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Report Number **OS/22/12**

**To:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 25 April 2023  
**Status:** Non-key decision  
**Responsible Officer:** Olu Fatokun, Low Carbon Senior Specialist  
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**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Lesley Whybrow

**SUBJECT:** UPDATE ON COUNCIL'S CLIMATE CHANGE AND  
ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY WORK

**SUMMARY:**

This report summarises the council's work on climate change for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It follows the main points set out in the climate emergency declaration that was unanimously agreed by full Council on 24 July 2019.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. To receive and note report OS/22/12.

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Council declared a climate change and ecological emergency on 24 July 2019. The text of the declaration can be viewed here: [\(Public Pack\)Minutes Document for Council, 24/07/2019 19:00 \(folkestone-hythe.gov.uk\)](#)  
Progress on the points of the declaration is discussed in the sections below.

## 2. FOLKESTONE & HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL ESTATE AND OPERATIONS

- 2.1. The declaration called for the council to commit to reducing carbon emissions from its estate and operations to zero net carbon by 2030.
- 2.2. **Initial work** - The starting point for this work was to decide which elements of the council's operations and estate were within scope, using guidance in the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, and then calculate the council's carbon emissions at a base date. (The Greenhouse Gas Protocol is a global framework to measure and manage greenhouse gas emissions from private and public sector organisations and supply chains, and to calculate the benefits of mitigation actions.) Buildings and facilities were included where the council had direct control over the building and its energy use. Buildings and facilities were excluded where the energy supplier and use of energy was under the control of another party (such as a tenant in a self-contained council home).
- 2.3. LASER Energy, a company wholly owned by Kent County Council, was commissioned to carry out a study to establish the baseline for emissions from the council's estate and operations. Work on the study involved an extensive audit of invoices and meter readings for electricity and gas use for the different buildings and facilities within the council's control, as well as records for water usage, use of fuels and business mileage claimed by council officers.
- 2.4. At the base year of 2018/19 emissions from the council's estate and operations were calculated at 1,536 tCO<sub>2</sub>e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent) a year. The largest proportion of the emissions (58 per cent) arose from gas usage; this was largely due to heating for the Hythe swimming pool and the communal parts of sheltered/semi-sheltered housing blocks managed and controlled by the council. 26 per cent of emissions arose from electricity usage from council buildings, housing blocks, car parks and other assets. The remaining 16 per cent ('other' emissions) came from fuel use for transport and equipment, water use and the 'grey fleet' (employees' own cars that they use for work). Within this category, transport was the largest element, with some 11 per cent of total emissions arising from transport; the study highlighted the contribution of council-owned vehicles, particularly those fuelled from the central tank. There were smaller contributions from the 'grey fleet' which represented around 2 per cent of the overall total.
- 2.5. The Low Carbon Senior Specialist has undertaken a significant amount of work to assess how the council's emissions have changed since the base date. Rather than continuing to rely on consultancy services to calculate the

annual carbon footprint, the Specialist has developed a spreadsheet that allows raw data on energy and fuel use to be entered and, by formulae, converted directly to carbon emissions equivalent using the most up-to-date conversion factors.

2.6. The results of this analysis are as follows:

- Carbon emissions for 2019/20 were 1,649 tCO<sub>2</sub>e. This showed an increase of 113.95 tCO<sub>2</sub>e when compared to that of the baseline year 2018/19.
- Carbon emissions for 2020/21 were 1,483 tCO<sub>2</sub>e. This showed a decrease in emissions of 165.78 tCO<sub>2</sub>e compared to 2019/20 and 51.72 tCO<sub>2</sub>e when compared with the baseline year 2018/19.

2.7. Work is progressing to calculate a figure for the 2021/22 monitoring year. It is difficult in the above, however, to identify a general trend or the impact of specific corporate decisions on emissions, as the middle and later years were affected by the three national lockdowns that were imposed from March 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the changed working practices that emerged from the crisis.

2.8. **2021 Carbon Action Plan** - From the LASER work officers drafted a Carbon Action Plan to tackle the council's carbon emissions. The Carbon Action Plan included 33 high-level actions covering six areas: behaviour change; energy; transport; water; procurement; and biodiversity and greenspaces. Actions were categorised as immediate, short-term or medium-term. Some actions were exploratory, recognising that detailed feasibility and viability assessments would be needed to determine their cost and quantify the extent of the carbon reduction and other effects, such as impact on service provision. The Carbon Action Plan was adopted by Cabinet on 24 February 2021 (report C/20/76).

