

Report for:	Shadow Executive
Meeting Date:	7/1/2020

Title of Report:	Environment & Climate Change Policy
Responsible Officer	David Sutherland / Penelope Tollitt
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Recommendations:	<p>That Shadow Executive agree with the following recommendations:</p> <p>1) The Shadow Executive notes that existing authorities continue to work to address climate change and it supports the continuation of that work prior to vesting day. When the new Council has responsibility for climate change it may resolve to take a specific policy position.</p> <p>2) The Shadow Executive agrees that further work be conducted ahead of vesting day to gather the necessary evidence to inform Buckinghamshire Council's policy decision, including a Carbon Audit on current emissions and producing a plan for developing Buckinghamshire Council's policy on wider environmental issues.</p>
Corporate Implications:	The Carbon Audit will cost up to £40k, to be covered from existing revenue budgets.
Options: (If any)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do nothing – paper to be noted. 2. The Shadow Executive notes that existing authorities continue to work to address climate change and it supports the continuation of that work prior to vesting day. When the new Council has responsibility for climate change it may resolve to take a specific policy position (Recommended). 3. The Shadow Executive agrees that further work be conducted ahead of vesting day to gather the necessary evidence to inform Buckinghamshire Council's policy decision, including a Carbon Audit on current emissions and producing a plan for developing Buckinghamshire Council's policy on wider environmental issues. (Recommended)
Reason:	The recommended options allow Buckinghamshire Council to be informed of baseline information, policy options and implications before adopting an Environment and Climate Change Policy.

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the Shadow Executive with an update on work underway to inform the Environment and Climate Change Policy of Buckinghamshire Council. This includes a Carbon Audit of all existing authorities, gathering wider environmental information and developing policy options for the new authority to take a view on after vesting day.

2. Executive Summary

The report provides background information to this policy area and recommends that further work is carried out, ahead of vesting day, including a Carbon Audit. It is recommended that the Shadow Executive agree these policy matters are for the new authority to take a position on after vesting day.

3. Content of Report

Background

There has been an increased public and political focus on environmental issues and in particular climate change since 2018. This has been seen through the number of public demonstrations, declarations of a 'climate emergency' and other campaigning and political activity. Some of the more prominent events over this time which have led to the current situation include:

- In January 2018, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) introduced the 25 Year Environment Plan which establishes a broad set of goals, across all environmental themes, with the overall aim of 'leaving the environment in a better state than we found it'.
- In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC – a UN Body) warned of the rapid and far reaching consequences of exceeding 1.5°C of warming globally. 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 that the UK should change the national carbon reduction target for 2050 from 80% to 100%, to create a 'net-zero'¹ position.
- In May 2019, the House of Commons passed a non-binding motion to become the first parliament or legislature in the world to declare an 'environment and climate emergency'.
- The UK Government subsequently amended the Climate Change Act (2008) in June 2019 so that the 80% emissions reduction target by 2050 was replaced with 100% - this is now the UK's legally binding, national target.
- In July 2019 The Committee on Climate Change, in assessing progress in reducing UK emissions over the past year, reported that UK action to curb greenhouse gas emissions was lagging behind what is needed to meet legally-binding emissions targets. Since June 2018, Government had delivered only 1 of 25 critical policies needed to get emissions reductions back on track
- On 15 October 2019, the Government introduced a new Environment Bill that:
 - Will set up a new Office of Environmental Protection that can take enforcement action against public authorities if they have breached environmental law, and

¹ Net-zero position permits for a small volume of carbon emissions to be offset / removed through activities which absorb carbon from the atmosphere.

has an ability to take action against the government if it fails to meet its legally-binding climate change targets.

- Will set legally-binding targets on air, water quality, biodiversity and waste efficiency that puts the DEFRA 25 year Environment Plan on a statutory footing.
- Mandate the principle of biodiversity net gain as part of the planning system
- Allows for regulations to be introduced regarding single use plastics and deposit return schemes.

Whilst the UK has a national carbon emission reduction target in law, there are no comparative regulations which apply to local authorities.

The current County and District Councils have all undertaken work to reduce their impact on the environment, including reducing carbon emissions, however this report does not attempt to summarise this work.

