

Bolsover District Council

Meeting of the Executive on 6th March 2023

Review of Council's Approach to Carbon Reduction

Report of the Chair of Climate Change & Communities Scrutiny Committee

Classification	This report is Public
Report By	Chair of Climate Change & Communities Scrutiny Committee
Contact Officer	Scrutiny & Elections Officer joanne.wilson@bolsover.gov.uk 01246 242385

PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

- To present to Executive the findings of a recent review by Scrutiny assessing progress of the Council's Approach to Carbon Reduction.

REPORT DETAILS

1. Background

- 1.1 The Climate Change Act 2008 commits the UK government by law to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% of 1990 levels (net zero) by 2050. This includes reducing emissions from the devolved administrations (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), which currently account for about 20% of the UK's emissions. The 100% target was based on advice from the CCC's 2019 report, 'Net Zero – The UK's contribution to stopping global warming'.
- 1.2 Scrutiny has previously received updates on progress against the Carbon Reduction Plan 2019-30 (CRP) with reports presented to the Customer Service & Transformation and Healthy, Safe, Clean & Green Scrutiny Committees. The original CRP set out 8 thematic areas by which the authority aimed to reduce its carbon emissions.
- 1.3 Following structural changes in 2021/22 and a change in lead officers, the Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs reviewed the existing action plans and those in use with regional funders. In consultation with the Assistant Director of Development & Planning, a 10 point framework used by the Midlands Engine was identified which would allow the Council's existing themes to be transferred/captured, but would also allow the streamlining of bids for schemes to be aligned with regional and national funders.

- 1.4 It was felt that the framework would allow better compatibility with funders both regionally and nationally. It included additional themes which represented new and emerging technologies that the Council were keen to explore. It also allowed a number of different polices and groups to be brought together so progress could be clearly identified and evidenced, with greater opportunities offered to partners through the Low Carbon Thematic Group and the Bolsover Partnership.
- 1.5 In March 2022, Executive agreed to accept these proposed changes to the CRP and move away from more traditional monitoring to a live document that tracked and evidenced progress across all schemes and or initiatives.
- 1.6 The Climate Change & Communities Scrutiny Committee received a further update in May 2022, following the operational changes to the Council's approach during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.7 Committee Members agreed to complete further detailed work in relation to carbon reduction as part of the 2022/23 work programme in order to evaluate work completed within the current municipal cycle 2019-23, to guide incoming Members on potential future action.
- 1.8 On the 7th February 2023, and subsequent to the work completed by Committee from November 22-January 23, the Prime Minister announced a new Government Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. Priority Outcomes for the Department¹ will include:
 1. Ensuring security of energy supply this winter, next winter and in the longer-term – bringing down energy bills and reducing inflation.
 2. Ensuring the UK is on track to meet its legally binding Net Zero commitments and support economic growth by significantly speeding up delivery of network infrastructure and domestic energy production.
 3. Improving the energy efficiency of UK homes, businesses and public sector buildings to meet the 15% demand reduction ambition.
 4. Delivering current schemes to support energy consumers with their bills and develop options for long-term reform to improve how the electricity market works for families and businesses.
 5. Seizing the economic benefits of Net Zero, including the jobs and growth created through investment in new green industries.
 6. Passing the Energy Bill to support the emerging CCUS and hydrogen sectors; to update the governance of the energy system; and to reduce the time taken to consent offshore wind.

It is likely that this will create new opportunities to access funding to support delivery at a local level developing new green industries, retrofit of housing stock, improving Council fleet and improved options for energy supply.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134989/Making_Government_Deliver_for_the_British_People.pdf

2. Details of Proposal or Information

2.1 The aim of the review was:

- To evaluate the Council's current approach to Carbon Reduction.

2.2 Following a briefing by the current lead officer on progress against the Council's three strands of activity, the objectives agreed were:

- Review of officer capacity and resource
- Review of software platform used to monitor progress against Carbon Reduction Plan
- Assessment of local knowledge of best practice in home energy efficiency
- Clarity over Corporate approach/objectives
- Progress update on current activity across the 3 themes

2.3 The key issues identified for investigation were as follows:

- Resource levels to deliver existing schemes and identify and submit funding bids for new programmes, particularly officer resource and clear budget commitments.
- Data quality to ensure progress is being adequately tracked.
- How the Council could further embed considerations of environmental impact in to service design and delivery.
- Communication – both internal and external, as to what the Council is doing and how this can be supported.

2.4 The review was completed in a slightly different format to normal and ran as a shorter spotlight review over a two month period. The Committee met on four occasions in total and sought evidence by way of:

- Lead Officer reports
- Internal enquiries to the Low Carbon Thematic Group and core officers engaged in operational delivery against the three themes of the Carbon Reduction Plan.
- Review of neighbouring authorities including strategies in place and communication/guidance to public and partners via the Council website.
- Review of data tools and performance indicators used to monitor carbon reduction
- Assessment of Council Ambitions and how carbon reduction activity has been enabled.

