

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Climate Change Working Group 21 June 2007  
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### REVIEWING SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S CLIMATE PLAN

#### **Purpose**

1. At the last meeting of the Climate Change Working Group, members agreed upon three priority areas that they felt the Group should actively pursue as the first elements in a rolling programme of 'task and finish' work. The first of these was to focus upon reviewing, revising and re-issuing South Cambridgeshire District Council's Climate Plan.
2. An outline programme item brief for this piece of work has subsequently been drawn up (attached as Appendix A to this report) and, subject to members' approval, will be used as its terms of reference.
3. The purpose of this paper is to take the first steps towards fulfilling this task. The specific objective at this point in time is for members to consider the content of the current Plan with specific focus upon its policies and actions with a view to providing constructive direction for its revision and updating.
4. The first review of any plan / policy document is probably the most crucial stage in its existence. Such documents only retain their value and influence if they are:
  - kept relevant;
  - marked by achievement, and;
  - have a clear and attainable forward path.
5. The real status of a 'plan', in terms of benefit and progress, will not become apparent until it has been through a full year's corporate, service and budget cycle. One year on from adoption, this is therefore an important time in the life of the Council's Climate Plan – a copy of the current plan is attached as Appendix B.
6. The Climate Plan review must reflect and advance the Authority's key objectives and priorities in relation to this context.

#### **The current 2005/06 Plan – strengths and weaknesses**

##### ***Strengths***

7. The key strength of the plan is that it exists. Gaining endorsement at Member and Senior Officer level of the need to 'adopt a properly resourced, fully integrated policy approach towards climate change' is an achievement in itself.
8. The plan preparation process was well supported through:
  - public consultation;
  - commitment within the Community Strategy (via the LSP), and;
  - Service Plan actions.

9. The use of an acknowledged assessment process (in the form of the European Climate Menu Programme) has lent the Plan's development process legitimacy and a useful initial structure.

### **Weaknesses**

10. The principal weakness of the Plan is not so much in its content, as in its structure and format. The content is comprehensive, if not necessarily fully focused (see below), and the terms 'consider', 'assist', 'review' and 'support' were, perhaps appropriately, chosen for the initial plan – moving on now they suffer from not lending themselves to readily measurable / tangible outcomes.
11. The central issue lies in a format that does not clearly identify responsibilities, timescales, milestones and resources. Without these it will be difficult to create ownership whilst managing and monitoring the areas of work outlined. If a clearer definition of action management is not taken up in the review a significant proportion of the Plan is likely to remain dormant. (N.B. the monitoring and publishing of results is a commitment within the Nottingham Declaration).
12. The contextual and introductory sections, though comprehensive, are very dense – perhaps to the point of being impenetrable to many readers. The themed actions are likewise couched in very dense supportive text. This may create a substantial weakness in that the plan may not engage properly with those it is intended to influence.
13. Although references are made to the annual Performance Plan and individual Service Plans, the direct links are not established (this may be down to the timing of the reports approval). This means it is difficult to see how the Climate Plan specifically contributes to the achievement of corporate objectives and priorities – without this it will be hard to gain the necessary political and / or budgetary support to move into effective implementation.
14. Members should perhaps also consider that the current plan is short on actual policy and whether the development of a specific climate change policy for the authority would be useful / appropriate.

### **Recommendations for review**

15. With the above in mind, the following recommendations are made to revise and update the Climate Plan through the review process (N.B. with behaviour change as a fundamental outcome, adopting the correct process, to buy in commitment, becomes a very important issue)
  - (a) List all the achievements and outcomes from the current plan.
  - (b) Use Member / Officer workshops with expert / public witnesses to reassess previous objectives against achievement and future direction. Inclusion of LSP links will be important.
  - (c) Establish a new layout for the Plan which makes endeavours to maximise its accessibility and user friendliness.
  - (d) Place the climate agenda within the broader notion of sustainable development – the use of the 'ecological footprint' concept is a useful illustrative tool (being both readily understood and persuasive).
  - (e) Emphasise the benefits of mitigating and adaptive actions in response to climate change (social, economic, environmental and political).
  - (f) Lay particular emphasis on efficiency savings (short, medium and long term) and convert to monetary values where possible.

- (g) Ensure that all actions are framed to support the District Council's objectives/priorities and, as far as possible those contained within the emerging Sustainable Community Strategy. In this light actions for 2007 could be focused within the following areas:
- resource use (energy and recycling);
  - sustainable communities (growth areas and housing)
  - sustainable procurement (life cycle analysis)
  - internal Council practices (leadership)
- Although it should be noted that a revised set of corporate objectives and priorities can be expected soon.
- (h) Sub-divide all actions by Service Area and discuss with individual Service Heads how best to advance them through their own service planning process.
- (i) Following discussions, attach agreed timescales, milestones, resources and lead/support officers to each action.
- (j) Establish a monitoring mechanism and timetable (6 month intermediate and full annual) possibly using Scrutiny function and / or LSP Environment Group. Work with monitoring groups to establish climate security / sustainability indicators.
- (k) Develop a communications strategy to run alongside the Plan's annual cycle.

16. In summary, the Climate Plan as it stands is a good point of departure for South Cambridgeshire in its response to the complex but very pressing issue of adequately responding climate change mitigation and adaptation imperatives. The two key improvements required are, firstly, to tie down the management processes required for effective implementation (i.e. resources, timescales and monitoring) and, secondly, to develop a more focused set of actions which work in clear support of current corporate objectives and priorities.

### Implications

17. Legal	None
Staffing	Limited project management resource - SSO
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure to have a 'live' Climate Plan would undermine commitment as signatory to Nottingham Declaration.</li> <li>• Climate change matters will have an increasingly influential role in the Council's business and thus a more proactive response will be beneficial.</li> <li>• Public concern is high and without a meaningful policy position/active plan it will be hard for the Council to adopt a meaningful leadership position.</li> </ul>
Equal Opportunities	No specific implications

### Consultations

18. No formal consultation has been necessary in preparing this report.

### Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

19. Affordable Homes	<p>Responding to climate change is no longer a peripheral matter or one which can be put off until tomorrow.</p> <p>The District Council has a responsibility to ensure that all its services take account of the climate change agenda in terms of both mitigation and adaptation.</p> <p>A genuinely sustainable South Cambridgeshire will be one in</p>
Customer Service	
Northstowe and other growth areas	
Quality, Accessible Services	

Village Life	which carbon 'counts' and as many steps as possible are taken to help and encourage communities, businesses and individuals to adopt a low carbon economy and low carbon lifestyles.
Sustainability	
Partnership	

### Recommendations

20. It is **RECOMMENDED** that:
- (a) members consider the above report; and
  - (b) agree the above approach to taking forward a review of the Council's Climate Plan making any amendments and additions as appropriate.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

SCDC, Nov. 2005, *Climate Plan*  
SCDC, April 2007, *SCDC Service Plans 2007/08*  
SCDC, 2006, *Performance Plan 2006*

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