

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

4 July 2023

Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology: Phase 1 (2021-23) Progress Report – Summer 2023

For Review and Consultation

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

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Report Status: Public

1. Brief Summary:

- 1.1 The Dorset Council Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy and action plan were adopted by Full Council on 15 July 2021. At this time, 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, to be presented to this committee.
- 1.2 The first report (Autumn 2021) provided a quantitative outline of progress, on annual carbon emissions reductions. The second report (Spring 2022) provided qualitative narrative on delivery against strategy actions, and the third (Autumn 2022) again updated on the quantitative emissions trajectory.¹
- 1.3 *‘Protecting our natural environment, climate and ecology’* has since been included as one of the top priorities embedded within the Council Plan and

¹ <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/progress-so-far>

Delivery Plan. In March this year we refreshed our strategy and action plan for Phase 2 of our programme.²

- 1.4 This report aims to take stock of what was achieved in the first phase for the original 2021-23 action plan, by providing a qualitative narrative on major action to date in key areas. It is important to emphasise that the strategy and action plan are long-term programmes that will evolve over time.

Recommendation:

To review progress made in delivering the original climate and ecology action plan during the first phase of our programme.

Reason for Recommendation:

In line with the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on 12 May 2021 that the Committee would provide oversight against progress and delivery of the strategy and action plan via six monthly progress reports. The Committee's views will be used to inform the shape of the next phase of the programme for delivery of the refreshed 2023 strategy and action plan.

2. Background

- 2.1 Dorset Council adopted its strategy and action plan in 2021 following consultation and agreed to monitor performance biannually. Three progress reports were published in 2021-2022.
- 2.2 The appended report gives the latest overview of progress, providing a narrative on key achievements to date during the first phase of the programme as we commence implementation of our refreshed Phase 2 strategy and action plan.
- 2.3 This report aims to take stock of what was achieved in the first phase for the original 2021-23 action plan by providing a qualitative narrative on major action to date in key areas. It is important to emphasise that this is a long-term programme that will evolve over time and many actions though progressing well may take time to reach completion.
- 2.4 This report provides a qualitative narrative of progress against actions but does not provide a quantitative description of our emissions and our consequent progress against our emissions trajectory. The latter is the subject of our Autumn/Winter progress reporting.

² <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/our-plan>

3. Summary of progress spring 2022

- 3.1 Our original strategy set our long and short-term carbon targets, set 41 objectives under 9 topic headings, and detailed around 190 actions.
- 3.2 Two years since its adoption, considerable work has been undertaken and excellent progress has been made, as summarised in the appended report.
- 3.3 In some areas progress has been slower than anticipated, and actions that haven't been commenced may have been rolled over to the next phase. Most actions also remain 'in progress' rather than 'complete', as they are ongoing and likely to continue for some time. Transformational change on the scale required is extremely complex. Significant amounts of work are being undertaken now that may take years to reach fruition, and new ways of working across systems with partners will need time to embed.

4. Key Achievements

- 4.1 There have been many key achievements to date, as detailed in the appended report. Some highlights include:
 - Mainstreaming climate and ecology by establishing it as a corporate priority, appointing a corporate director, beginning embedding it in key policy and strategy, and adopting a new decision-wheel for the design and evaluation of new policy, projects and strategies.
 - Establishing governance and a programme management approach for our organisational net zero 2040 target; and cutting our footprint by 26% by the last report.
 - Phase 1 of our estate retrofit programme has now been completed, thanks to a £19m grant that has upgraded over 200 buildings with over 350 renewable generation, heating or energy efficiency measures.
 - The initial phase of our Low Carbon Dorset Programme provided free advice and £6.2m in grant funding to local projects worth £17m, installing 13MW of renewables and saving 10kt CO₂e/yr. Resource has been secured from the Shared Prosperity Fund to continue the advisory service.
 - Healthy Homes Dorset recently won a further £4.34m through HUG2 funding, which will help further support with heating decarbonisation measures and energy efficiency upgrades for local households.