2.5 Review of officer capacity and resource

Members were advised in November 2022 that proposals had been developed for a dedicated officer post to support delivery of the carbon reduction objectives. In January it was noted that this had been placed on hold, pending the report to Council in February 2023 in relation to Dragonfly Development Limited. which would result in an alteration to Council structures.

It was noted that a number of External Wall Insulation schemes had been delivered previously due to a concerted effort by a previous officer with

reasonability for Housing Improvement schemes. While the government funding schemes currently available were limited, the officer resource to actively secure funding was no longer available.

Following release of the proposed Business Case for Dragonfly Development Limited, it was clear that the lead for Climate Change would sit within the Council structure and Members agreed that this was the right course of action to ensure the Council kept control over planning and delivery.

2.6 Review of software platform used to monitor progress against Carbon Reduction Plan

The current lead officer has noted that pending the roll-out of Microsoft 365 across service areas, this may be the best option for improving file sharing and monitoring. However, the roll-out of SharePoint is within phase 2 of the project which could create further delays in effective monitoring.

Members were also mindful that there were now regular meetings between the Chief Executive and ICT on the roll-out of improved Microsoft systems and that this was being done in a staged approach, taking account of implementation risks including cyber security.

Members queried whether the Loop software was being used where possible to track 'environmental' social value outcomes from current delivery. It was noted that this was an area that still required further development as the software became embedded across service areas. The lead officer had access to the Loop software and further training was planned before projects could go live in the system for monitoring.

2.7 Assessment of local knowledge of best practice in home energy efficiency

The lead officer advised in November 2022, that the Bolsover Citizens Panel was to be surveyed to gauge local knowledge around options for home energy efficiency. It was noted that the results of the survey were to be used to shape what would be required in terms of any local awareness campaign by the Council. This was considered a vital piece of work in the current situation with energy bills and cost of living.

At the meeting in January 2023 it was noted that the survey was complete but that the results report was still pending. Members agreed that this work was still necessary in order to shape future engagement by the Council. It would also help the Council to develop local awareness campaigns and to influence any future funding bids by the Council in relation to energy efficiency in the District's housing stock and to support local businesses.

The Committee would welcome sight of the survey results as part of a future report and hope that the Council are able to take effective action as a result of the findings.

2.8 Clarity over Corporate approach/objectives

Scrutiny Members note that there was no assignment of Climate Change or Carbon Reduction to any current Executive Portfolio. While there was a Scrutiny lead through the Chair of the Committee that addresses Climate Change, Members felt that a clear Executive lead would complement this and

provide a strategic Member champion. There was no formal Executive link or Climate Change & Communities Scrutiny Committee Member link to the Low Carbon Thematic Group. Members suggest that these would be useful additions to the Thematic Groups membership following the election in May 2023.

As part of the review, Members assessed activity across all the Corporate Ambitions to examine how each area was contributing to climate change and carbon reduction objectives. Members would be happy to share this with existing lead officers/newly recruited officers. Members also found that other Councils had completed environmental impact assessments of their Corporate Plan, which could be something for the Council to consider when the current Corporate Ambitions are refreshed following elections in May 2023.

To ensure consideration of environmental impact was embedded as part of all strategic decisions and budgets, the core committee report template had been amended as of November 2022 and now included an additional environmental impacts section:

Environment:

Please identify (if applicable) how this proposal/report will help the Authority meet its carbon neutral target or enhance the environment.

However, it was apparent that officers were not always sure the level of detail required for this section, and that further guidance may be required.

Members are clear that a range of activity had taken place to date including:

- Retrofitting properties with improved insulation – both Council and private, where grant schemes can be delivered.
- Seeking further improvements at core sites.
- Carbon Literacy training, with some staff and Members gaining qualified Carbon Literacy Status

Nevertheless, Members are clear that there are further options that require investigation, which could bring additional benefits in terms of reduced CO₂ emissions including:

- Use of hydrogen based fuel in fleet – this still requires further development nationally.
- Mine water energy schemes
- Possible installation of a Combined Heat & Power unit (CHP) at The Arc to create further efficiencies within the leisure centre
- Further installation of solar panels across BDC sites/council car parks
- Impact of the Ombudsman findings in relation to mould/damp within social housing
- Further bids for insulation schemes for both Council and private properties

2.8.1 Communications

Appendix 1 shows the information currently made available on the Council's website. This refers to the old plan from 2019 that was updated in early 2022. It

has been noted by Members that the Council's current Plan is not on the website, nor is the old document accessible. The page is considerably limited in detail compared to neighbouring authorities. In addition, while there are some links to activity happening within the various parishes, there are no clear action plans available outlining specific Council activity.

