Environment, Economic Growth and Transport Scrutiny Committee
Meeting to be held on Thursday, 25 April 2024

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Protecting our environment;

Strategic approach to decarbonising county council assets and operations

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Brief Summary

The report provides an overview of the process being followed to calculate the carbon emissions from the estate and operations of the county council; together with the approach being taken to prepare options and costings for action to reduce emissions. This work will be available towards the end of 2024.

Recommendation

The Environment, Economic Growth and Transport Scrutiny Committee is invited to formulate any recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change.

Detail

The council's organisational carbon footprint has been calculated in line with the UK Government's Environmental Reporting Guidelines for Voluntary Greenhouse Gas Reporting[1], and the Greenhouse Gas Protocol accounting standard[2]. The Local Authority Greenhouse Gas Accounting Tool, developed by the Local Government Association and Local Partnerships has also been used. This tool provides a straightforward and consistent approach for councils reporting their carbon footprint.

Emission releasing activities are categorised into three groups known as scopes. The scopes correlate to who 'owns' the emissions and the level of control applicable to changing those emission levels, as detailed in the Greenhouse Gas Protocol Guidance:

[1] Environmental Reporting Guidelines (publishing.service.gov.uk)
[2] https://ghgprotocol.org/corporate-standard

Scope 1 – Direct emissions, where the emission occurs directly from sources controlled or operated by the Council, e.g., gases emitted from a boiler flue because of burning natural gas for heating, or emissions from vehicles.

Scope 2 – Indirect emissions, where the consumption of a utility on site has a direct bearing on the emissions offsite, this predominantly relates to electrical consumption.

Scope 3 – Other indirect emissions, where emissions are a consequence of the activities of the Council and emissions which also occur from sources not owned or controlled by them (e.g. schools where the county council doesn't have the authority to control heating or lighting; staff business travel where the county council cannot control emissions from private vehicles; or staff working from home - emissions exported from county council premises to staff homes).

The council's emissions have reduced by 17.9% since 2019/20 from 52,651 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO_2e) to 43,203 tCO_2e in 2021/22.

The emissions from heating and electricity use in schools have been included in the overall emissions total as contributing to scope 3 emissions, however, reporting of these emissions is often considered out of scope because they are not under control of the local authority and many authorities exclude it from reporting. They have been included for completeness, but the focus of attention is on scope 1 and 2 emissions and those that we have control over.

Excluding the emissions schools, the top three emission sources are:

- Heating in corporate buildings - 31%
- Electricity consumption for streetlighting – 17%
- Electricity consumption for corporate buildings – 16%

As heating and electricity use in corporate buildings combined makes up 47% of emissions, work has been commissioned to prepare a carbon descent plan for the corporate property portfolio, focusing on lowering energy demand and decarbonising the energy supply. The plan will provide the emissions from the estate (excluding schools), forecast emissions to 2050, and then consider business as usual, low, high, and accelerated carbon reduction actions with the required level of investment required, CO_2 saving and pay back periods.

Previous rounds of the council's operational buildings condition-led programmes were based predominantly on the condition of the building structure, fabric, and services; with the highest priorities being ranked according to risk of building closure or Health and Safety risks. These condition priorities continue to form the basis of the programme; however, this now incorporates a focus on carbon reduction, taking a more holistic approach to the building and its operational use.

