

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee 16th November 2021 Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy – Progress report

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr R Bryan, Highways, Travel and Environment

Local Councillor(s): County Wide

Executive Director: J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

Report Author: Antony Littlechild

Title: Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy – Draft

Tel: 01305 224802

Email: antony.littlechild@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

To note and review progress made in delivering the Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Action Plan as will be published in the public facing progress report.

Reason for Recommendation:

In line with recommendation of Scrutiny Committee of 12th May 2021 that the Committee would provide oversight against progress and delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan via six monthly progress reports.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Dorset Council declared a Climate & Ecological Emergency in 2019 and following public consultation a Strategy and Action plan to make Dorset Council Carbon Neutral by 2040 and the wider Dorset Council Area by 2050 were adopted by full Council on 15th July 2021

- 1.2 As part of the adoption of the Strategy and Action Plan it was agreed that Dorset Council would commit to producing two public facing reports per year, giving an overview of progress against the strategy and action plan which would be presented to the Scrutiny Committee prior to publication alongside additional details as to the every developing and changing external circumstances that will influence the progress and direction of the Strategy and Action Plan.
- 1.3 The first public progress report (Appendix A) highlights that action is underway across all areas of the strategy and that major progress has been made in reducing the Councils carbon emissions since the base year of 2019/20.
- 1.4 It also notes that the COVID pandemic has had a significant influence on many of the savings seen, such as major reductions in staff travel. The key challenge will be to lock in some of the working practices and maintain the urgency of delivery across Council services and in partnership across the County to ensure carbon reduction stays on track.
- 1.5 This report provides further detail against the key areas for action identified in the strategy and builds upon the information provided in the public facing report with details of key challenges and next steps.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 A costed action plan presented to Cabinet, 6th October 2020, highlighted many initial actions could be taken forward with existing resources but significant additional revenue and capital would be required to deliver the strategy over its life time to ensure action continues with the urgency required and carbon reduction targets are achieved in a timely manner.
- 2.2 Dorset Council and partners have been extremely successful at drawing in significant external funds to support delivery of the strategy objectives, including £19 million in grant funding from the Governments Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and the Low Carbon Skills Fund,

3. Well-being and Health Implications

- 3.1 There are no specific health and well being implications of this report. However, the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy highlights that

the impacts of climate change poses numerous health and wellbeing risks to the residents of Dorset and these need to be significant consideration in the mitigation and adaptation to climate change. The strategy also highlights that effective delivery of the action plan will have wider health and well being co-benefits, such as improved air quality, healthy diets, improved access to high quality natural environment and active travel to name but a few.

4. Climate implications

- 4.1 The specific purpose of this report and the strategy is to present Dorset Councils overall approach to the climate and ecological emergency. The overall principle behind the strategy is to set out key areas where Dorset Council will need to take action to directly reduce carbon emissions from its own operations to become a carbon neutral Council by 2040 and by working in partnership to help Dorset residents and organisations achieve a wider carbon neutral Dorset County by 2050. This report provides the first progress report in delivery of the strategy.

5. Other Implications

- 5.1 There are no specific other implications for this report. As previously noted, the strategy and action plan itself has wide ranging implication, opportunities and benefits in the way the council delivers services and works with others across the County. Tackling the climate and Ecological Emergency are a key part of the sustainability agenda.

6. Risk Assessment

- 6.1 Having considered the risks associated with this report, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

- 6.2 Due to the known high level of public interest in the Climate Change Agenda and the previous commitment to provide the public with a bi-annual progress report to not do should be considered a HIGH reputational risk to Dorset Council

Residual Risk: Low

6.3 The publication of the public facing report is in line with commitments made and shows a significant level of progress in reducing the carbon emission of Dorset Council.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

7.1 Specific EqIA's will be developed against relevant actions as required. The publication of the public facing progress report will be undertaken against established and agreed communication equality principles.

8. Appendices

- Appendix A - DRAFT (pre graphic design) Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy – Progress Report - Autumn 2021
- Dorset Council Climate Emergency Strategy and action plans – www.dorsetforyou/climate

9. Background Papers

- 9.1 Dorset Council declared a climate and ecological emergency in May 2019 and established an Executive Advisory Panel to oversee the development of the Councils approach. Following consultation Dorset Council climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and action plan was adopted by Full Council on 15th July 2021. Dorset Council agreed to monitor performance against the strategy and action plan and report to the public twice a year.
- 9.2 The first public facing progress report is attached at Appendix A. It aims to provide a concise summary of progress in the delivery of the strategy, but particularly focuses on progress towards our carbon emission targets over the past year and highlights some key pieces of work underway to deliver the strategy.
- 9.3 The report will be available to the public via the Councils climate emergency webpages and will be subject of a targeted social media campaign and press releases. This report does not cover everything, but provides a snapshot. In addition to the progress report further case studies and video clips will also become available to provide more detail to the summary report. These will be updated on an on-going basis as they become available.