Carbon Audit

All the councils have for many years run programs to reduce energy consumption, initially to produce savings and reduce wastage.

This work has now developed to become part of a determined course of action to react to climate change and so the new Buckinghamshire Council has to its benefit a record of good practice to build on and can continue to improve its performance.

The Carbon Audit will provide an opportunity to record the effectiveness of work undertaken to date and will provide a new baseline for future achievements to be measured against.

It is therefore recommended that a Carbon Audit is undertaken to ensure that any policy decisions on the matter are taken with knowledge of the existing baseline emissions. In summary, a Carbon Audit will:

- Provide an overview of baseline emissions from owned and controlled assets (e.g. from gas and electricity consumption in buildings) and staff business travel, in line with Government Sustainability Reporting Guidance².
 - If gaps are identified the audit will provide recommendations for how to collect data to report on these emissions.
- Propose a carbon budget showing how the authority could meet a net-zero target by 2050, in line with the UK's national target.
- Provide guidance on how carbon offsetting and renewable energy supplies can reduce residual emissions within the carbon budget.
- Set out a range of measures and projects to reduce emissions along with indicative costs. These may include:
 - Energy efficiency measures across operational assets including buildings, street lighting and vehicles.
 - Moving to renewable or low carbon fuels and encouraging the use of sustainable transport options.
 - Installing renewable energy generation on Council buildings as well as larger scale renewable installation on its land holdings, e.g. solar farms.
 - Changes to land use across agricultural estate, e.g. additional tree planting which would also support wider environmental benefits such as enhancing biodiversity.

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772723/Sustainability_report_19.pdf

Developing Buckinghamshire Council's Environmental Policy

Whilst the specific work in relation to reducing its own carbon emissions will be critical, the new authority may also wish to adopt new environmental policies once established. This is to ensure that the clear environmental risks as well as economic opportunities from climate change are planned for and managed, to ensure that a healthy environment remains at the heart of a thriving County. In order to inform these policy options and their implications it is proposed to establish baseline information across a broader suite of environmental indicators, for example biodiversity.

The establishment of this baseline will in turn help the authority inform its environment policy for its own operations as well as its wider policy and place shaping role in line with the national environmental priorities and indicators as set out in the DEFRA 25 year Environment plan and the recently published Environment Bill.

From this baseline a set of targets and actions could be developed around the following areas in the short, medium and long term:

- **Leading by example** – Improving the authorities own performance, for example by stopping the use of single use plastics.
- **Enabling action** on the environment and climate change across Buckinghamshire – via policies and plans the authority is responsible for, i.e. Local Plan and related policies and guidance (zero carbon home, biodiversity net gain), Local Transport Plan.
- **Partnership working** to facilitate others to take action themselves.

Options for external support to progress this element of the work are being considered now and a specification is being drafted.

Options

1. No action – paper noted only.
2. Note that existing authorities continue to work to address climate change and continue that work prior to vesting day. When the new Council has responsibility for climate change it may resolve to take a specific policy position (**Recommended**).
3. Conduct further work ahead of vesting day to gather the necessary evidence to inform Buckinghamshire Council's policy decision, including a Carbon Audit on current emissions and producing a plan for developing Buckinghamshire Council's policy on wider environmental issues. (**Recommended**)

4. Financial Implications

Immediate financial implications include the cost of the Carbon Audit, up to £40k, which can be met by the County Council's existing revenue budget. The outputs of the carbon audit will outline potential projects which would reduce carbon emissions along with estimated costs.

5. Legal Implications

The Council's policy position should reflect all current and emerging legislative requirements, and not be inconsistent with any national standards imposed on public bodies.



6. Other Key Risks

Not applicable.

7. Dependencies

Not applicable.

8. Consultation

Not applicable.

9. Communications Plan

Not applicable.

10. Equalities Impact Assessment Summary

Screening questionnaire completed indicating no equalities impacts.

11. Next Steps

Upon agreement, the Carbon Audit will be commissioned as summarised in this paper. A plan for developing an Environmental Policy will also be produced ahead of vesting day.

Background Papers	None
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