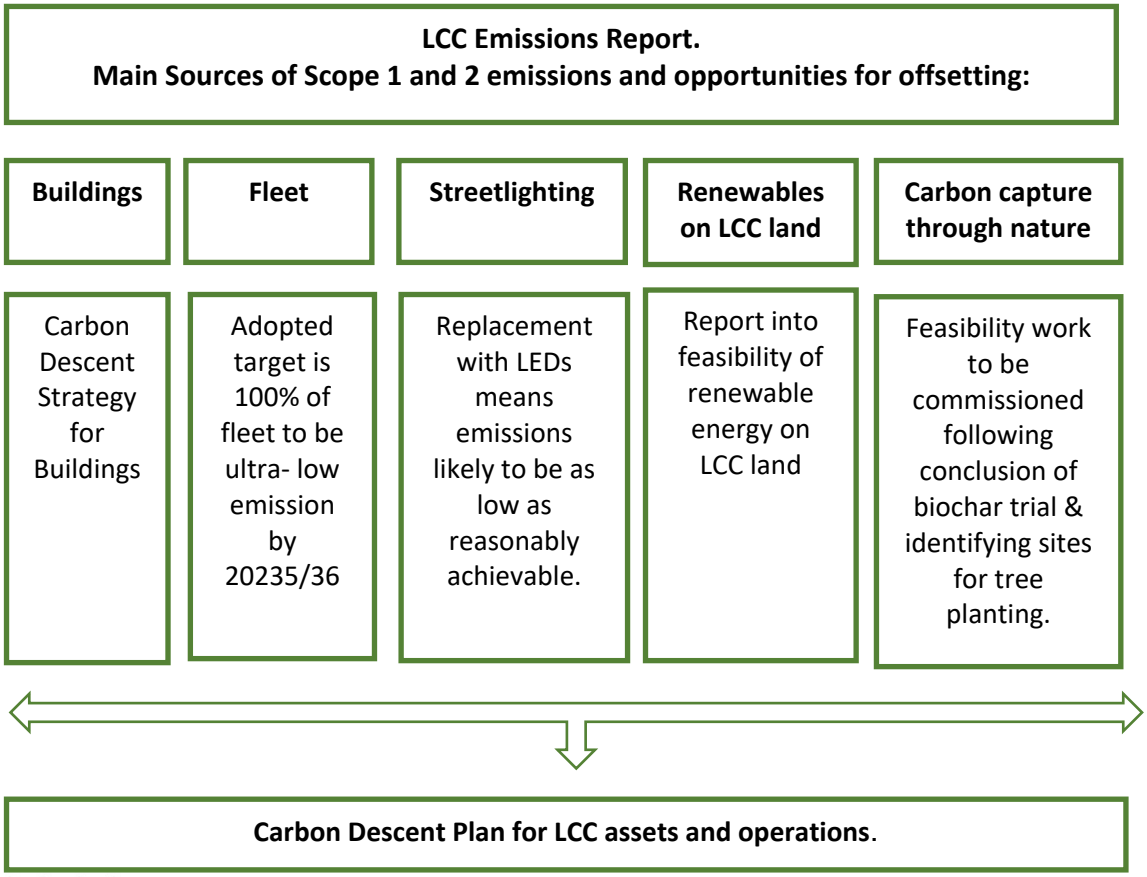
A carbon descent plan is now being prepared for the other key sectors contributing to the council's Scope 1 and 2 emissions; fleet and streetlighting and scope 3 emissions that we have control over, such as staff business travel. The work will include modelling scenarios of possible emissions reductions over time, an assessment of the impact of actions on emissions as well as high level financial modelling. Combining with the plan for property, this will provide an overall carbon descent plan for the council.

The Carbon Descent Plan will provide a projection of emissions and high-level costs for a range of different reduction scenarios ahead of the national target of the UK being net-zero by 2050. Reducing emissions to net-zero ahead of the national target will undoubtedly require additional expenditure, with the cost growing as the time ahead of the national target increases. Ultimately the additional cost of delivering net zero ahead of the national target will need to be balanced against the other cost pressures facing the county council. The Carbon Descent Plan will also demonstrate what level of carbon offsetting (e.g., tree planting and peatland restoration) could help to achieve net zero by a chosen date ahead of the national target of 2050.

It is recognised that there has been a large reduction in emissions over the last 10 years and further reductions will become more challenging and costly to achieve. For example, whilst emissions from streetlighting still make up 17% of emissions, this is an area that has seen one of largest reductions (45% since 2019-20) with the conclusion of the work to convert streetlights to LEDs. In this case emissions may be as low as is reasonably achievable. Work such as this and existing proposals such as the targets for transitioning the fleet to ultra-low emission vehicles will be considered in the options appraisal work.

'Offsetting' of any remaining emissions can be achieved through offsite energy generation, carbon capture through nature projects, or purchasing carbon credits through accredited schemes.

A desktop study to assess the potential of council owned sites like former landfill sites, reclamation sites and countryside sites in generating renewable energy (wind and solar PV) has been carried out. An overview of projects to capture carbon through nature is provided in a separate report. Both these areas of work will feed into the overall carbon descent plan for the council, as set out below. This work will be available towards the end of 2024.



Consultations

The work to develop the carbon descent plan for the council will be informed by a wide-ranging evidence base, including dialogue and consultation with key county council services.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Legal

There are no significant legal implications detailed in the report.

Financial

The report does not contain any specific financial implications. The work to prepare the pathways reports has been funded through existing budgets. Any recommendations emerging from the carbon descent plan and requirements for additional funding to support delivery will be presented to Cabinet for approval.

Risk management

The report provides an overview of the approach being taken to prepare options and costings for reducing emissions, it does not set out those options and costs or any recommendations for delivery, there are consequently no risks of significance associated with the report.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel

None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A