2.9. Since the Carbon Action Plan was adopted the majority of the immediate and short-term actions have been completed or are substantially complete, including: climate change training for staff and members; the introduction of a Climate Change Champions staff scheme; reducing the use of plastics, printing and paper waste; the introduction of sustainable travel incentives, including a salary sacrifice scheme for electric vehicles; the installation of electric vehicle charging points in council car parks; converting council-controlled street lighting to LED (phase one is complete and phase two is being implemented); reducing the use of peat in grounds maintenance operations; introducing climate change implications to committee reports; expanding opportunities for flexible working; introducing sustainable procurement policies; increasing biodiversity on council-owned land; and reviewing the Green Infrastructure Strategy. Some actions are dependent on other changes, such as the review of local plan policies, which will depend on government reform of the planning system.

2.10. **Carbon Action Plan Update** - Despite progress since 2021, it has become clear that a review of the Carbon Action Plan is needed. Officers have asked for more detail about the implementation of actions identified for their service areas. Since 2021 there have also been changes including: the extension of

remote working practices introduced during the pandemic; the energy crisis and inflation affecting council resources and the relative costs and benefits of carbon reduction measures; and the acquisition and divestment of buildings in the council's portfolio.

2.11. Consultants Carbon Descent were therefore commissioned in September 2022 to:

- Review the 2021 Carbon Action Plan and quantify the anticipated impacts of the high-level actions (stage 1).
- Develop a Carbon Reduction Plan which will set out measures to reach the net zero target and identify any additional actions which may be needed (stage 2).
- If necessary, provide ongoing support to implement the actions (stage 3).

2.12. Stage 1 of the work, assessing the 2021 plan and quantifying its impacts, is nearing completion. The carbon impact of some fuels (gas, petrol and diesel) is unlikely to change significantly, and future emissions from these sources can be predicted with reasonable certainty. However, part of the council's carbon impact is attributable to the energy it takes from the national grid and there are differing projections of how fast grid-supplied energy will decarbonise.

2.13. Nevertheless, the focus of the work remains on reducing energy use across the council's estate and operations, and, where possible, introducing green energy generation as a lower carbon alternative to electricity and gas, for example, through exploring the potential for solar energy generation. In many cases, the generation of zero carbon electricity will have additional benefits including increased resilience, lower overall operating costs and a demonstrable commitment to a net zero future.

2.14. As noted in paragraph 2.4, the largest share of the council's carbon emissions arises from the use of gas, including at the Hythe swimming pool and civic centre, as well as the sheltered housing schemes where it is important to maintain warm and healthy spaces. Best practice is to develop a 'decarbonisation plan' tailored to each building, considering the building's fabric and daily operations, and identify an integrated approach with measures and technologies to deliver a net zero building in operation. This is being piloted for the Folca building and if successful the approach could be extended to other buildings (paragraph 7.10).

2.15. Initial findings from stage 1 of the Carbon Action Plan review are that, under both pessimistic and optimistic scenarios for decarbonising the electricity grid, the council could get close to net zero carbon by 2030, but only if all the actions in the 2021 Carbon Action Plan are fully implemented; many of these actions were exploratory, identifying the need for further investigation and costings. Some actions rely on improvements in the availability of new technology and increases in its output (such as the availability and range of electric vehicles and the capabilities of battery-powered horticultural equipment). While the council has been very successful in accessing government funding (see section 7 below), measures to decarbonise the

council's estate and operation are likely to be extremely expensive and with many other competing priorities the council will have difficult decisions to make about where it focuses its resources.

- 2.16. Stage 2 of the work will provide indicative costs and payback times for these actions and will also identify what additional measures could be implemented to get to net zero; this will be crucial in informing the council's decisions about where it focuses its limited resources.

