

Environment Policy Development Group – 31 October 2007**CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY AND STRATEGY****Report of the Strategic Director (Community)**

Statutory Powers: Local Government Act 2000 and various environmental legislation

Financial Implications

At this stage of development it is anticipated that the climate change action plan will largely take place within existing budgets. However there are elements of the action plan which will require additional resources if Members decide to pursue specific actions. The financial implications will be assessed as part of the annual budget process and reviews of the capital programme. Members will be aware that as part of last years budget consideration a 'one-off' sum of £15,000 was identified to undertake work to establish the Council's carbon footprint.

Purpose

To consider the climate change policy, strategy and action plan.

Links to Council Priorities

Responding to climate change particularly relates to Council priorities CP3 (distinctive environment) and CP4 (clean environment). It also closely relates to the Council's commitment to CP2 (sustainability), and the climate change cross-cutting theme.

Recommendations

That the Environment Policy Development Group makes comments on the strategy and action plan, and recommends to the Executive that it be adopted.

Background

1. Global warming is the publicly recognised term for the current concern about changes to the earth's climate. Addressing climate change is a complex global issue which is likely to have far reaching impacts on society and the world economy. The Council has a role to play in encouraging mitigation and adaptation to climate change across the South Hams, within a framework provided by corporate priorities, commitments, and resource constraints.

2. The policy will supersede the Council's current Environmental Policy. In March 2005 the Council signed the Devon Wide Declaration on Climate Change and Fuel Poverty. In December 2005 the Council reviewed its corporate priorities and confirmed the current CP1 to CP6 priorities but with increased emphasis to be given to responding to climate change within existing priorities. This strategy is a step forward in ensuring that existing and future actions occur within a co-ordinated cross cutting framework. It will also help to ensure that the Council meets the obligations of the Devon Wide Declaration on Climate Change and Fuel Poverty.
3. Across the Council there is an improved understanding of climate change issues and how the Council's activities can contribute to mitigating problems. Key current activities, include greater use of the internet to provide information, facilitate communication and improve access to services to reduce the need to travel; the establishment of sustainability criteria in the assessment of capital projects; the purchase of 'green' electricity from renewable sources; recycling of waste; promotion of sustainable development through planning policies (in particular work associated with Sherford and Totnes Southern Area); grants and loans to improve energy efficiency in dwellings; sustainable tourism initiatives (in particular the Green Tourism Business Scheme); and the promotion of tree planting schemes. The Council has also established a Green Team of interested officers from a cross section of services to promote carbon emission reduction initiatives within the Council.

The Climate Change Policy

4. The Climate Change Policy is as follows:

"South Hams District Council's Climate Change Policy aims to improve the well-being of the community by looking at the needs of customers, and the services we provide, and working in partnership to reduce the causes of climate change with a particular emphasis on

- *reducing CO₂ emissions*
- *adapting to climate change*
- *promoting sustainable development*
- *encouraging the development of appropriate new business opportunities*
- *raising community awareness.*

Developing the Strategy and Action Plan

5. In December 2005 the Council agreed that it would provide greater emphasis to climate change. Members concluded that climate change would not be established as a new independent priority, but that action would be included within the existing corporate priorities as a cross-cutting theme.

6. The strategy includes an action plan which has been subject to consultation with key services and agencies. Consultation has included the partners on the South Hams Strategic Partnership (Devon County Council, the police, the health authority, the Environment Agency, Dartmoor National Park Authority, the social housing sector, the business sector and the voluntary sector), Teignbridge District Council, the Climate Change Officer from Devon County Council, a representative of Renewable Energy for Devon, and the South Hams Sustainability Group. The Environment Policy Development Group considered the draft document on 14th September 2006, prior to recommending to the Executive that the policy should be subject to consultation. A limited number of observations were received from external agencies but comments received have been incorporated into the document, particularly the initial views of the Environment Policy Development Group. The action plan does not replicate all the actions of other existing strategies but establishes clear linkages to corporate priorities. The role of the action plan is to provide an umbrella document to sign-post action in other strategies including those of partner agencies, and to identify new actions, which this policy will act as a catalyst for.
7. A particular issue has been progress on a joint climate change officer post with Teignbridge. As part of the budget discussions earlier this year the Council considered the focus of a potential post and whether the key role should relate to asset management to deliver both carbon emission reductions and financial savings through more efficient use of energy and fuel, or whether the role should be to improve awareness of climate change issues across the community as part of a wider community leadership agenda. The view of the Council was that the focus should be on the Council's assets and operations.
8. During Spring 2007, the Council agreed a one-off sum of £15,000 to fund a shared climate change officer post with Teignbridge for a year. If the post could be self financing from cost savings which arose from reducing the Council's carbon footprint, it was suggested that the funding could be continued on a more permanent basis, subject to consideration of other budget pressures.
9. After the budget was agreed there were a number of changes at Teignbridge which resulted in the proposal being put on hold. In the circumstances, the Council is currently using some of the budget to pay an officer at Teignbridge to help the Council carry out some preliminary work to assess the Council's carbon footprint. The arrangement was established because Teignbridge had taken part in the Local Authority Carbon Management Programme facilitated by the Carbon Trust and therefore had practical experience that the Council could learn from.

10. Recent informal discussions with officers at Teignbridge have indicated a renewed interest in the original proposal of a shared post to focus on carbon management within the two authorities. Both Councils will consider a proposal as part of the overall budget discussions. The work currently being undertaken on the Council's behalf by Teignbridge will hopefully enable a judgement to be made on whether the post will be a 'spend to save' initiative. If it cannot be demonstrated that annual savings are achievable then it is likely that the post would become a 'desirable' rather than an 'essential' funding bid, and therefore a low priority against other financial pressures faced by the Council.

Strategic risk management

11. The following risks have been identified:-

RISK	MITIGATION
Failure to deliver this Council's priorities and commitments with sufficient acknowledgement of climate change considerations.	Ensure, where appropriate, clear links are made to the contribution the Climate Change Strategy makes towards this Council's priorities and commitments, and that subsequent actions achieve value for money.
Failure to deliver on the community's priorities, and national requirements/legislation.	Take account of consultation feedback and national priorities in developing the Climate Change Strategy and associated action plan.
Failure to promote and encourage partnership working to address cross agency issues.	Encourage buy-in through ensuring that the appropriate agencies are involved in drawing up Action Plans as prospective partners.
An over ambitious Strategy may stretch resources and lead to community disappointment. A key risk will be the availability of funding and appropriate staff resources.	Draw together a realistic Action Plan within the Strategy.
That the proposed joint post with Teignbridge is not implemented.	As an alternative the Council could consider the cost and staffing implications of applying for programmes facilitated by organisations such as the Carbon Trust and the Energy Savings Trust.
Initial work concludes that the proposed joint post with a focus on carbon management is not self-financing.	The Council considers through the budget process whether the joint post should be funded as part of a wider commitment to addressing climate change issues across the district in line with the Devon wide declaration.

Conclusion

12. In December 2005 the Council introduced climate change as a new cross cutting theme. This document is therefore an important milestone to making progress on this matter

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Environment Policy Development Group
31 October 2007

Background Documents

Climate Change Policy and Strategy