9.4 Many other areas of work are underway across the Council and wider Dorset which contribute to delivering the strategies objectives and action plan. More of these will feature in future editions. The next report will be published in Spring 2022, highlighting further progress, and focusing on the year to come.

10. Performance against carbon targets

10.1 Dorset Council Carbon Emissions have been estimated to have fallen by 17% in 2020/21, well in excess of the 8% year on year budget to reach Carbon Neutral by 2040.

10.2 The biggest reductions were in Business Mileage (-60%) and Commuting (-50%) both of which were in a large part caused by the effects of Covid pandemic and impact of lockdown. This also explains the increases in emissions from Fleet Fuel (+17%) and Dorset Travel Fuel (+14%) brought about by the requirement to provide socially distanced transport arrangements.

10.3 The challenge to lock in the Covid related reductions will be greatly assisted by the initiatives that Dorset Council are implementing around new ways of working.

10.4 It is considered that the Covid pandemic had a more limited influence on other Carbon reductions which should be primarily attributed to ongoing Council initiatives.

10.5 Accurate data is less available for the wider Dorset Area but Carbon emissions across the wider Dorset Council area are considered to have reduced by approx.. 6% between 2017 and 2019. Whilst significant this falls below the required reduction of 9% to stay within the Carbon budget and on course for Carbon Neutrality by 2050. Dorset Council is responsible for and therefore has direct control over only 1-2% of the overall Carbon emissions from the Dorset Area and reducing the area wide emissions presents challenges in terms of indirect action and influencing behaviour.

11. Buildings & Assets

Key Challenges

- The pandemic caused significant disruption to the delivery of energy saving measures in 2020.
- In March 2020 all work ceased as contractors shut down and visits to premises were prohibited.
- No effective promotional campaigns could be conducted, and installations dried up.
- Currently severe shortages of manpower and materials in the sector and installation costs are known to be rising steeply.

Next Steps

- The Council has a new contractor in place to deliver Healthy Homes Dorset and has begun targeted marketing of residents to inform them of the opportunities for funding energy saving improvements to their homes.
- The Council will be bidding for more money from government to provide enhanced Green Homes Grants (LAD3) in Dorset.
- The Council has entered a bidding competition for more money from Government to roll out targeted enforcement of landlords renting poorly heated or insulated properties.

12. Business and Economy.

Key challenges

- There is no budget or dedicated staff resource (i.e. a sustainable tourism officer) to continue or grow a green tourism project. The work currently carried out is part of the general work of Visit Dorset.
- The tourism industry has been hit by covid, and businesses are now focussed on recovery and keeping their businesses afloat.
- The provision of public transport in Dorset makes it difficult to travel sustainably round Dorset
- There is a lack of information for tourist businesses about how green credentials might help in terms of increased income.

Next Steps

- The Great South West partnership have put together “Towards 2030” outlining green tourism projects that could be implemented should funding become available. This includes becoming zero carbon, calculating the footprint of the tourism industry in the south west, building resilience and improving productivity through addressing seasonality. This a £10 million oven ready project.
- If resources were available, next steps could include working with council colleagues and other partners to hold further business webinars on reducing food waste, becoming plastic free, reducing general waste, sourcing local produce, marketing green tourism.
- Dorset could aim to be officially recognised as a sustainable destination. Others have achieved this but it's not just about tourism businesses, it's what transport is available, recycling and waste management, planning policy for how and what buildings are made of, local food and drink production, renewable energy etc.
- Visit Dorset also aims to carry out visitor and business surveys to gain baseline data regarding the current level of sustainable tourism in Dorset.
- If funding was available, Visit Dorset could approach Bournemouth University regarding calculating the carbon footprint of tourism in Dorset. This would give a starting point to know how much carbon needs to be reduced or off-set to become zero carbon by 2050. Plymouth University did something similar in 2016 for the [South West](#).
- The Council is commissioning additional evidence to provide an update on the employment /retail space needs of the area to consider the likely impacts of Brexit the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift to online retail. The results of this evidence will be fed into to the next stages of the Local Plan.