### **3. GENERAL POLICY AND OTHER DECISIONS**

- 3.1 The declaration called for decisions across the organisation to be taken in line with a shift to zero carbon by 2030. An outline of progress on key initiatives is given below.
- 3.2 **Corporate Plan** – The Corporate Plan 2021-30 'Creating Tomorrow Together' was developed alongside the Carbon Action Plan and was also adopted in February 2021. The Corporate Plan sets out 'A thriving environment' as one of its four service ambitions, and states that, by 2030, *"Across the district, we will ensure excellent accessible open spaces for all. We will have invested in green infrastructure to enhance our superb natural environment and the council itself will generate net zero carbon emissions."* The Corporate Plan identifies priorities including: ensure an excellent environment for everyone; grow the circular economy and reduce waste; and increase our resilience to climate change.
- 3.3 The Corporate Plan also identifies 'Greener Folkestone & Hythe' as one of six guiding principles running through all council activities, and pledges that *"We will embrace becoming a 'green exemplar' council, embedding measures to reduce our carbon footprint, enabling active travel and enhancing the natural environment."*
- 3.4 **Corporate Action Plan 2021-2024** – The themes of the Corporate Plan are carried through into high-level actions in the Corporate Action Plan, which was adopted in October 2021. These include to: develop a district-wide climate plan; progress walking and cycling schemes; undertake a pilot scheme to phase out the use of pesticides; introduce electric vehicle charging points to district car parks; minimise waste and usage for our estate; improve recycling rates; and reduce, rethink, reuse and recycle.
- 3.5 **Procurement policy** – The council has introduced a sustainability section into tenders as a trial. The section is designed to be simple to complete, quantified, aligned with government guidelines and suitable for local small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to use. The resulting contract includes a sustainability section to measure the carbon performance against the commitments made in the tender. This pilot aligns with the wider initiatives of Kent County Council's Procurement Committee and the Energy and Low Emissions Strategy (ELES) and is the first in the county to be implemented. The next step is to develop a county-wide scoring framework to evaluate the sustainability responses in the tender and in the performance of contracts.

- 3.6 **Member and officer training** – Officers arranged for an expert to provide training for all Members and officers. The training, ‘An Introduction to Tackling the Climate Emergency’, was given by Malcolm Powers MSc and arranged through the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU). A general invitation was sent to Members and a second event was provided for officers. In addition, a mandatory course, ‘Environmental Awareness’, has been set up through the council’s new e-learning supplier. At the time of writing 354 staff have completed the course.
- 3.7 **Planning decisions** – The climate emergency declaration included reference to the council’s approach to planning decisions. At the time the declaration was made, the council’s two development plans were already significantly advanced: the Places and Policies Local Plan (PPLP) was at public examination and the Core Strategy Review (CSR) was soon to be submitted to the Secretary of State.
- 3.8 The PPLP sets out the energy hierarchy as a sequence for reducing carbon emissions, starting with reducing the need for energy by making changes to the design and fabric of a building (‘fabric first’), then using energy more efficiently within the building, before using energy from renewable or low carbon technologies and finally ensuring that any fossil fuels that are required are used as efficiently as possible. This aspiration is supported by the CSR which aims to minimise carbon emissions by reducing emissions from new buildings. Policy SS3: Place-Shaping and Sustainable Settlements Strategy states that proposals should be designed to contribute to local place-shaping and sustainable development *“through appropriate sustainable construction measures, including water efficiency and a proportion of energy from renewable/low carbon sources on new-build development”*.
- 3.9 Other local plan policies seek to: enhance the district’s biodiversity and its green infrastructure (PPLP policy NE2, CSR policy CSD4); protect and enhance its water and coastal environment (PPLP policies NE8 and NE9, CSR policy CSD5); promote sustainable development (PPLP policy CC2); improve health and wellbeing (PPLP policy HW2); support active lifestyles as part of new developments (PPLP policy HW3); and promote active travel (PPLP policy HW4, CSR policy SS3).
- 3.10 Under the planning reforms being introduced through the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill currently before Parliament, the council will have to produce a new local plan within a 30-month timescale; the government will also introduce new national development management policies. At the time of writing, it is not clear whether local authorities will have scope to push for environmental policies that exceed national standards under the new system (Cabinet, 22 February 2023, C/22/85).
- 3.11 At the time of writing, outline proposals for a new garden town at Otterpool Park had received a resolution to grant planning permission, subject to conditions and a Section 106 legal agreement(s) (planning application reference Y19/0257/FH). Approximately 50 per cent of the site will be green space and will secure a net gain in biodiversity of at least 10 per cent, with a target of a 20 per cent increase, with a range of habitat types and a network of corridors to support the movement of species. The proposals will allow for

the deployment of a range of technologies to address greenhouse gas emissions as the town is built out over successive phases. The outline proposals set a target for emissions reduction that exceeds national standards set out in the Interim Future Homes Standards for new homes, ensuring a 45 per cent reduction in carbon emissions against current Building Regulations. Non-domestic buildings above a threshold of 500 square metres will achieve a minimum BREEAM rating of Excellent. Monitoring arrangements will be built into the detail of phases as they come forward for approval. A district heat network is a potential option for the denser parts of the town centre, and this will need to be investigated before detailed proposals for these parts come forward.

