

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Corporate Governance Committee

8 July 2011

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IMPROVING THE COUNCIL'S 'USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES'

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on the steps that have been and are being taken to improve the Council's 'Use of Natural Resources' – as requested at the Committee's March 2011 meeting.
2. This not a key decision because the report is an information item.

Recommendations

3. That the Committee
 - (a) Notes the steps being taken to improve the Council's 'Use of Natural Resources'.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. In May 2010, the Audit Commission assessed the Council's *Use of Natural Resources* as part of the former Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process. At the time the Council was not able to reassure the auditor that: it fully understood its own use of natural resources and was taking the necessary steps to manage them – this related particularly to electricity and water usage (especially at South Cambs Hall) and the poor accessibility for both South Cambs Hall and the Depot by sustainable travel means. It is important that Members' attention is drawn to the steps that have and are being taken to rectify this situation.

Background

5. In the Audit Commission's 2009/10 round of Corporate Area Assessments, South Cambridgeshire District Council was rated as Level 1 for its 'Use of Natural Resources (also known as Key Line of Enquiry 3.1, or KLOE 3.1 for short). This means the Auditor considered that the Council's arrangements for 2009/10, as regards making effective use of natural resources, were inadequate.

The use of natural resources in this context covers the Council's consumption of gas, electricity, water, petrol and diesel and responsibilities for air quality in the running of its buildings, business travel and direct service provision (excluding Council-owned housing stock for let). Procurement matters are also considered. Other issues relating to ensuring and enabling the sustainable use of natural resources in the wider South Cambridgeshire community are generally not covered within the scope of this 'key line of enquiry', although may be referred to. A central metric in assessing consumption is the reduction in calculated CO₂ emissions (kgCO₂/annum).

6. The principal criticisms contained within the Auditor's Interim Report relate to:
 - (a) gaps in the Council's baseline data: specifically relating to water usage and a more detailed breakdown of electricity consumption;
 - (b) the lack of targets and measures specifically designed to reduce consumption.

7. With specific note being made of:
 - (a) high electricity usage at South Cambridgeshire Hall (considered relatively high from the building's Display Energy Certificate calculations);
 - (b) the current unserviceability of the rainwater harvesting system to service toilet flushing in South Cambs Hall;
 - (c) the locations of both South Cambs Hall and the Depot in terms of readily encouraging the use of more sustainable means of transport – curtailing the effectiveness of the Council's Travel for Work Plan;
 - (d) limited resources (staff and budget) to fully manage a comprehensive response and deal with the matters arising.

8. Since this time the Council has significantly strengthened its position and raised the priority of this issue by adopting an internal carbon dioxide (CO₂) reduction target, establishing an officer-based Internal Sustainability Delivery Group, incorporating specific actions within both Service Plans and the Council's Climate Change Action Plan, and regularly updating both the Council's Climate Change Working Group and Executive Management Team.

Considerations

9. Specific responses to individual criticisms raised in the Interim Findings report:
 - (a) The Council is conscious of its high electricity usage (spotlighted through the Display Energy Certificate assessment process) and has taken steps to reduce consumption:
 - (i) Collating electricity consumption data from the zonal sub-metering equipment within the Building Management System at South Cambs Hall;
 - (ii) replacing standalone and less efficient print/copy devices with significantly more efficient 'multi-functional devices';
 - (iii) Implementing a programme of IT 'server visualisation' which significantly reduces the number of IT servers within the air-conditioned computer room – directly reducing the number of powered units and indirectly reducing the requisite cooling load;
 - (iv) Running a PC auto power-off programme every evening to power down PCs that have accidentally been left running;
 - (v) Bringing forward a programme of 'desktop computer virtualisation' which will see more the more energy consuming desk top PCs replaced with terminals driven from centrally located servers;
 - (vi) Bringing forward proposals to install an array of photovoltaic panels at South Cambs Hall;
 - (vii) Bringing forward plans to assess the business case for installing 'voltage optimisation' equipment at South Cambs Hall which should reduce power consumption;
 - (viii) Although not a consumption reduction measure, the Council is signed up to 'green tariff' electricity which has the potential to increase the percentage of renewable energy sources feeding into the National Grid.