13. Renewable Energy

Key Challenges

- Need for public-sector projects to be innovative in order to be eligible for support within the Low Carbon Dorset (LCD) programme. Extremely difficult to justify spending on higher risk projects at such a time of financial constraints
- Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund - Some pipeline public-sector projects did not progress to a grant application with LCD as they were able to access 100% funding from the Public-Sector Decarbonisation Fund. The fact that the Decarbonisation Fund is 100% public funded – rather than

requiring match funding like the LCD programme – proved more attractive to some of our expected projects.

- The key challenge for delivery moving forward is funding.

Next Steps

- The LCD team is currently helping develop some major low-carbon projects in the county, including but not confined to:
 - a £6m green hydrogen project in east Dorset
 - a £500K solar PV project
- LCD very close to having fully allocated £5.6m grant pot –now prioritising those in key sectors (social housing, public sector) to meet those targets.
- Applications for support are now being added to a waiting list – and will be notified if/when any additional funds become available (ie. If a contracted project falls through or comes in under budget, or if funding is secured from an alternative source). We currently have over 160 potential projects seeking support who are yet to receive a grant from the programme.

14. Natural Assets

Key Challenges

- Public appreciation/understanding of new cut and collect verge management techniques – comms have been working very hard on this.
- The conflicting demands for new developments and protecting the environment

Next Steps

- Tree planting for Jubilee – both directly as DC and also assisting and facilitating a number of Town and Parish Councils
- Agree position regarding planning gains for ecological benefits and approach to management of new land, results to be fed into the local plan
- Begin in house carbon soil testing on verges now managed by cut and collect to monitor changes in soil carbon
- Rights of Way Improvement Plan to be complete and launched
- The Council has commissioned ecological surveys of sites proposed for allocation in the Local plan
- Establish a baseline and set targets for improvement

15. Transport & Travel

Key Challenges

- Maximising the opportunities and gains that Covid-19 has provided in travel reductions
- Work on Dorset Council's travel plan was disrupted by the pandemic, which would impact on research/surveys already undertaken
- When Schools returned in September, many more vehicles were needed to accommodate social distancing and school bubbles
- Accommodating the limitations imposed by COVID on our various transport services
- Keeping our operators financially afloat whilst transport services were not running. Despite this support, many operators are struggling to invest in newer, cleaner vehicles and there is a national shortage of drivers for both large and small vehicles
- Trials of electric vehicles restricted to Dorchester area due to existing infrastructure (most charging points being at County Hall),
- The range of electric vehicles during winter months can half when lights, windscreen wipers, demisters and heaters are used.
- Additional cost of
 - Electric vehicles over their fossil fuel equivalents
 - upgrading existing infrastructure at depots
 - upskilling colleagues engaged in maintaining vehicles.

Next Steps

- Further work to reduce business mileage and maximise use of digital technology to enable home working.
- Looking to capture staff use of public transport through our business mileage claim system.
- Roll out the Marginal Gains App to a wider audience for a limited defined period & extrapolate the data for a clearer picture of the cost/ time and carbon savings to the whole authority (rather than just one service).
- A key element within our Bus Service Improvement Plan for the years ahead will be a reduction in carbon emissions from transport – eg by encouraging more use of public transport, moving towards cleaner engine technology and reducing the need to travel.
- A further ten fast charging (22kW) sockets and a single rapid (50kw) charger are being installed at four sites.
- A further £500k of private sector and Government investment is planned for 2021-22.
- Continue to develop network and roll out next phases of chargers.
- Further development of pipeline schemes.

- Delivery of early Active Travel Fund schemes,
- Continued delivery of TCF schemes,
- Bidding through capability fund capital and any other available opportunities.
- Funding being sought for further delivery of bike share schemes in larger settlements
- Hanson are aiming to demonstrate a “world first” net zero kiln fuel mix, using hydrogen and biomass, by the end of 2021.
- RAP inclusion in primary surfacing supplies is targeted to increase over coming years due to the equipment improvements made at the production plant.
- low energy asphalt was formerly limited to the bottom and middle level of road surfaces, however from July 2020, its use was gradually introduced to surface course as confidence increases. This will increase the proportion of low energy asphalt compared to conventional hot surfacing.
- Hanson have brought in the first all-electric van on their site fleet, which will be delivered to the cycleway scheme at Leigh Road, Wimborne in the near future, where its use will be monitored closely, with a view to introducing electric vehicles to other sites in future where viable. Dorset Highways are following suit and are about to install charging infrastructure at Bridport Highways Depot and are looking to lease or purchase a new electric van for one of our Site Agents. Again, the plan is to roll this out for other staff such as Community Highways Officers in future.
- Monitoring driver’s behaviours to ensure that drivers avoid harsh acceleration and braking, unnecessary idling when a vehicle is stationary and that the speed limit is not exceeded.
- Services to review their vehicle usage and eliminate any unnecessary travel.
- Review the provision of vehicles for employees to use to and from work to assess the opportunity to reduce the numbers of vehicles that the Council operates.
- Look to seek additional funding to electrify the fleet.
- Work with EV charging point colleagues to progress the electrification of the fleet
- Redistribute the Pool fleet across the county to make it more accessible to non-Dorchester based colleagues.
- Continue to investigate other renewable energy such as Hydrogen for the use in large goods vehicles.
- Network/pool resources with other local authorities and agencies such as BCP.
- Introduce HVO as an alternative to diesel as an interim measure to help the transition from a fossil fuelled fleet to an alternatively fuelled fleet