- 3.12 **Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy** – The council is developing a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for the district (Cabinet, 20 October 2022, C/22/47). Consultants Blackwood Bayne have undertaken a comprehensive evidence-gathering exercise to map the district’s network of green and blue infrastructure (its natural habitats, farmland, managed open spaces and water environments). Key findings include that: the district supports many rare species, such as Turtle Doves and chalk grassland orchids; tree cover is generally lower than the Kent average, but this can be explained by the open landscape character of the Romney Marsh; some habitats, particularly the fragmented wetland habitats of the Romney Marsh are particularly vulnerable to climate change. The draft strategy identifies fifteen strategic priorities, including the need to: protect and enhance core sites and improve links to create a network of corridors and spaces; mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change; support active travel through improving and creating new cycling and walking routes; support people in taking exercise and engaging with nature for their physical and mental health; and protect water resources and incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) into new developments.
- 3.13 The draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy was published for public consultation from late 2022 to early 2023 and officers are reviewing the consultation comments and considering how the strategy should be amended.
- 3.14 **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** - Following the passing of the 2021 Environment Act, the government is bringing into force requirements for the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. These strategies will support efforts to recover nature across England, help local authorities incorporate nature recovery objectives, support the delivery of biodiversity net gain as part of new developments and help deliver national environmental targets. The ‘responsible authority’ for Kent and Medway will be Kent County Council. The county council is starting to scope out this work, and national guidance has recently been published (*‘Local nature recovery strategy statutory guidance – What a local nature recovery strategy should contain’*, DEFRA, 23 March 2023). The government has said it will provide training and further information to the responsible authorities to help them fulfil their duties. As the requirements are clarified, the district council will have the opportunity to work closely with the county council to ensure that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy reflects the opportunities and priorities identified in the district’s Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

- 3.15 **Net zero toolkit** - The council is preparing a net zero toolkit to provide advice to those looking to deliver net zero carbon homes. Architects Levitt Bernstein and sustainability specialists Elementa and Etude have been commissioned to prepare a practical, easy-to-follow guide for new build and retrofit projects. The guide will be available for private developers, particularly smaller firms which are unlikely to have in-house specialists to call on, and for homeowners for their own self-build or retrofit projects. The toolkit will cover a range of steps from pre-planning through to construction.
- 3.16 **Encouraging biodiversity and reducing pesticides** - The grounds maintenance team has undertaken measures to improve the district's biodiversity. 95 per cent of in-house green waste is mulched and composted at the Hawkinge depot to reduce the need to buy compost. The mulch also cuts down the amount of water or pesticide needed around newly planted shrubs by creating a protective barrier. A local compost unit has been installed at East Cliff and other units are being looked at for other locations.
- 3.17 The grounds maintenance team has worked with the Bumblebee and Butterfly and Moths trusts and staff have volunteered their own time to plant habitat that supports pollinators; for example, seasonal bedding has been selected with bright colours, large, single flower heads of various shapes and attractive perfumes to attract pollinators. To cut down on waste, seasonal bedding is grown in reusable trays which are sent back to the grower after use.
- 3.18 Sedum matting was trialled on the coastal park depot roof and the success of this trial has led to the use of sedum matting on the refurbished beach huts along Folkestone's Marine Walk. The roofing forms a thick matt of plants which thrive in dry conditions and provides an excellent micro-climate for insects.
- 3.19 The grounds maintenance team has experimented with different mowing regimes to test what can be done to increase biodiversity. Where cutting has been reduced to encourage pollinators, 'Bee Friendly' signs have been installed to explain the new approach. Working with the highway authority Kent County Council, trial sites have been identified where cutting of roadside verges will be reduced. The team has also identified council-owned sites where this method is likely to be beneficial.
- 3.20 The grounds maintenance team has also drastically reduced the use of chemicals in parks, gardens and play areas owned by the council. For the period 2015 to 2021, pesticide and herbicide use fell by 80 per cent, from a peak of 75 litres to just 14.5 litres. The team has kept the use of pesticides and herbicides to a minimum for several years and, following a motion agreed by full council in 2019, efforts have been made to find effective alternative methods; however, there are some situations where chemicals will still be needed, such as to treat highly invasive weeds like Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed. Officers continue to experiment with new technology and explore best practice to further reduce the use of pesticide and herbicides. No pesticide is used on football pitches or in the council's play areas.