Furthermore, it was noted that Derbyshire CC website had links to the old 2019-30 Carbon Reduction Plan on their website and the document was also linked as supporting the delivery of Vision Derbyshire's Climate Change Strategy 2022-25. <https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/site-elements/documents/pdf/environment/climate-change/vision-derbyshire-climate-change-strategy.pdf>

Members have reviewed the draft 'posters' created as a result of the Carbon Literacy training and feel there is duplication of statements across them. Further work is needed to create one combined 'organisation' poster that states what we are doing – to be used on BDC public screens and town centre screens and on the website. This should be used alongside one 'individual' poster that states what individual officers could do – to be used as an internal reminder in kitchens/possible screensaver page that is incorporated alongside the Corporate Ambitions. Members would be happy to work further with officers on this and have identified potential content for the final drafts.

Further resources could also be developed for residents, businesses and Parish Councils/VCS partners. Examples of such resources were gathered as part of the review work and are available for reference.

Members concluded that overall, the information made available by the Council required a review and update to ensure the Council's current objectives were clear internally and externally, particularly with partners.

2.8.2 Data quality

Members have established that there is currently no clear baseline data from which the Council is tracking progress. It is also unclear what data may have been gathered previously when the authority was required to report on emissions NI185 and NI186.

A number of tools are available nationally to assist Councils in monitoring their CO2 emissions. One such tool supported by the LGA is the Greenhouse Gas Accounting tool, which is free to use and enables access to benchmark data.

The lead officer noted that there may also be an opportunity to get support from an external partner but this would likely be at a cost to the authority.

To date however, there appears to be no clear commitment to data analysis and tracking. In addition, the Council currently has no specific PIs related to carbon reduction/climate change, aside from the recycling PI.

Possible indicators to consider include:

- Total Gas used by all Council owned and operated sites.
- Total Electricity use by all Council owned and operated sites/

- Total Gas and Electricity used in all Council leased Buildings inc. leisure centres and assisted living sites.
- CO2 emissions from no. of miles claimed as Business travel
- CO2 emissions from council fleet
- Fuel usage from Council fleet
- Waste contamination levels (for recycled waste)

There are a number of areas that can be monitored within the national tools available.

2.8.3 Progress against the Motion to Council in July 2019.

As part of the review, Members completed a full analysis of progress against the wide ranging list of objectives contained within the Motion to Council in July 2019, in order to assess progress over the last four years. A RAG status has been applied to each point allowing Members to clearly see actions that have been achieved, actions in progress, actions that could be achieved if there is a will to develop additional delivery, and actions that cannot be achieved due to external constraints. It is recommended that this be passed to the Low Carbon Thematic Group for consideration as part of their future delivery planning.

2.9 Progress update on current activity across the 3 themes of the Carbon Reduction Plan

One of the key queries by the Members was around the Council's current energy tariffs and how the Council was also looking to generate its own energy. The lead officer noted that whilst the Council had previously moved to a green tariff, due to the current rates, the increased costs associated with being on the tariff meant that it was no longer a viable option

The lead officer noted that the Woodlands development in Langwith was likely to complete early with 19 properties completed in total. This development included air source heat pumps and extra insulation with the properties being built to a high-spec 'future homes' standard. Members were keen to see the Council use such specification for other Bolsover Homes developments in future.

Members were also updated on work at Whaley Common where the Council had a number of 'off-gas' properties that have had air source heat pumps fitted. Whilst this had been completed at a higher cost to the Council due to the lack of grants available, the difference to the properties was significant. Members were again keen to see this approach used elsewhere, and the officer noted that this would be the likely approach for any remaining 'off-gas' properties.

Committee Members are keen to see a greater shift towards installation of air source heat pumps and asked to what extent this was being delivered in place of gas boilers. It was noted that the Council planned to continue use of gas boilers whilst legislation allowed this. However, it was noted that whilst there was no long term plan, Members were advised that staff were being trained on how to service air source kit and would eventually be trained on installation.

As noted earlier in the report, the Council has been successful in delivering a number of External Wall insulation schemes through securing funding via LAD1 and LAD2 which had a huge impact on reducing CO2 emissions. Unfortunately, although more properties had been identified that would benefit from such work,

further grants were not currently available. While the current government funding schemes available were limited, the officer resource to actively secure funding was no longer available. Furthermore, the funding schemes currently available did not enable the Council to support delivery to a large number of properties due to the criteria associated with the schemes.

From information provided, Committee Members were also keen to ensure the District is able to benefit from other innovations such as Mine Water Energy. The officer has noted this is being assessed in conjunction with Derby University but further work is required to understand which sites could benefit from such a system.