16. Waste

Key Challenges

- As well as preventing further work taking place, Covid lockdown changed waste arising from Dorset Council buildings significantly, therefore audits would not have served their purpose.
- Household waste growth has increased due to Covid and everyone working from home. Kerbside collected residual waste has increased by 5.66%
- The team have been unable to conduct some of their usual promotional activities due to Covid, e.g. door knocking, roadshows, promotional events, school visits, community talks, etc.

Next Steps

- Secure budget to enable audits and develop waste reduction plans
- Continue to implement various campaigns across Dorset to encourage residents to reduce, reuse and recycle as much of their waste as possible.
- We will continue to closely monitor developments to ensure these changes are adhered to and implemented in Dorset.

17. Water

Key Challenges

- Resources to take pro-active action
- Accessibility to sites over pandemic period
- Abnormal water consumption levels and patterns caused by pandemic, making establishment of normal consumption levels difficult
- As the scale and ambition of the community has evolved, the project team has remained the same. To help deliver more for the communities along the River Asker, and to spread the approach to others within the West Dorset Rivers and Coastal Streams area, it would have been helpful to have a dedicated project coordinator.
- The River Asker project started out as a short-term pilot to see if it is an effective model for delivery. Its success has resulted in growing expectations. We have been fortunate with securing funding to allow ongoing delivery but to effectively deliver into the future, better forward planning is required.
- The impact of restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic has meant that very little has been achieved on the ground in the last year. We

paused activity at an early stage in the proceedings and have not had the opportunity to return to normal yet.

- Incorporate future climate change scenarios into our planning application responses; this may have an economic impact on developers and property owners.
- Continuing to respond in a timely manner to increasing numbers of major development planning consultations.
- Tight timescales for delivering a sound flood risk evidence base for the Local Plan.
- The effects of sea level rise and the need for new/improved flood defences in areas sensitive to this.
- Unknown severity of impact on flooding & coastal erosion of climate change in the future.

Next Steps

- To secure more funding, not only for the River Asker Community Project, but to allow Dorset Wild Rivers to effectively deliver the Community-led approach in the River Char catchment and others throughout Dorset.
- Continue monitoring water consumption & identifying high usage
- Evaluate feasibility of automatic water consumption monitoring in key locations
- More frequent and focussed maintenance activities on critical drainage systems (mainly highway drains and public sewers) to help reduce flood risk.
- Develop a sound evidence base in support of the new Local Plan.
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is underway to assess flood risk across the council area, results to be fed into the next stages of the plan production.
- Ongoing internal/external consultation with flood risk authorities on the proposed allocations within the plan, to further identify and understand mitigation for flood risk issues.

18. Making it happen

Key Challenges

- Embedding in DC culture
- Scale and complexity

Next Steps

- Currently trialling use of our impact tool for wider role out through decision making and project development

- Embed Climate change strategy objectives into all transformation work stream
- Further develop our carbon footprint and Performance indicators for Ecology
- Forge links and strengthen links with external organisations and partners
- Continue to seek and bid of external funds
- Develop Internal Governance structure to ensure delivery and development of the strategy and action plan in the long term.
- Develop finance strategy to support delivery of the climate change strategy.

19. Conclusion

- 19.1 The collection, analysis and production of the first annual Carbon Emission data set against a qualifiable baseline marks a major milestone in the evolution and delivery of the Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan delivery has is the culmination of a large quantity of work.
- 19.2 Dorset Council have actively and successfully persuaded a number of high profile technological and financial opportunities and moving forward will proactively manage the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan to ensure all future opportunities are acted upon.
- 19.3 The results of the data analysis show that Dorset Council is delivering in line with the Strategy and Action Plan and current reductions are above target. Whilst it should be recognised that the impact of the pandemic has influenced the performance it must also be noted it has shown what positive change is possible and be considered as a series of opportunities to lock in the savings moving forward through changes in working practices and organisational culture.

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.