

**Divisions Affected - ALL**

**CABINET**

**July 2025**

**CLIMATE ACTION PROGRAMME UPDATE AND CIRCULAR  
ECONOMY PLAN**

**Report by Director of Economy and Place**

**RECOMMENDATION**

Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:

- a. Adopt the Circular Economy Plan (Annex 1).
- b. Note the climate outcomes dashboard (Annex 2).
- c. Note the update on the delivery of the Climate Action Programme 2024/25 and approve the proposed Climate Action Programme for 2025/26 (Annex 3).

**Executive Summary**

1. This report is a six-monthly update to cabinet on the delivery of the 2024/25 Climate Action Programme workstreams, including the development of a new Circular Economy Plan.
2. The Circular Economy Plan (Annex 1) expands the council's approach to climate action by focussing additionally on the resources it uses. The plan builds on work which the council is already undertaking, such as the Carbon Management Plan, and seeks to deliver a culture change which embeds circular economy at the heart of the Council's policy and practice.
3. The Climate Outcome Measures dashboard (Annex 2) has been updated with the latest data available, and additional measures have been added to reflect the broader focus on adaptation and community engagement. Highlights include progress in decarbonising the Council's estate and operations, including a significant increase in renewable generation, rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and an over 200% increase in volunteering hours through the Community Action Group network since 2021.
4. An update is provided on workstreams agreed by Cabinet for 2024/25, alongside an overview of the proposed activities for 2025/26 (Annex 3).
5. One of the key focuses for 2025/26 is the refresh of the Climate Action Framework. This follows 5 years of full delivery against the framework and allows the council to respond to local and national policy priorities.

## **Circular Economy Plan**

6. The council committed to producing a Circular Economy plan as part of the 2024/25 Climate Action Programme. The Circular Economy Plan (Annex 1) expands the council's approach to climate action by focussing additionally on the resources the council uses.
7. It is based on three principles:
  - Designing out waste and pollution.
  - Keeping materials and products in use for longer.
  - Regenerating natural systems.
8. The Circular Economy Plan brings together a wide range of different policies and workstreams, including those on carbon reduction, waste management, social value, ethical procurement, biodiversity and community wealth building.
9. Elements of the plan delivery will be incorporated into the Carbon Management Plan, highways maintenance contracts, property and facilities work and Oxfordshire Resources and Waste Partnership.

## **Climate Outcomes Dashboard**

10. The Climate Outcomes Dashboard (Annex 2) was introduced for the first time in April 2024, as a way of providing a snapshot of the outcomes of climate mitigation and adaptation-related actions across the county. The dashboard has now been updated to include a wider range of metrics, including those on climate adaptation and engagement.
11. Highlights from the dashboard are provided below, alongside their outcome reference number from Annex 3:
  - CAS 1-5: The data from the Council's own estates and operations shows the success of the delivery of the Carbon Management Plan, work on supply chain monitoring, and renewable generation on the council's estate which has increased more than six-fold between 2019 and 2024.
  - CAS 6a – b: As discussed in the previous update to cabinet in November 2024, data on territorial greenhouse gas emissions is provided by the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) with a two-year lag. This presents a challenge for monitoring emissions in real time, however the data indicates an overall reduction in total greenhouse gas emissions in Oxfordshire since 2019, largely due to continued grid decarbonisation.
  - CAS 8a – b: Programmes to increase the availability of electric vehicle charging infrastructure have been successful (a threefold increase in charge points since 2019), and this is one of the factors which has been driving the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions from road transport over time. However, total transport greenhouse gas emissions for Oxfordshire have continued to rise (CAS 7).

- CAS 10: Bus patronage is increasing after a significant drop off during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- CAS 14a – b: Emissions from residential properties in the county have been dropping, despite the growing number of homes, due to continued decarbonisation of the grid.
- CAS 19 – 23: New indicators have been included in the dashboard to reflect progress on climate adaptation. Going forward, this will include reported flooding events and the number of trained flood wardens in the county, which has been increasing.
- CAS 21: Outcome measures on community engagement also indicate a significant willingness from communities to be involved, with over twice as many volunteering hours from the Community Action Group network between 2021 and 2024.
- There is work ongoing to establish indicators for circular economy, including engagement with other organisations who are leading the way nationally such as Zero Waste Scotland.
- Key focus areas for reducing emissions should continue to be working towards OCC's 2030 target for its own estate and operations, transport emissions county-wide (particularly alternatives to petrol or diesel private vehicles), delivering home retrofit programmes and supporting the delivery of the Climate Adaptation Route Map.