- 3.21 **Climate Change Champions** – To embed climate change considerations in the day-to-day work of the council, the Low Carbon Senior Specialist has set up a Climate Change Champions Group of volunteer staff from teams across the organisation to explore ways to improve the council’s energy efficiency and environmental practices. The champions group meets every quarter.
- 3.22 The volunteers have developed an environmental year calendar to encourage teams to take part in an activity with the main aim of impacting positively on the environment. For this financial year, the group will seek to establish key performance indicators for measuring its impact. At the next meeting, a guest speaker from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust will talk about the trust’s ‘Bee Connected’ project; Bee Connected is a three-year landscape restoration project based on the South Kent and East Sussex coast, with a focus on rare species of bumblebees. Bee Connected aims to work with farmers, landowners, councils and local community groups to improve bumblebee-friendly habitat, by increasing the abundance, diversity and the length of the flowering season, allowing rare species to thrive.

#### **4. COUNCIL REPORTS**

- 4.1. The declaration called for all council reports, where appropriate, to include a climate impact statement.
- 4.2. It was decided to focus this assessment on reports to Cabinet and full Council; this was to reflect the fact that some committees are advisory rather than decision-making, and others, such as Planning and Licensing Committee, are required to follow existing national and local policies.
- 4.3. Officers looked at examples of how other local authorities use climate assessments. A template was drawn up of key considerations, including impacts on greenhouse gas emissions, waste, water consumption, pollution, resilience to the effects of climate change, and conservation and wildlife. The intention was to create a broad picture of the climate change impacts of a proposal, rather than a quantitative assessment of the tonnes of carbon emissions of different options. It was also recognised that some decisions may be high-level in nature and lead to more detailed proposals which may be subject to separate decision-making processes (such as through the planning process).
- 4.4. Rather than submitting their reports to a specialist officer for assessment, report authors are encouraged to review their own work for climate change impacts and include a statement at the end of their reports; the intention is to embed climate change considerations into officers’ thinking, rather than leaving the assessment to the end of the process when key decisions have already been made. Training has been provided to authors on how to assess their reports.
- 4.5. The climate impact statement has now been in operation for around 18 months. Officers will review the approach and seek views from officers and Members on how it operates and how it influences Members’ decision-making. If necessary, it can then be amended to reflect the comments.

## 5. STRATEGY FOR CARBON NEUTRAL DISTRICT AND CARBON ACTION PLAN

- 5.1. The declaration called for a strategy to be prepared for the council to play a leadership role in promoting partnerships for a carbon neutral 2030 commitment throughout the district. The declaration added that the council should create a Carbon Action Plan.
- 5.2. As noted (paragraph 2.4), the council's emissions at the base year 2018/19 amounted to 1,536 tCO<sub>2</sub>e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent). Data published by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)<sup>1</sup> for 2019 (the most recent published data) show that emissions arising from buildings, transport and activities across the Folkestone & Hythe district amounted to 385,100 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. Emissions from the council's estate and operations therefore only amount to around 0.4 per cent of the district total, and so collaborative working across the district will be essential to meet the net zero target.
- 5.3. **Carbon Innovation Lab** - A proposal was put to Cabinet on 23 March 2022 (C/21/94) for the council to establish a 'Carbon Innovation Lab' (CI-Lab), an informal and inclusive group of representatives from the community, business, special interest groups and academics. The CI-Lab is intended to be a forum to promote a collaborative dialogue, to influence change and exchange ideas, to agree priorities and encourage local actions. This approach builds on a similar group that has been successfully operated for around two years at the London Borough of Hounslow and is now delivering its own carbon reduction actions alongside and supporting the borough's own plans.
- 5.4. The members of the Carbon Innovation Lab, who attend on a voluntary basis, have shared experience of their own projects and a support network is beginning to develop. It is hoped that the council will also be able to provide guidance and support to projects that will serve as pilots for the district, including directing groups to likely sources of funding.
- 5.5. **District-wide Carbon Plan** - The CI-Lab has now met five times, and ideas from the group are being used to draft a carbon plan for the district. When ready in draft, the plan will be taken to Cabinet for approval for wider public consultation. Officers are also looking at using the expertise of Canterbury City Council to survey a representative sample of Folkestone & Hythe residents to understand their knowledge of climate change matters and their willingness to take measures to address the problem. (A similar survey was undertaken to inform the priorities in the Corporate Plan.)
- 5.6. **Folkestone & Hythe Sustainable Futures Forum** – It is anticipated that the projects emerging from the CI-Lab and across the district could be delivered through a new initiative, the Folkestone & Hythe Sustainable Futures Forum. The first project to be developed is a 'TEDx-style' talk and video initiative, culminating in an in-person event at the Burlington Hotel on 29 April 2023. The event will bring together businesses, community groups and individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Now the Department for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ)

