

Report to Cabinet

Title:	Climate Change – Update on Progress
Date:	Monday 10 February 2020
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Local members affected:	(All Electoral Divisions);
Portfolio areas affected:	Planning and Environment

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Summary

This report summarises the work undertaken to address the climate change and environmental impacts of Buckinghamshire County Council, including since the Climate Change motion was passed by Council on 26 September 2019. Updates on a range of areas are presented along with suggestions of how Buckinghamshire Council may continue this work.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to note the progress made in improving the environmental and climate related performance of the Council, along with the suggestions for how to continue this work as part of the new Buckinghamshire Council.

A. Narrative setting out the reasons for the decision

Background

There has been an increased public and political focus on environmental issues and in particular climate change over the last 12-18 months. This has been evidenced through the increasing occurrence of public demonstrations, declarations of a 'climate emergency' by various organisations and changes to legislations in the UK.

The public and political attention for climate change has arisen for a wide range of reasons; however two scientific reports were particularly prominent in evidencing the scale and pace of change required.

- In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC – a UN Body) report¹ warned of the rapid and far reaching consequences of exceeding 1.5°C of warming globally. The report advised that to avoid this, global emissions would need to reach a net-zero position by 2050.
- In May 2019, The Committee on Climate Change (CCC – UK Government climate advisory body) advised in its 'Net Zero' report² that the UK should change the national carbon reduction target for 2050 from 80% to 100%, to create a 'net-zero' position.

Subsequently the UK Government amended the Climate Change Act (2008) in June 2019 so that the (then current) 80% carbon emissions reduction target by 2050 was replaced with 100%. This made the UK's legally binding, national target a 'net-zero' position by 2050.

This made the UK the first major economy to legislate for a net-zero target for 2050, aligning with the scientific advice from the IPCC and CCC. This target is in the context of the UK's carbon emissions already being 44% below 1990 levels in 2018³ and the UK accounting for just 1% of global carbon emissions⁴.

What has Buckinghamshire County Council achieved to date?

Buckinghamshire County Council has taken positive action across a number of areas including managing energy across its estate including the installation of renewable generation technologies, diverting waste from landfill, preventing and protecting properties from flooding, encouraging sustainable travel and helping deliver a new biodiversity net gain scheme. A summary of the progress across these respective areas is contained within **Appendix A – Caring for our Environment**.

Through the work highlighted in Appendix A, Buckinghamshire County Council achieved a 53% reduction in carbon emissions from its direct activities between 2009/10 and 2018/19. This has exceeded the 40% emissions reduction target the Council set itself and has done so two years earlier than the 2020/21 target year. The 40% target itself was also more stretching than the 30% target suggested by Government as part of the 'Emissions reduction pledge 2020'.

This reduction in carbon emissions has been achieved through the implementation of a range of energy savings measures over many years. These include upgrading lighting systems to LEDs in both our buildings and our street lights, installing 14 solar panel systems on our buildings, improving the insulation of our buildings and optimising out heating systems for greater efficiency.

What has Buckinghamshire County Council done since passing the Climate Change motion?

¹ https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/SR15_SPM_version_report_LR.pdf

² <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming/>

³ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/tackling-climate-change/reducing-carbon-emissions/how-the-uk-is-progressing/>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/fossil-co2-emissions-all-world-countries-2018-report>

The motion passed by Council on 26 September 2019 recommended that further consideration of what action could be taken ahead of vesting day, to continue these improvements to our environmental performance. Central to this was commissioning an audit of the Council's carbon emissions. This audit has now been commissioned through Local Partnership and agreement from the Buckinghamshire Council's Shadow Executive received to expand the audit to cover all the Councils which will form the new authority (i.e. including emissions from the County and four District Councils).

Since the motion in September, Buckinghamshire County Council has continued to work across a range of areas to reduce its impact on the environment and the climate. Examples of work underway to improve our environmental improvement include:

- We have continued to identify opportunities to improve the energy efficiency of our estate, for example upgrades to the flood lights at Cressex Artificial Pitches was started in December 2019. These will reduce energy consumption on site by 56%, reduce maintenance costs and improve the quality of the light for the pitches' users.
- New IT equipment is being provided to staff, including new energy efficient LED screens which have recently been installed and new energy efficient laptops will follow shortly.
- We are working with the in-house catering provider to remove all single use plastics from County Hall, moving to sustainable alternatives.
- Opportunities for an innovative wireless electric vehicle charging pilot programme are being pursued for Aylesbury.
- An Electric Vehicle Charging Point Plan is being developed to support the roll out of charging infrastructure across Buckinghamshire.

There are also a range of potential actions which could be implemented by the new Buckinghamshire Council, in order to continue the improvements in environmental performance already achieved. These include:

- Consider how the land holdings of the authority could be used to support renewable energy generation, for example solar farms or for growing sustainable biomass fuel.
- Further improvements to the energy efficiency of the authority's buildings and assets, for example continuing to upgrade street lighting to efficiency LED equivalents.
- Continued installation of renewable generation technology on buildings, in particular solar PV panels on the roofs of suitable buildings.
- Installation of solar PV canopies in car parks, in combination with electric vehicles charging infrastructure to allow renewable power to be supplied to vehicles.
- Using the Council's estate to facilitate the planting of trees to absorb and lock-up carbon from the atmosphere, as well as providing other environmental benefits such as flood alleviation and habitat creation.

The progression of any of these suggestions is a matter which the new Buckinghamshire Council may take a view on after vesting day.

B. Other options available, and their pros and cons

Not applicable.

C. Resource implications

The projects already being implemented are being done so within existing budgets.

Investment in any of the suggestions measures will be a matter for Buckinghamshire Council to consider, in line with any capital investment strategies in place at the time. The new authority's budget includes an allocation of £5m for 'Council Priorities', some of which could be used to address climate change. This is however a decision for members of the new authority to make.

D. Value for Money (VfM) Self-Assessment

Not applicable.

E. Legal implications

Not applicable.

F. Property implications

Not applicable.

G. Unitary Council

The report has suggested some measures which Buckinghamshire Council may wish to consider post vesting day. Such decisions may be informed by outcomes of the carbon audit which is currently in production.

H. Other implications/issues

Not applicable.

I. Feedback from consultation, Local Area Forums and Local Member views

Not applicable.

J. Communication issues

Not applicable.

K. Progress Monitoring

It is suggested that annual monitoring and reporting on carbon emissions is continued by the new Buckinghamshire Council, whilst noting that this is a matter for the new authority to take a view on.

L. Review

No applicable.

Background Papers

Appendix A: Caring for our Environment

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

If you have any views on this paper that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on Friday 7 February 2020. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382343), or e-mail to democracy@buckscc.gov.uk