

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Climate

Emergency

Advisory Committee



held on Tuesday, 16 July 2024 at 6.00 pm
This was a virtual meeting

Open to the public, including the press

In attendance:

Councillors: Hayleigh Gascoigne (Chair), Eric De La Harpe (Vice-chair), Kiera Bentley, Robert Clegg, Max Thompson, Scott Houghton and Sarah James

Officers: Tim Oruye (Head of Policy and Programmes), Dominic Lamb (Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader), Jessie Fieth (Senior Climate Action Officer), Chloe Bunting (Senior Climate Action Officer), Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer), Nick King (Economic Development Manager), Karen Tolley (Principal Economic Development Lead), Roselle Chapman (Nature Recovery Officer).

Cabinet member: Councillor Bethia Thomas

Guests: Dr Sara Le Roux from Oxford Brookes Business School

65. Chair's announcements

Chair ran through procedure for the virtual meeting.

Committee chair thanked previous committee members Councillors Sally Povolotsky and James Cox for their contributions, adding thanks to Councillor Povolotsky who previously served as Cabinet member for climate, and had provided her expertise in this area.

Chair welcomed new members, Councillors Kiera Bentley and Max Thompson.

The chair also introduced Roselle Chapman in her new role as Nature Recovery Officer.

66. Apologies for absence

None.

67. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting on 7 December 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

68. Declaration of interests

None.

69. Urgent business

None.

70. Public participation

None.

71. Update from the Cabinet Member for climate action, nature recovery and strategic partnerships

Councillor Bethia Thomas updated the committee with highlights of work undertaken.

- Climate and nature recovery action plan
- Positive news was due on funding from Innovate UK regarding an electric vehicle trail for waste collection
- Funding for a nature-based carbon offsetting project with Innovate UK was obtained, to expand markets for carbon offsetting. The Local Nature Partnership would lead in partnership with local councils including Vale.
- LEVI project for electric vehicle infrastructure - funding was approved with £3.6 million allocated to the county.
- The climate action fund, £100,000 was available and decisions would be made in September to allocate funds to projects that had applied. The selection process was that all projects were scored on their individual merits. Officer confirmed that there would be around £145,000 available due to carry forward of the last funding round's underspend.

A member asked about National Landscapes. Cabinet member confirmed that she had a productive meeting with them recently. Officer added that relevant topics could come to CEAC, if it was required that CEAC make a recommendation to Cabinet.

A member asked about waste collection vehicles and allocating electric vehicles to towns as it was more difficult for rural rounds to use these vehicles. Officer added that the trial would help and that this was already part of considerations on whether electric vehicles can handle long rural rounds. This was for the waste team to take into consideration.

72. Review of the Operational Net Zero Target

The report was introduced by the Corporate Energy Officer. A lot of progress was already made on targets, however the report recommended dropping the unachievable interim target of 2025 and retaining the overall target of 2030. To reach the target, we would need to accelerate work and obtain funding for potential projects in order to reach the 2030 target.

Members of committee asked questions of clarification on the four proposed scenarios (committed projects, potential projects, a potential solar farm and a potential low carbon fleet), and details within the report, before debating the report's recommendations in order to reach a conclusion as a committee and recommend to Cabinet.

- Members acknowledged greater baseline data was available now to reconsider the target that was set with no baseline.
- Some members were unsure on dropping the interim target completely.

- Members asked about the option for a solar farm on council land. The reporting officer explained that this was in early scoping stages.
- Members discussed staff mileage and what was being considered to reduce higher mileage (due to role). Officer responded that this was impacted by officers not all being in the same place. The new Climate Action Plan would raise this. It was difficult for the council to control as personal vehicles were individual choice. This may be captured in future though scope three (indirect emissions). It was confirmed that the scopes measured depended on the progress of a project. For example, a leisure centre running on gas would be measured for scope one, but would move to scope two measures if energy was decarbonised etc.
- On solar farms a member asked about whether a proposed solar farm would cover current electricity or be sufficient for future electrification of fleet etc. Would the supply go beyond need? Officers were still researching sites and the sizes available. An increase in electric fleet would logically be balanced with other efficiencies made elsewhere. This project was in early scoping.
- Formal council meetings needed to be in person for decision making as per legislation, so not all meetings can be virtual and save on travel as a result.
- It was confirmed that other councils were in the process of reviewing their net zero targets as well.

In debating the topic, two members discussed that the interim target could be shifted to 40 percent, keeping it ambitious but more achievable than 75 percent (recommendation b).

A member considered that recognising the progress made since 2009/10 in 'recommendation a' seemed to deflect, when some of the results would have been improvements to the energy grid etc, not just council work. It was suggested to make the recommendation similar to: "CEAC recognises the significant amount of carbon reduction activities that had been actioned by the council and activities that are being progressed now in order to reduce carbon emissions." The member also considered that the interim target should not be removed, but possibly other targets considered at different steps.