to deliver talks on projects or ideas illustrating the inspiring initiatives happening across the district.

## **6. ESTABLISH A CROSS-PARTY WORKING GROUP**

- 6.1. The declaration called for the council to establish a cross-party working group to monitor progress and report back on the Carbon Action Plan.
- 6.2. The Climate and Ecological Emergency Working Group was set up in late 2019 and has met 18 times from October 2019 to the present.<sup>2</sup> The Working Group is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for the Environment, and its current members are drawn from all political parties.
- 6.3. The cross-party group has guided work on the council's Carbon Action Plan and early work on the district-wide Carbon Plan. The group has reviewed council-led projects including: the installation of electric vehicle charging points in car parks; LED street lighting; grounds maintenance measures to promote biodiversity and reduce the use of pesticides; the provision of cycling infrastructure; the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy; the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment; the Green Business Grant Scheme; the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund; and the housing service's approach to carbon reduction.
- 6.4. There have been presentations from external bodies, including Kent County Council on its Climate Adaption Plan and on the work of the county's Sustainable Business Team, as well as a presentation by the White Cliffs and Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership on the partnership's work managing wild spaces. The Working Group has provided comments on consultations, including from government on the draft England Tree Strategy and from water companies on draft Water Resources Management Plans. As part of a school project, children from Seabrook Church of England Primary School wrote to the council expressing their concerns about the state of the environment and the class were invited to present their ideas to the Working Group in June 2021.
- 6.5. Regular update reports on the Carbon Action Plan have been taken to the Working Group. As highlighted, reports on different projects have also been taken to Cabinet regularly as the projects have progressed to key stages. A summary report outlining progress against the Carbon Action Plan and the other initiatives outlined in this report will be taken to full Council in due course.

## **7. POWERS, RESOURCES AND FUNDING**

- 7.1. The declaration called for the council to use its influence to call on the government to provide powers, resources and help to achieve the aims of the declaration.

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<sup>2</sup> Links to agendas and minutes can be accessed here: <https://service.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListMeetings.aspx?CommitteeId=491>