## Climate Action Programme 2024/25

12. The Climate Action Programme is developed under three programme pillars: becoming a climate active council, decarbonising our estate and operations, and enabling Oxfordshire's transition to net zero.
13. The actions have been developed from the priorities and commitments in the [Climate Action Framework](#). Annex 3 provides cabinet with an overview of the progress under each of the actions since the last update in November 2024.
14. Some key updates include:
  - Awarding £298,000 in loans to seven primary schools for energy efficiency measures, **saving 32 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>** and **£35,700 in energy bills** through efficiency improvements.
  - Through an 18-month funded innovation programme trialling the Energy Saver App which enables residents to **save money and install home retrofit measures** (initially solar panels with battery storage) on a subscription basis, with no upfront cost.
  - Accessing **£2.6 million of government funding under Phase 2 of the Home Upgrade Grant** to retrofit 150 homes at risk of fuel poverty who are not on mains-gas.

- **Expanding our electric vehicle fleet to 71** (43 EVs in OCC fleet and 28 EV in fire and rescue service) - over 15.6% of our total fleet, replacing petrol and diesel vehicles, **saving 100 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually and reducing harmful air pollution.**
- Began work on **£10 million of energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements to the corporate estate** across approximately 33 properties.
- Developing an **evidence base to identify future impacts on Oxfordshire from climate change** and provided resources to stakeholders to understand Oxfordshire's climate vulnerabilities.
- Developing a **climate engagement plan** with wide community participation.
- Appointing a consultant and commencing the development of a **Local Area Energy Plan for Oxfordshire (OxLAEP)** to identify the future energy needs of the county.
- Launching and commencing delivery of the **Oxfordshire Adaptation Route Map and Action Plan.**
- Continuing to support the **expanded Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership.**

15. Eight actions are rated amber, largely due to resource constraints or slippage in timescales.

16. The only action rated red is the delivery of the Local Energy Oxfordshire Neighbourhoods (LEO-N) scheme. As stated in the November 2024 update to Cabinet, the partnership bid for a 4-year multi million pound programme to continue the work programme under LEO was unsuccessful. Work is ongoing by various partner organisations to explore possibilities for a resubmission.

## **Climate Action Programme 2025/26**

17. Annex 3 also provides an overview of the proposed workstreams reported within the Climate Action Programme for 2025/26.

18. This includes the addition of a workstream to refresh the Council's Climate Action Framework which was published in 2020. There has been significant progress since the publication of the first Framework. The refresh of the Climate Action Framework presents an opportunity to further align the plan both with local priorities for inclusive economic growth and reducing health inequalities, and to reflect national programmes such as [Clean Power 2030](#).

19. The Framework refresh will take place across the 2025/26 financial year. As such, it is proposed that next report on this programme is brought alongside the refreshed Framework in order to align with the approval of that document.

## Financial Implications

20. There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report, as all other funding sources have been agreed previously in their relevant papers.

21. The following capital funding is allocated to the climate action programme including the school's energy efficiency loan scheme over the medium-term financial plan.

| Ref | Project/Programme Name                             | Prev Yrs Expenditure | Remaining Budget | Total         |
|-----|--|----------------------|------------------|---------------|
|     |  | £'000                | £'000            | £'000         |
| 1)  | Schools Energy Efficiency Recycling Fund           | 298                  | 1,567            | 1,865         |
| 2)  | Tree Policy  | 632                  | 1,393            | 2,025         |
| 3)  | Green Homes Grant 2023/24 - 2024/25                | 3,872                | 0                | 3,872         |
| 4)  | Energy Saving Measures 2024/25 Programme           | 2,396                | 7,048            | 9,444         |
| 5)  | Energy Saving Measures 2025/26 Programme           | 0                    | 10,360           | 10,360        |
| 6)  | Vehicle Management Service - Replacement Programme | 1,419                | 16,581           | 18,000        |
| 7)  | EV Charging Points (for Fleet)                     | 355                  | 655              | 1,010         |
| 8)  | Warm Homes: Local Grant 2025/26 - 2027/28          | 0                    | 3,750            | 3750          |
|     | <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>8,972</b>         | <b>41,354</b>    | <b>50,326</b> |