It was asked what the risks were to not changing the target, considering this was not a statutory target. An officer responded that it was more reputational, and monitoring and reconsidering targets shows that as a council we are monitoring our progress and adjusting them if unrealistic. A member considered that having these targets were important in order to drive KPIs across our work and contracts.

There was general reluctance to drop the interim target, and a member added that we should consider what does it mean to the public whether we change the target or leave it as it is? We needed to understand the full implications. When the targets were set, there was no baseline. Now there was a baseline, we could adjust the target accordingly, but not necessarily needing to change or even remove it. Could removing it show a loss of focus? A point was raised that reassessing a target should not be viewed as negative when we simply had more data available now to create more accurate targets.

Members asked whether officers could come back with a plausible interim target. Could the interim date be in-between 2025-30, such as 2027/8?

After discussing the implications of changing or removing the target, the chair summarised the discussion and members agreed with the following recommendations:

Recommendations:

- a) CEAC recognises the significant progress made in reducing our operational carbon emissions by 47 per cent since 2009/10.

Members added that, to be more transparent about achievements, can this recommendation be more descriptive about what we had achieved. Committee suggested in additional point about 2019 onwards achievements and the percentage reduction achieved.

b) CEAC recommends that Cabinet agrees to retain its operational net zero target of 2030, but do not agree that the interim target for a 75 per cent reduction in emissions should be dropped.

Members suggested that officers work on a more realistic interim target that we can set with the knowledge and tools gained. Possibly a target in 2027/28 rather than 2025.

73. Review of the District Net Zero Target

Senior Climate Action Officer Jessie Fieth introduced the progress report and explained the challenges to a district wide target. We had worked hard towards working with neighbouring councils in order to tackle this, working in partnership was the most effective method. Too much was out of the council's control, so this was a difficult target to achieve.

The officer explained that before taking this report to Cabinet in September 2024, she would consider recommendations from CEAC and also use the data from 2022 that was previously unavailable. The officer added that she had checked the new data and they do not considerably impact the discussion today.

We look set to reach a emissions reduction of 55% by 2030, based on the 2008 baseline. When the target was set, we agreed to use a 2017 baseline (based on Aether consultancy report), but we could not replicate the methodology. We adopted a 2008 baseline as used by other councils. We would need to reduce emissions by double the current speed to reach the countywide target of 2050. It was stressed that we as a council had an important role, but a lot of issues were out of council control. Working with stakeholders and neighbours was important. We needed to formally acknowledge that we cannot meet our interim target and reconfirm our commitment to carbon reduction. Members will be updated with yearly tracking.

Members asked questions of clarification.

- It was confirmed that new methodologies could be employed instead of Aether methodology, with a baseline being calculated from 2008. The reporting officer confirmed lessons were learned from a procurement perspective.
- If modelling annually, would this come back to CEAC? It was confirmed yes.
- Members discussed the data sources and discussed the potential causes of the drops and in emissions over the period, such as Didcot Power Station closures.
- It was explained that this was nationally sourced data and that individual projects were not calculated separately and there was not the capacity to calculate to that level of granularity. Individual projects would have consultants who would calculate specific impacts.
- The team leader confirmed that some areas had higher emissions, the example given was Cherwell and the impact of the M40. It could be similar for other areas in our district, but it was difficult to ascertain.

Members discussed their thoughts on the recommendations of the report, in order to conclude with a recommendation from the committee.

A member considered that 2045 was an appropriate target date but that we should formally recognise that the interim 2025 target was an unachievable target. Members discussed whether the interim target, if formally acknowledged, could be dropped or not. Some felt that the interim target could be dropped considering it was out of the council's control.

A member considered that only having the 2045 target was not meaningful enough. Could the interim target instead be a pathway of targets, replacing the current interim target.

There was concern about this target being largely out of the council's control. This context was important in this decision.

A member considered that with a new government in place, the targets being kept would help with future lobbying of government on climate targets.

A member mentioned the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan, and considered whether we could align with that as a form of partnership work. An officer explained that the target in this work was 2050, with no interim target.

Members concluded that they supported 'recommendation b' as it is written.

'Recommendation a' was debated further due to varying opinions given. It was generally felt that interim targets were helpful for working with partners and government and driving ambition.

A member considered an extra recommendation was needed, but others asked whether the data was complete enough yet to consider a new interim target. The team leader explained that there was not enough resource before September to understand carbon budgets. This report and recommendations were going to inform the Corporate Plan targets in September. Members were reminded that there was a balance between officers conducting more data research for target setting and the resource needed to get projects up and running. CEAC did recognise that the timing of creating new interim targets depended on resource availability.

Members asked whether officers could investigate the practicality of setting more plausible interim targets every five years? The officer confirmed the team could provide a guestimate alternative interim target from the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan^[1] report data, to present to Cabinet in September.

There was recognition of the fact that this target was widely out of the council's control, and the original setting of targets were without a baseline of data that we have now built.