- Through our MEES Enforcement Project, landlords owning EPC rated F or G rated properties were engaged through targeting of 700 rented homes with guidance, support, and awareness – and it also saw the development of our ground-breaking “Energy Rating Improver”.
- Interim guidance and a planning position statement have been prepared in lieu of the forthcoming Local Plan to highlight that climate change is a material consideration, and to support the consistent application of existing policies which maximise their opportunities to address climate change. A sustainability checklist has also been prepared for submission alongside applications, and additional guidance has been prepared on retrofitting listed buildings.
- We have significantly changed the way we manage our verges in the last few years, improving an additional 350,000m² for biodiversity as a result – with a consequent doubling in butterfly species since.
- Through our Charging Ahead programme we’ve now completed Phase 1 of our public EV charger rollout with Joju, with Phase 2 now underway. 144 public charge points are now available in Dorset, up from 63 in 2019. We are also 1 of 9 Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure pilots, which initiated in March and is enabling £4m in funding to further invest in charging infrastructure – and could see a planned 175 charge points installed.
- Our recycling and composting rate is 58.9%, putting us in the top three unitary councils in England, and our waste sent to landfill has been cut to just 2%. We’ve been listed in the top 3 councils in a national Recycling Carbon Index.
- Dorset has been extremely successful at drawing in external funding streams, including £19m for the Salix programme, £8.25m for Low Carbon Dorset, £1.9m for EV infrastructure, another £4.3m of Home Upgrade Grant funding, and Shared Prosperity Fund funding.

5. **Next Steps**

- 5.1 Over the past two years the council has strengthened the governance and management of the programme, and we are now in a much stronger position to facilitate cross-service and cross-directorate working for a whole council approach during the next phase.

5.2 A significant amount has been achieved, but we are still only at the beginning of our journey, and it will remain very challenging to achieve our ambitions. As the progress report notes, we will face ongoing constraints around resourcing – with progress highly contingent on winning competitive grants. Grid constraints, and the delay until national decisions are made on key policy such as on the role of hydrogen in heating and transport, will also present obstacles in renewable deployment and retrofit to an extent. We will need to step more into areas that are less familiar too, such as the food system, and will need to develop a strategic approach to difficult tasks like behaviour change and offsetting. And we must give far greater attention to the risks of now unavoidable warming, and the local impacts it will have.

5.3 As our refreshed action plan outlines, over the coming year we will be continuing our major programmes like Low Carbon Dorset, Healthy Homes Dorset, and our EV charger programme – as well as continuing to bid to source external funding to expand our capacity. Other critical immediate work will involve:

- Embedding our new Impact Tool to support decision-making and sustainable project, policy and programme design; strengthening the activity of our green champions; and rolling out improved training for staff and members.
- Embedding climate and ecology further within emerging strategies, especially our forthcoming Local Plan and Local Transport Plan.
- Strengthening the consideration of climate and ecology in our commissioning and procurement processes.
- Better understanding the baseline opportunities for nature and carbon sequestration on our estate, developing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and implementing Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Further developing our climate risk vulnerability work for the council, and developing a partnership approach to adaptation for the county.
- Strengthening our partnership working and its opportunities through our Public Sector Decarbonisation Group and with town and parish councils.
- Lobbying further on key constraints to delivery like grid infrastructure.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 This report itself has no financial implications. A costed action plan for the programme was presented to Cabinet on 6 October 2020, highlighting what could be achieved with existing resources, but stressing that significant additional revenue and capital would be required to deliver over its lifetime at the pace and scale required. Dorset Council made significant commitments in the 2022/23 Dorset Council budget.
- 6.2 We will need to continue our success in accessing additional resources from a variety of external sources through competitive grant funding and partnership working – and will need to ensure we are opportunity ready with the right evidence and resources to win funding competitions.

7. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

- 7.1 The specific purpose of this report and the strategy is to present Dorset Council's overall approach to sustainability, detailing overall progress.

8. Well-being and Health Implications

- 8.1 There are no specific health and wellbeing implications of this report. However, from a strategic perspective, implementation of the strategy and action plan has significant co-benefits for health and wellbeing, and climate change impacts include significant socio-economic and health and wellbeing risks. Our emerging work on adaptation is considering how to mitigate the impacts of now unavoidable warming.

9. Other implications

- 9.1 There are no other specific implications contained in this report. As previously noted, the strategy and action plan itself has wide ranging implications, opportunities, and benefits for the way the council delivers services and works with others across the county.

10. Risk Assessment

- 10.1 Having considered the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Medium

- 10.2 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.

- 10.3 The publication of this report is in line with commitments made and shows a significant level of progress; but notes that there remains a need for increased urgency and further progress.
- 10.4 In addition, the impacts of climate change pose a significant risk to council services and budgets and the wider Dorset area in the medium and long-term. Failure to effectively address the climate and ecological emergency and resilience will increase the risks associated with climate change.

11. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 11.1 A scoping exercise is currently being undertaken to highlight any specific impacts that need to be considered through the delivery of the strategy and action plan.

12. **Appendices**

- Appendix A - Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology: Phase 1 (2021-23) Progress Report – Summer 2023