22. An additional £110,000 has been allocated in 2025/26 for the purchase of carbon credits to address residual emissions. Based on the UK Government's Clean Power 2030 Action Plan and assuming the timely implementation of the decarbonisation programme outlined in the Carbon Management Plan (CMP), Oxfordshire County Council's residual operational carbon emissions are projected to be approximately 2,720 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e in 2030/31.

23. There will be additional investment needs to reach net zero as set out in the [November 2024 update to cabinet](#). These will be addressed by service leadership through the revenue planning process for 2026/27, although there is no guarantee that this additional budget allocation will be approved.

**Comments checked by: Filipp Skiffins, Assistant Finance Business Partner, [filipp.skiffins@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:filipp.skiffins@oxfordshire.gov.uk)**

## Circular Economy Plan

24. Directors have agreed to actions within the plan. Some actions require investigating business cases which may generate investment needs which would be subject to agreement through the council's decision-making processes. A number of activities may be invest to save, such as trialling innovative materials in buildings and highways to reduce degradation over time (and therefore repair and replacement).

## Corporate Governance

25. The Climate Action Programme supports the council's commitments to tackle the climate emergency as expressed in the Strategic Plan 2022-25.
26. There are a number of corporate boards and working groups which also oversee various elements of the Climate Action Programme. These include:
- **100 Together Steering Group:** Responsible for overseeing the 100 Together programme activities and receives reports from the Communications and Collateral Working Group, and the Green Finance and Investment Working Group.
  - **Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership Adaptation Working Group:** Leads the delivery of priority actions within the Oxfordshire Climate Adaptation Route Map where collaboration between different organisations is required.
  - **Local Area Energy Planning Officer Working Group and Executive Steering Board:** Two groups which oversee the governance of OxLAEP.
  - **Carbon Management Plan Delivery Group:** Oversees the delivery of OCC's Carbon Management Plan for our estate and operations.
  - **Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee:** Receives reports on specific work areas, including OxLAEP and the Adaptation Route Map.

## Legal Implications

27. Central government has committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, recognising much of this reduction must happen before 2030. Local authorities are clearly expected to play a role in these efforts and whilst there are currently no clear specific statutory duties on local authorities to take action that mitigates or adapts to climate change the Council does have wide powers to undertake such activities under its general power of competence set out at Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.

**Comments checked by: Jonathan Pool, Solicitor (Contracts), [jonathan.pool@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:jonathan.pool@oxfordshire.gov.uk)**

## Equality and Inclusion Implications

28. The council's Climate Action Framework aims to ensure a fair sharing of costs and benefits and avoiding energy inequality.
29. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Circular Economy Plan and found a net positive impact on protected groups and the wider community. Further EIA will take place on business case development for individual elements of the programme as they progress.
30. Over the long term, this will reduce the impacts of climate change compared to a do-nothing scenario, and benefit all groups, especially those who have been identified as vulnerable. This also applies to the wider Climate Action Programme

which includes both mitigation of impacts and adaptation to the locked-in effects of climate change.

## **Sustainability Implications**

31. The Climate Action Programme is at the centre of the council's commitment to tackle the climate challenge.

## **Risk Management**

32. A strategic risk is included on the council's strategic risk register, noting the increasing vulnerability of communities, economy and infrastructure to climate impacts. A number of control measures have been identified and are being reported on through the Business Management and Monitoring report. The Climate Adaptation Route Map which is being delivered with the district councils and key partners will identify further mitigations.

## **Annexes**

Annex 1 – Oxfordshire County Council Circular Economy Plan

Annex 2 – Climate Outcomes Dashboard

Annex 3 – Climate Action Programme delivery plan 2024/25 update and 2025/26 programme

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