Members were updated on the Safe & Warm Programme being completed across the Council's Independent Living Schemes. A number of the Schemes were already completed and the Council was learning where possible from each phase and making amends as required to each new phase of roll-out. The works were making a significant difference to residents' energy bills and the overall quality of the accommodation offer.

Based on the information presented and discussions with the lead officer, it was concluded that the Council would need to be clearer moving forward on its approach to carbon reduction and the Council's core objectives. This would also require the Council to be clear on the financial commitment that was being made to ensure the Council can deliver on its core objectives and meet its 2050 target.

2.12 Following discussion at Scrutiny Committee on 31st January 2023 where the lead officer provided an additional progress report, and based on the additional research which had taken place and evidence provided, Members agreed the following recommendations:

1. That the officer function addressing the Council's strategic approach to carbon reduction should be kept in-house, with partnership work as required with Dragonfly Development Limited, for delivery associated with the service functions transferred.
2. That a dedicated operational post be recruited to, in addition to the designation of a lead senior officer, to ensure that the delivery in relation to carbon reduction maintained momentum to reach the 2050 target.
3. That data quality related to carbon reduction be improved, with a clear baseline agreed from which to track progress up to 2050, with regular data reports as part of the corporate performance reporting.
4. That the lead senior officer take account of the Member analysis of the Council's current Ambitions and how activity was supporting carbon reduction as part of new programme development.
5. That a revised approach to communication of objectives and achievements be implemented, both external and internal, with a full review of the website to ensure the Council's activity, and progress towards the target, is clearly documented.
6. That the Council ensures that a lead Portfolio Member is agreed for Carbon Reduction from within the Executive, post-election May 2023.
7. That the membership of the Low Carbon Thematic Group is reviewed, post-election May 2023, to ensure it incorporates the Portfolio lead and a link to Climate Change & Communities Scrutiny to further improve communication. It

is also recommended that the cross-party representation remains going forward as this is seen as a positive way of working.

8. That the Council website is reviewed and updated to provide clear guidance on current Council activity.
9. That Scrutiny analysis of progress against the Council Motion previously passed to the Low Carbon Thematic Group, be shared so future work planning can take account of outstanding areas capable of delivery.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

3.1 The Committee have put together nine recommendations, as outlined at 2.12, which will hopefully enable the Council to clarify immediate priorities for action, as well as longer term plan to ensure the Council and District is net zero by 2050.

3.2 The key findings arising from the review were:

- There is insufficient officer resource to ensure the carbon reduction agenda is progressed effectively.
- There is a lack of clarity around the Council's current baseline and data quality/monitoring in relation to carbon emissions.
- At present there is limited communication of Council objectives and work being completed to meet our target.
- Widened membership of the Low Carbon Thematic Group would lead to improved cross-communication.
- A clear Member lead at Executive level would create a higher profile for the work required by the Council and provide an Executive level champion alongside the existing Scrutiny Chair champion.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

4.1 Executive could choose not to endorse the recommendations of the review, where they feel the course of action recommended is beyond the delivery capacity of the Authority.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the Executive endorses the recommendations of the review outlined at 2.12.
2. That for recommendations approved by Executive, monitoring by Committee takes place over a twelve month period via the PERFORM system with an update report to Committee at the end of the monitoring period.

Approved by Chair of Climate Change & Communities Scrutiny Committee

IMPLICATIONS:

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details: The recommendations will have cost implications outside of current budgets related to staffing resource. Any proposed changes to facilities/energy management or targeted projects would be subject to a separate report.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes No

Details: In carrying out scrutiny reviews the Council is exercising its scrutiny powers as laid out in Part 1A, s9F(2) of the Local Government Act 2000.

The Council is committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050 as a result of the Climate Change Act 2008.

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Environment:

Please identify (if applicable) how this proposal/report will help the Authority meet its carbon neutral target or enhance the environment.

Details: The recommendations from Scrutiny seek to ensure there is greater clarity on the Council's approach to carbon reduction, with improved data quality, clear objectives and reporting, additional staffing resource and improved communications internal and external.

Staffing: Yes No

Details:

Any changes to the Council's establishment resulting from these recommendations will require approval by the Council's Employment and Personnel Committee. Any budgetary growth implications will require further approval from Council. The Council's policies and procedures will be followed for any recruitment or restructure required.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

<p>Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p>Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i></p>	No
<p>Is the decision subject to Call-In? (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</p>	No

District Wards Significantly Affected	All Wards
Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Executive <input type="checkbox"/> SLT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Members <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	Details:

Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy and Environment.
The Carbon Reduction Plan clearly links into the Environment Ambition but can also have an impact on both Customer and Economy.

DOCUMENT INFORMATION	
Appendix No	Title
1	BDC Website – Climate Change

Background Papers
<i>(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive you must provide copies of the background papers).</i>