Connectivity Plan developed with zero-carbon transport system as a key objective
 - Green Homes Grant LAD1B bid submitted to support households in fuel poverty increase the energy efficiency of their homes
 - Pilot under way to reduce carbon footprint of the Kennington Bridge Replacement Scheme. Without any carbon reduction work, the bridge will have a carbon footprint similar to the entire OCC corporate estate.
 - 'Zero Carbon Oxfordshire' report review started, led by the University of Oxford (to complete Feb 2021)
16. In 2019-2020 our carbon emissions continued to decline, showing an annual reduction of 12.1% in overall emissions and 8% in corporate emissions (our carbon neutrality target). These figures cover the period to March 2020, not capturing yet the effects of COVID-related changes. Since the baseline year of 2010-2011, overall emissions have declined 65.7% and corporate emissions 50.8%. Please see the council's 2019-2020 Greenhouse Gas report for more details (Appendix 2).

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Next steps

17. The decade to 2030 has been called the 'decade of action' against climate change. While it is true that over the next 9 years remaining emissions will become progressively harder to eliminate, substantial progress will be made by taking early action to reduce energy consumption using available technologies. Such early actions will have the added benefit of maximising savings and future-proofing our services, assets and investments.
18. The Climate Action Framework identifies as key next steps:
 - (a) Continue delivering the streetlight LED conversion programme
 - (b) Develop an invest-to-save programme for energy efficiency and generation on our estate
 - (c) Develop an integrated fleet management approach to support fleet rationalisation and electrification
 - (d) Work closely with contractors to reduce carbon emissions across supply chains
 - (e) Support schools to set and meet their climate targets
 - (f) Develop the evidence base to inform the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy
 - (g) Champion climate action in OP2050.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

19. The Climate Action Programme has been created to deliver the council's commitments to act on the climate emergency by becoming net zero in its own estate and operations by 2030 and enabling Oxfordshire's transition to net zero by 2050, as outlined in the Climate Action Framework.
20. Acting on climate change is a cross-cutting theme of the Corporate Plan, which highlights how reducing carbon emissions and increasing climate resiliency will deliver benefits for Oxfordshire's people, communities and economy – e.g., improved health, better air quality, green jobs, sustainable growth.
21. Zero carbon is also integral to the council's 're-start, re-cover, re-new' post-COVID approach.

Financial Implications

22. Both capital and revenue proposals were brought forward in 2019/20 to address immediate resourcing needs. Funding was agreed between OCC and CDC to

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create a joint climate action team. Revenue and capital directly associated with Climate Action is shown in Table 1.

23. Funding was agreed for the revenue resource to mobilise an invest-to-save programme in OCC Property. Recognising that opportunities for material changes in the way the council delivers services following Covid-19 will impact the Property Strategy, this will now commence in 2021/22 to optimise our effective use of this funding.
24. These roles will help develop the business case for future investment requirements which will be brought through the council's usual decision-making channels.
25. Capital has been identified for EV charging infrastructure for council-owned fleet and for creation of an invest-to-save recycling fund for property retrofit following the Property Strategy, alongside the existing allocation for streetlighting investment. Capital investment in property is likely to be reprofiled into 21/22 reflecting the intention in paragraph 20 to optimise the use of this funding in line with new property strategy.
26. A refreshed Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy will take into account climate implications and low-carbon infrastructure needs as part of its prioritisation approach to funding.

Table 1 - Revenue and capital funding for climate action

	2020/21 £m	2021/22 £m	2022/23 £m	2023/24 £m	Total
Staffing Budget					
Joint OCC/CDC Climate Action Team staffing (hosted OCC)	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.39	1.56
CDC contribution Joint Climate Action team	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05	-0.2
Property Climate Action Staffing Budget		0.24	0.06		0.3

CAPITAL FUNDING	2020/21 £m	2021/22 £m	2022/23 £m	2023/24 £m	Total
Allocated Capital Budget:					
SALIX Energy Programme Invest to Save Recycling Fund	0.417	0.153	0.109	0.05	0.729
EV Charging Infrastructure own estate	0.020	0.014			0.034
EV Charging Infrastructure own estate	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.400
Climate Action Invest to Save Property Recycling Fund	0.100	0.400	0.500	0.500	1.500
Streetlighting invest to save retrofit	7.800	11.400	11.400	8.182	38.782
Total in-year capital budget	8.437	12.067	12.009	8.732	41.445

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

27. This report raises no legal issues or implications.

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Comments checked by:

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Staff Implications

28. Delivering the climate action programme involves all council staff. Management are being supported to include climate action in their short and long-term planning. Staff will be supported to integrate climate considerations into their day-to-day activities and decision making.
29. A climate action team has been put in place to support services to deliver on their workstreams in the climate action programme. This team is funded jointly by OCC and CDC. Resource funding has also been allocated to the Property team to develop and deliver an invest-to-save programme for energy efficiency and generation across the estate.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

30. Climate change will disproportionately disadvantage vulnerable groups and young people. Acting on climate change is, therefore, most likely to have a disproportionately positive impact on several of the protected and disadvantaged groups considered within the Council's equality framework
31. When developing and implementing the Climate Action Programme, the council must take an inclusive approach, ensuring the costs and benefits of the transition to a low-carbon economy are fairly shared.

Sustainability Implications

32. The Climate Action Programme is at the core of the council's response to the climate emergency. A number of its projects have a direct impact on our corporate emissions e.g., installing heat pumps in our buildings or converting streetlighting to LED, while others, e.g., reviewing the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, aim to put in place the strategies, partnerships and initiatives that will help reduce carbon emission and increase climate resiliency across the county.

Risk Management

33. Adequate resourcing is required to capture opportunities for energy savings across the estate and to put in place a delivery mechanism for heat decarbonisation and energy efficiency projects funded by the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.

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34. A single management approach to fleet is needed to deliver the existing 'electric by default' fleet policy and to support rationalisation and sharing of fleet.
35. Work is taking place to assess whether the existing partnership arrangements are optimum to support cross-county working on climate action.

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Appendix 1: Climate Action Framework

Appendix 2: OCC 2019-2020 Greenhouse Gas Report

Background papers: Nil.

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