Recommendations:

a) CEAC formally recognises that the interim aspirational target of achieving a 75 per cent reduction in district carbon emissions by 2030 cannot be met.

(b) CEAC agrees with the recommendation that Cabinet re-affirms its commitment to accelerating progress towards achieving an ambitious 2045 target to be a net zero carbon district

Added recommendation

(c) CEAC recommends that Cabinet considers developing new 5-year interim targets up to 2045 using carbon budget data from the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan, for a more accurate interim target.

^[1] *The Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan was endorsed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in March 2023. This report builds on the detailed evidence that was developed through the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PAZCO) report, published in 2021.*

74. Local Area Energy Planning

Senior Climate Action Officer Jessie Fieth updated the committee.

Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) was a spatial plan that mapped out the existing energy infrastructure in an area and evaluates future demand. There would be a range of scenarios and technology suggested to help meet net zero targets. This was not a statutory requirement of the council, but councils tend to lead them.

We think it is important to lead on this because:

- We can have some control over our operational emissions, but district-wide there was a limit on what we can do. Having a LAEP will assist.
- Major updates were needed to our energy systems. The LAEP will produce a plan of actions to help us transition to a suitable system to deliver net zero ambitions.
- Identify solutions for our area and alternatives.
- LAEP will help us as a planning authority.
- The LAEP should be ready by summer 2025.

This workstream was county-wide. It was proposed that data collection was to occur county-wide, but detailed scenarios would be district specific, so there would be five LAEPS at the final stage. Consultants would be in place to collect the data, with officer teams assisting. Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) would decide on approving the budget. If approved, consultants would be in place in autumn. We would look to form some internal expertise so that less consultancy would be required. At various stages, the district can decide if it still can resource the project and continue or not.

This would be led by Oxfordshire County Council, but we would be involved, with more input in the final stages for the district specific LAEP.

CEAC could help further at the district level and this item could come back to the committee at those points.

75. Understanding the Net Zero Challenge for SMEs in South and Vale

Introduced by Nick King, Economic Development Manager. Karen Tolley (Principal Economic Development Lead) was also present to support the item.

Members were updated on decarbonisation projects for small and medium sized enterprises (SME's) and the research carried out on this, before a report was published publicly.

Dr Sara Le Roux from Oxford Brookes Business School presented and provided some results from the research carried out and the findings. She talked about barriers to action, the appetite and priority given to environmental issues by smaller businesses. Grants would be earmarked for environmental sustainability projects.

Economic Development Manager explained that this was a pilot scheme, as future funding was unknown, and ran through the planned process, and the bespoke support and tools (e.g., free energy audits) that were being planned for businesses who wanted to get involved. A draft grant policy was being circulated for grants up to £10k. Projects would need to demonstrate the value a project would have for sustainability/carbon reduction. There may be up to 20 grants offered in this pilot scheme.

Principal Economic Development Lead added that business engagement events and business breakfasts had been arranged.

Officers and guest speaker were thanked for their time.

76. Progress on the Draft Climate and Nature Recovery Action Plan

Senior Climate Action Officer Chloe Bunting updated the committee on the updates being made to the Climate and Nature Recovery Action Plan for 2024-2028 (CNRAP), including reviewing long-term targets and consideration of new legislative requirements. This plan would be adopted in line with the corporate plan at the end of the year. There was a task and finish group and staff consultation, and the team analysed the responses to bring a short-list of actions.

To report on progress, this would be in tandem with the corporate plan, a once-a-year in-depth reporting process with live data at more frequent intervals and consideration would be given to a data dashboard.

There will be a further task and finish group and this would come back to a meeting of CEAC.

77. Progress of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

An update was given by the Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader. There had been workshops this year. The strategy was now a statutory requirement and we needed to produce one, and we will be given a clear national picture as to what we should be doing to address nature recovery, and also bring access to funding streams to help deliver targets. This strategy gives a national picture and was a big step for nature recovery.

The team leader ran through the stages already covered by the team, to produce maps and statements of what the local priorities were (forming the strategy). Over one thousand people attended the workshops and replied to consultations. There was a live map on Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC) website where members can input information to inform on activities happening in their wards. In May, there was a wrap-up event to feedback to those who took part in workshops. OCC were responsible for the strategy, but we had a statutory duty to support and input into this.

The next stage was to work on the draft plan, with consultation planned in September/October. There would be a specific task and finish group for CEAC to contribute to the draft strategy. It was expected that the strategy would be published in Spring 2025.

78. Update from task and finish groups and future items

As mentioned, there would be Climate and Nature Recovery Action Plan task and finish group – this would be joint with South Oxfordshire District Council, due to being a joint strategy. Local Nature Recovery Strategy would have a task and finish group once out to consultation.

Chair closed the meeting and thanked all for their work and contributions.

The meeting closed at 8.39 pm

Chair:

Date: