

GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 25 May 2011

Report by Deputy Director for Growth and Infrastructure

Managing our assets and services to ensure future resilience to severe weather

Purpose of report

1. Implementation of the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan, "Preparing for a Changing Climate" agreed by the Climate Change Board in 2010, is an objective in the Corporate Plan 2012-2015.
2. This report updates committee members about work to evaluate the costs and impacts of severe weather on Oxfordshire County Council services, and the steps being taken to increase the resilience of our assets and services to the predicted impacts and consequences of more frequent severe weather events.

Context

3. Coping with the effects of severe weather over the last 15 years (between 1996 and 2009) has cost Oxfordshire County Council an estimated £20 million (this figure does not include the most recent cold spells in 2010/2011). Weather events which have affected the council include flooding, heatwaves, cold spells, and storms, with for example 138 severe weather claims (worth £1.7 million) for damage to council buildings (mainly schools) between January 2007 and August 2009. These incidents indicate our current vulnerability to weather.
4. The most recent predictions from the UK Climate Impacts Programme suggest that we can expect warmer, drier summers, milder, wetter winters and more frequent extremes of temperature and rainfall. By the 2050s, we can expect average summer temperatures to be at least 2 degrees hotter than now, and by the 2080s daily average maximum temperatures could reach 30 degrees.
5. A report ¹ from the Independent Adaptation Sub-committee on Climate Change, (set up by Government under the Climate Change Act 2008) estimates that timely adaptation measures may reduce damages from the predicted impacts of increased severe weather events by roughly half for moderate amounts of warming, and that the costs of failing to adapt will outweigh the costs of not taking action.

¹ How well prepared is the UK for Climate Change? (Sept 2010),

Overview of progress by Oxfordshire County Council

6. In recent years the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) based at the University of Oxford has worked in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council. Together we pioneered the first Local Climate Impacts Profile (2006), which identifies the costs and impacts of weather events on council services. The work programme with UKCIP, set out in a MOU signed by the Chief Executives of UKCIP and Oxfordshire County Council, culminated in the adaptation action plan, and a series of briefing notes outlining work with key service areas, and lessons learnt.
7. The expertise provided by UKCIP has been beneficial in helping us to understand the issues about adaptation and to find processes which can be applied most usefully by local authorities, for example risk assessment procedures. The simple action plan developed last year has provided a model which has been shared with and used by some of the district councils in Oxfordshire. These emphasise the importance of risk assessments which provide the basis for prioritising the actions in the plan.
8. An Adaptation steering group brings together representatives from Corporate Policy and Emergency Planning, Property and Facilities, and Transport, including the Strategic Flooding Group Co-ordinator, to monitor implementation of the action plan, share best practice, and identify future priorities.
9. The Local Climate Impact Profiles (LCLIP) and case studies give a snapshot of developments since the first LCLIP was completed in 2006, including, for example:
 - Emergency planning:** co-ordination of emergency response and business continuity planning; publication of severe weather plan; promotion of community resilience plans.
 - Property:** adaptation steering group and development of adaptation action plan for Property Services (now Property and Facilities).
 - Transport:** sustainable drainage being introduced across the county; use of GIS mapping.
 - Fire service:** risk assessments, purchase of new equipment (i.e. cool packs and suits for working in warmer weather).

Local Area Agreement and development of council action plans

10. During the past two years, the Local Area Agreement (LAA2) target NI188, "Adapting to Climate Change", shaped the work programme, specifying a series of target levels to achieve, which included the development of a strategy or action plan. This process was developed in partnership with district councils, sharing methodology and experiences, and promoting this work to Local Strategic Partnerships. The approach developed provides the basis for an on-going working relationship through which we share information and lessons learnt in this area.

Oxfordshire County Council Action Plan

11. The council action plan sets out short, medium term, and longer-term priorities for Oxfordshire County Council.

Short term:

1. Managing priority impacts from flood and increased summer heat.
2. Managing current risks as part of core processes.

Planning for the medium term:

3. Embedding consideration of climate risks in policies, appraisal and processes including procurement.

Planning for the long term:

4. Understanding future risks.

12. Last year, services and directorates were required to include weather related risk assessments in their risk registers. All Directorates completed this in 2010, with the exception of CYP&F. The Action Plan requires Directorates to provide annual updates on their risk assessments to the Adaptation Steering Group, and through the performance management process. It will be suggested that this year these are completed in time for the next round of Service and Resource Planning.
13. An important focus of the work has been to embed consideration of weather related risks in policies and appraisal processes. As a result, the Corporate Plan 2012-2015 now recognises the strategic importance of forward planning to prepare for the possible consequences of a changing climate in the future. The council's procurement processes are an important opportunity to ensure that our assets are protected; for example the Property and Facilities work on the procurement of a single service provider could be used as an example to show that the council is taking this issue more seriously.
14. An action proposed in the Adaptation Action Plan for this year is to continue our work initiated with UKCIP to ensure that consideration of the risks, costs and benefits of adaptive measures are incorporated in capital planning and asset management in time for the service and resource planning process.

Priorities for the future

15. The council's capacity to respond to severe or extreme weather events (such as the 2007 floods or the 2010 cold spell) is stronger as a result of improved emergency planning and business continuity procedures. However the need to prepare for the potential impacts of more frequent or severe weather events on our assets and infrastructure in the longer term (as well as service delivery) is a significant challenge. Although there is continuing uncertainty about the frequency and severity of weather events it is certain that the weather will continue to have an impact on council services and infrastructure, with

associated impacts and costs. This emphasises the need to take a risk-based approach - preparing for a range of possible impacts and scenarios.

16. There is a range of possible responses, from measures which address management, behaviour and policies “building adaptive capacity”, to technical measures, “adaptation actions”, for example modifying our buildings so they remain cool during hotter summers which are predicted, and sustainable drainage systems.
17. Many of the measures needed to “build adaptive capacity” are already in place, for example, risk assessments and business continuity planning processes undertaken by directorates and Emergency Planning. In addition good progress is being made on the introduction of sustainable drainage systems. However there remains a need to assess the potential risks to the council’s highways and property assets in the longer term, and to evaluate the costs and benefits of investment to improve the resilience of these assets to severe weather in the future.
18. For example, the Property Services Adaptation Action plan has identified and prioritised risks, and identified and costed adaptive measures which could be implemented, but has not yet been in a position to present a successful business case for capital investment. This would require additional work by Property and Facilities Management to update the existing programme and evaluate the costs and benefits of a range of potential adaptive measures.
19. There is scope for other public sector bodies to work with us in terms of investing in making our assets (particularly property) more resilient. For example our ambition to promote co-location of services lends itself to building on the joint working already underway with the districts.

Recommendations

20. For the reasons outlined above, it is suggested that the following priorities for the future focus of this work could be considered:
 - a) Emphasise the need to have resilience as a factor addressed in the next round of service and resource planning;
 - b) Call for the Capital Investment Board to take issues of resilience into account when determining investment priorities;
 - c) Build on the joint working already under way with the district councils by calling for other public sector bodies to work with us in terms of investing in making our assets (particularly property) more resilient.

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