- 7.2. The council has responded to consultation from government and other organisations on climate change matters, applied for funding and worked with other organisations to deliver change.
- 7.3. **Consultations** - The council has provided comments on government consultations relating to climate change through the Working Group and Cabinet; recently comments have been provided on proposed changes to national planning policy, including implications for climate change policy (Cabinet, 22 February 2023, C/22/85).
- 7.4. Where staff resources have allowed, the council has applied for funding for climate change initiatives and has worked with other organisations on joint projects.
- 7.5. **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 1** – The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) is for local authorities, providers of social housing and charities that own social housing to bid for funding from government to install energy efficiency upgrades in their housing stock that is currently below an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C rating.
- 7.6. In 2022 the council was successful in securing £2m of Government funding from SHDF (Wave 1), supported by £1m of council funds. The award was one of the largest in England for any district or borough council and one of only two awards in Kent (Cabinet, 26 April 2022, C/21/107 and Cabinet, 23 November 2022, C/22/59).
- 7.7. Work is underway on retrofitting 125 of the council's poorest performing social homes to bring them up to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C rating using this funding, ready for low carbon heating. It is estimated that in total these measures will yield savings of 254 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or 919,000 kWh heating energy a year. Ross House in Folkestone was chosen as a demonstrator project for the first 16 homes, and work is now progressing on the remaining 109 homes.
- 7.8. In addition to achieving an energy efficiency standard of Band C, the other key performance indicators and outcomes include: a demonstrable and quantified reduction in the energy required to heat each home to a comfortable standard; the appropriate ventilation measures to reduce condensation and mould; and, following the works, the sharing of knowledge and support with the tenant and government. The council has been invited to participate in government research into the effective delivery of the funded measures. Throughout this work the council has identified and introduced local SMEs which deliver cost-effective services to the lead contractors.
- 7.9. **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 2** - The council put in a larger bid for Wave 2 of the SHDF, that could secure improvements to a further 300 social homes over a two-year period (Cabinet, 23 November 2022, C/22/59). At the time of writing, the Department for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ), had just announced that the council had been successful in securing £2.6m of government funding as part of Wave 2.1. The government has offered £778m to 107 projects for Wave 2.1. Folkestone & Hythe's successful award is one of four in Kent, the other successful authorities being

Ashford Borough Council, Dartford Borough Council and Thanet District Council.

- 7.10. **Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund** – The Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund (PSDF) is managed by Salix Finance Limited on behalf of the DESNZ. The fund supports the capital costs of decarbonising public buildings, using the ‘decarbonisation plan’ methodology that sets out the measures required to deliver a net zero building in operation. Folca 2 (the part of the complex facing onto Sandgate Road) has been selected as the basis of a bid to the PSDF. At the time of writing, the energy management consultancy CO2 Target has been appointed to develop a decarbonisation plan for the building, in readiness for the next bidding window of the PSDF (to be announced by DESNZ). If successful in a bid for Folca, this approach could be expanded to other buildings, such as the council’s sheltered housing buildings, and the fund could be used to make a major impact on carbon emissions from the council’s estate.
- 7.11. **Solar Together Kent** – In late 2021 Folkestone & Hythe joined with the county council and Kent district and borough councils in a group-buying scheme to secure discounts on the installation of solar panels and battery storage for domestic and community buildings. The scheme was administered for the local authorities by Kent County Council and run by the company iChoosr. For Solar Together schemes, residents express their initial interest and an auction is then held with potential installers. Depending on the quotes they receive, and the results of site surveys, homeowners and community groups can then go ahead with installation or withdraw from the scheme.
- 7.12. Interest in the 2022 Solar Together Kent scheme has been high, and despite some supply chain problems affecting the availability of panels and batteries, installations continued throughout 2022 and early 2023. At the time of writing, 1,351 installations have been completed across Kent, with 133 installations in Folkestone & Hythe district. With a typical home solar panel installation providing savings of around 0.74 to 0.94 tonnes of carbon emissions a year<sup>3</sup>, this phase of Solar Together Kent could yield carbon savings of around 100 to 125 tonnes a year for the district, or around 1,000 to 1,250 tonnes a year in total across the Kent and Medway area.
- 7.13. The Kent authorities have committed to a further phase of Solar Together Kent for 2023. With interest still expected to be high, it is proposed to spread the publicity and sign-up over two phases to manage demand. At the time of writing, 2,615 people across the county had registered interest in the new phase of Solar Together Kent, with 211 people registering in Folkestone & Hythe district.
- 7.14. **Climate Change Reserve** - The council has a specific earmarked reserve for utilisation in achievement of its carbon neutral goals and policies. This reserve currently stands at £4.2m and was approved by full council on 22 February 2023 as part of the General Fund Budget setting process. There are a number of drawdowns planned from this reserve in 2023/24 and these

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<sup>3</sup> Energy Savings Trust: <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/renewable-energy/electricity/solar-panels>

are summarised as below. After allowing for these drawdowns (£310k) a balance of £3.89m reserve is anticipated at 31 March 2023.