10. Steps have been taken to bring the rainwater harvesting back on-line for toilet flushing in South Cambs Hall: the pumps, which were unserviceable, have now been replaced, and the failings in the ducted cabling between the tank and main building have been repaired. The system was brought back on-line but subsequent monitoring has unfortunately indicated a leak of unknown location within the equipment and this is currently under investigation.
11. In terms of bringing forward more sustainable travel arrangements, criticism based on the location of South Cambs Hall and the Depot would seem difficult to resolve. The previous main office location in Cambridge clearly had far stronger options to reduce car use over any location in South Cambridgeshire. Measures put in place for the new replacement offices in Cambourne to facilitate reduced car use for commuting (most notably the staff bus service) have now expired and the Council is working hard with limited resources on a range of 'smarter travel' measures within the current Travel for Work Plan - 'Travel Link'. As regards more sustainable travel the Council has:
 - (i) implemented a significant revision to the business travel allowance scheme that should encourage fuel conservation;
 - (ii) implemented changes to the Council's recycling service collection rounds which to date have very marginally reduced diesel consumption for the high consumption waste freighters;
 - (iii) continued to actively promote *Travel Link* actions: these include car-sharing, cycle-purchase scheme, pool bicycles and home-working. The latter is now a regular part of the working pattern for many staff, for example planners generally work one day a week at home to complete reports thus reducing mileage.
12. Since the original Audit Assessment there have been improvements in the co-ordination of staffing and financial resources available to support and lead measures to improve the Council's use of natural resources:
 - (i) South Cambs Hall has a dedicated Facilities Manager (FM), a post that for some time before had been an add-on to another role.
 - (ii) Some additional funds have been allocated for maintenance and repair.
 - (iii) The role of the pre-existing Travel for Work Steering Group has been expanded to create an officer group with a wider environmental sustainability remit. This body, called the Internal Sustainability Delivery Group (ISDG) is chaired by the Executive Director (Operational Services) and is well placed to respond to all aspects of the Council's use of natural resources.
13. The most up-to-date version of the Council's Project Plan taking forward the above issues and several others is attached as Appendix I to this report (reported in May 2011, an updated report will be taken to the Internal Sustainability delivery Group this month – July). The more substantive actions are also included within the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.

Implications: A wider perspective

14. It should be noted that this is one of three areas in which the Council is taking concerted steps to improve the use of natural resources, most specifically CO₂ emissions– the other two being: i.) service provision (especially Planning & New Communities, Housing and Environmental Services) and ii.) community leadership (especially the Sustainable Parish Energy Partnership). SDCD has a headquarters building designed to very high energy efficiency standards (BREEAM 'Excellent'), and no other operational buildings that we own/can easily influence. We have a

relatively small and tight establishment, and are constantly looking to reduce fleet vehicle running costs and other miles travelled on business. These factors along with the transport implications of our location in a relatively large rural district mean that our ability to make further significant reductions in carbon emissions is constrained.

15. This is an important point to keep in mind to ensure that investments in measures to further reduce carbon emissions in the Council's internal operations are balanced against investments that might be made in generating more significant emissions reductions through service provision and community leadership.
16. Having said this, we are committed to working on the 'best practice' level. It is important for the Council to be able to promote its endeavours as an exemplar of what other organisations and businesses should be looking to do – this would include difficulties experienced and their resolution.

Implications

17. Financial	Non-capital actions are covered under existing resource allocations. The larger invest-to-save type projects (such as a PV installation and voltage optimisation) will have separate business cases made for capital spends.
Legal	None identified at this time
Staffing	None additional identified at this time
Risk Management	Failure to deliver the schedule of measures will risk: i.) Council's reputation as a best practice exemplar; ii.) not having 'qualified' status withdrawn from external audit opinion under Use of Natural resources; iii.) poor position under the new Greenhouse Gas emissions reporting to Government (successor to NI 185); iv.) Council not optimising budget savings from efficiencies in energy use.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this time
Equality Impact Assessment completed	An EqIA covering these measures has been submitted as part of the Climate Change Action Plan development process - this will be separately reviewed prior to full completion.
Climate Change	Measures relate to directly improving the Council's response to tackling climate change within the wider sustainability agenda.

Consultations

18. The following have been consulted as regards the development/content of the attached schedule:
 - (a) Internal Sustainability Delivery Group
 - (b) Executive Management Team
 - (c) Climate Change Working Group

Consultation with Children and Young People

19. None

Effect on Strategic Aims

20. A corporately supported, delivered and ongoing schedule of actions around carbon reduction and other natural resource management/sustainability issues, tied to the Council's internal operations, is essential if the Council is to positively manage its carbon reduction targets, improve its Use of Natural Resources and meet its respective climate change commitments.

Conclusions / Summary

21. This report has brought together actions relating to carbon natural resource management/environmental sustainability associated with the Council's internal operations.
22. It is hoped that the steps taken will reassure the Auditor that the Council fully understands its own use of natural resources and is taking the necessary steps to manage them.

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

Audit Progress Report South Cambridgeshire District Council, Audit 2009/10 (June 2010)
SCDC Draft Climate Change Action Plan 2011-2013

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