Planned 2023/24 draws on Climate change reserve

EV Charging points	£40k
Green Business Grants	£200k
Specialist advice costs	<u>£70k</u>
TOTAL	<u>£310k</u>

- 7.15. **Green Business Grant Scheme** – The district council introduced a Green Business Grant Scheme to help smaller businesses to become more energy efficient (Cabinet, 10 February 2022, C/21/80). Grants of up to £10,000 are available to support businesses (up to £25,000 in exceptional circumstances). The scheme will run until 31 March 2024 or until the fund is exhausted.
- 7.16. At the time of writing, 16 applications have been made to the grant scheme. Two applications have been approved, to the value of just over £30,000. Four applications, totalling almost £60,000, will be considered by the decision panel in April. An additional six applications are currently going through the application process, are being discussed with officers or officers are awaiting more information on the applications. (Two applications were withdrawn by the applicants and two were found not to meet the scheme criteria.) Applications have come a wide range of organisations including a sports trust, community interest company, hotel, financial business, events venue and arts organisation.
- 7.17. **Climate change network** – The district council is an active member of the climate change network, an officer group managed by Kent County Council, which includes the Kent district and borough councils. Folkstone & Hythe has led on the development of green procurement policies within the network and is now piloting the sustainability sections within the tender and contracting process (see paragraph 3.5). The council is also active in the transport group, promoting active travel initiatives to develop walking and cycling routes. The network is exploring the concept of energy planning to identify where grid capacity would allow the development of district heating schemes, electric heating or solar photovoltaic energy for local communities or industrial estates. The network is also valuable in identifying likely sources of funding, such as government and charity funds and social value investors, ranging from small sources to multi-million-pound funds.
- 7.18. **UK100 Network** – The council has joined the UK100 network to share knowledge and resources (Cabinet, 20 October 2022, C/22/51). UK100 is “a network of highly ambitious local government leaders, which seeks to devise and implement plans for the transition to clean energy that are ambitious, cost effective and take the public and business with them”.

- 7.19. UK100 lists 102 authorities as members, including large metropolitan authorities, London boroughs, county councils, unitary authorities and lower tier authorities. UK100 undertakes research and publishes findings on topics including transport, homes and buildings, energy, waste reduction and the circular economy, green finance and clean air. It also works with government ministers and civil servants to influence national policy.
- 7.20. The network provides learning opportunities on topics including decarbonising homes and buildings, decarbonising transport, financing the transition to net zero, nature and climate adaptation and clean energy. The network also offers a 'Knowledge Hub' to allow authorities to share their experience and learning.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1. The council has achieved a significant amount in the few years since the climate emergency declaration was made. Climate change considerations have become widely embedded in council policy and practice, and progress has been made in addressing emissions from the council's estate and operations. In parallel, the council has added its influence to existing networks and has reached out to local groups, pioneering some innovative schemes, such as the Sustainable Futures Forum.
- 8.2. These achievements have been realised with a very small staff resource - the council only has one officer working full-time on climate change initiatives, and supplements this resource with consultancy expertise for technical work on the social housing and public sector decarbonisation initiatives (paragraphs 7.5-7.10). Additional focus has come from officers across the council (particularly in the housing, grounds maintenance, estates and assets, transport, procurement and economic development teams) who have contributed significantly and widely through embedding various activities addressing the net zero commitment while also delivering their day-to-day work.
- 8.3. Nevertheless, significant work remains to reach the net zero target for the council's estate and operations and the wider district.
- 8.4. For the council, the detailed measures to achieve net zero emissions need to be costed and balanced against other demands on the council, at a time of high inflation and energy costs and reducing resources.
- 8.5. For the wider district, the council can play a leadership role in pulling resources together and facilitating partnership working; however, the journey to net zero will be extremely challenging and will require actions outside the direct control of the council. The council stands willing to work with local communities, key partner organisations, businesses and the public to deliver collective reductions in carbon emissions. There are huge challenges with the concerns of residents and businesses understandably focused on the cost-of-living crisis, high energy costs and maintaining firms' profitability during these times of economic uncertainty.

## **9. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

9.1 A summary of the perceived risks follows:

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
The council fails to achieve its ambitions for carbon reduction.	High	Medium	An action plan has previously been prepared and this is now being revised and updated. Public involvement and monitoring through CI Lab. Member monitoring through dedicated working group.

## 10. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

### 10.1. Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. Some of the projects required to deliver the actions may have legal implications but these will be considered on a project-by-project basis.

10.2. **Finance Officer's Comments (RH)** – There are no financial implication resulting from this report.

10.3. **Diversities and Equalities Implications (AT)** – There are no diversities and equalities implications arising directly from this report.

## 11. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

None