

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

22 February 2010

Report of Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 LOFTY AMBITIONS: THE ROLE OF COUNCILS IN REDUCING DOMESTIC CO₂ EMISSIONS

Summary

This report identifies best practice for Councils to reduce domestic CO₂ by reducing domestic energy consumption. The report compares this best practice with what the Council is currently doing and identifies areas for improvement.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Government has set a legally binding framework to reduce UK greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80 per cent of their 1990 level by 2050. To meet this challenge will require reductions in energy consumption and changes in energy production.
- 1.1.2 Government recognises the key role that councils play in reducing domestic energy consumption, hence reducing domestic CO₂ emissions, bringing financial savings for households and helping people towards coming out of fuel poverty.
- 1.1.3 The Audit Commission, the independent watch dog for local public services, published a report in October 2009, 'Lofty ambitions: the role of councils in reducing domestic CO₂ emissions'. This report makes recommendations to Government, Councils and the Audit Commission themselves on the role they can play in reducing domestic CO₂ emissions.
- 1.1.4 The report and a shorter summary are available at:

www.audit-commission.gov.uk/CO2 .

1.2 What the best councils are doing to reduce emissions

- leading by example, taking action on energy use in buildings they own, including housing, using their influence, legal powers and resources to encourage partners and local communities to reduce domestic CO₂ emissions;

- using planning powers to set standards for sustainable energy use in new homes;
- monitoring compliance with the requirements of Building Regulations;
- enforcing standards set out in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS);
- pursuing greater economy, efficiency and effectiveness, for example working with partners to undertake area based programmes of work on energy efficiency;
- closely monitoring the take-up of financial incentives to ensure that funding is targeted at those areas and households most in need of support;
- identifying sites for renewable energy generation through local development plans, drawing on evidence of future energy demand and potential for energy supply, and working with local communities to make the case for the development of renewable energy capacity;
- exploring opportunities to make use of own land for renewable energy generation;
- setting stretching targets to reduce CO₂ emissions; and
- developing ambitious long term strategies to drive CO₂ reductions.

1.3 What is Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council doing to reduce CO₂ emissions?

- 1.3.1 One of the Council's key priorities for improvement is "make a positive local contribution to tackling the causes and effects of climate change".
- 1.3.2 The Climate Change Strategy 2008-2011 sets out how the Council intends to achieve the above. It includes the contribution that key Council services can make to this, and the leadership role that the Council has within the community to encourage individuals and businesses to make a positive contribution to climate change. The strategy also recognises the important role that individuals, local community groups, statutory agencies and partners make to reducing the causes of climate change.
- 1.3.3 Two of the key areas in the Climate Change Strategy to reduce the cause of climate change are to improve energy efficiency in housing in the borough and to improve energy efficiency of the Council's own buildings. As part of the strategy there is an action plan with targets to achieve:
- a three per cent improvement per year in the energy efficiency of all housing sectors; and

- a ten per cent reduction of energy use in Council buildings by 2010.

Further actions and targets for housing and energy conservation are contained in the draft Energy and Efficiency Statement and Fuel Poverty Action Plan, which will be considered shortly by the Borough Council's Climate Change Officer Study Group.

- 1.3.4 Significant progress is being made to reduce energy consumption in Council buildings. Following audits by the Carbon Trust, capital investments have been made to reduce energy use at Tonbridge Pool and Larkfield Leisure Centre; these two sights account for nearly 70 per cent of the total energy used by the Council and have therefore been a focus for early attention. The investments made are projected to have payback period of only 18 months and energy savings are already being achieved. Further reports on this are made to the Leisure and Arts Advisory Board.
- 1.3.5 The Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) adopted Core strategy includes policy CP1, which requires the CO₂ emissions from new developments to be reduced by ten per cent through the installation of low or zero carbon technologies, such as wind turbines, photovoltaic cells and ground-source heat pumps. Planning applicants are required to submit an "Energy Assessment" with the planning application to demonstrate how these requirements will be met.
- 1.3.6 The Council has also prepared a whole chapter of climate change policies in the Managing Development and Environment Development Plan Document (MDE DPD). Policies include areas such as sustainable design, waste minimisation, sustainable drainage systems and winter water storage. Policy CC1 focuses on the need to achieve energy-efficient development that incorporates passive design elements. Such elements include the harnessing of light and energy from the sun and reducing the need for mechanical heating and cooling through measures such as natural shading (for example landscaping schemes including deciduous tree species), passive ventilation (for example wind-catchers in the roof) and the moderation of building temperatures through the integration of green roofs. To achieve completely sustainable homes the Policy also encourages the attainment of Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. Also, to help minimise the impact of developments on climate change all new residential developments (excluding extensions and conversions) and all new office and retail developments (excluding extensions) are required to reduce Co₂ emissions by at least 10% through the installation of low or zero carbon technologies. This is very much a locally distinctive policy with a threshold that is considerably lower than that set out in the South East Plan (May 2009) (10 residential units and 1000m² respectively). The Inspector's Report (February 2010), has found the MDE DPD to be sound.
- 1.3.7 The Council has also provided guides for developers including "Guides to renewables" and "making your home greener". In addition, information for householders on improving the energy efficiency of their own homes and adopting

more sustainable lifestyles is being prepared and will be available via the Council's website in the near future. The Tonbridge Forum recently discussed how it could assist householders by providing further information to them on available 'green' technologies from independent sources such as the Energy Savings Trust. Regular green features appear in 'Here and Now' and officers also attend community events to promote sustainable initiatives including recycling and energy saving.

- 1.3.8 The Building Control Team monitor compliance of building works with the requirements of Part L (Conservation of fuel and power) of the Building Regulations.
- 1.3.9 The Private Sector Housing Team enforces standards set out in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System for housing in the private rented sector and the social sector.
- 1.3.10 The Council leads on the North & West Kent Private Sector Renewal Partnership, which has obtained funding from government to support domestic energy efficiency works for homeowners in the borough. This is used to fund financial assistance for energy efficiency improvements such as heating and insulation measures, and also for the installation of low carbon renewable technologies targeted at those areas and households most in need. The targeting is based on local knowledge and evidence from the 2006 Private Sector House Condition Survey.
- 1.3.11 The Council has also recently signed an energy contract with Creative Environmental Network (CEN) to administer and manage the energy efficiency works on behalf of the Partnership. The contract has allowed economies of scale, value for money and levered in additional external funding sources.
- 1.3.12 For the last three years the Council has undertaken a 'Warm Homes Initiative' in partnership with CEN, this initiative is targeted at homeowners with homes in areas that are more likely to be energy inefficient as identified through the private sector house condition survey. It has also been targeted at those properties identified as energy inefficient from completed Home Energy Check forms received by CEN. Homeowners can benefit from a visit by a surveyor who can advise on improvements to the home to reduce energy consumption and who can signpost to any available financial assistance.
- 1.3.13 The North & West Kent Private Sector Renewal Partnership is required to monitor take up of financial incentives and provide six monthly reports to GOSE. Take up of the different financial incentives is also monitored monthly by partners.
- 1.3.14 As discussed at paragraph 1.3.2, the Council has developed the MDE DPD as part of the Local Development Framework to look at the development of renewable energy in the borough in the future.

1.3.15 The Council has not made use of its own land for renewable energy generation at the current time.

1.3.16 The Climate Change Strategy and the Housing Strategy set challenging targets for the reduction of CO₂ emissions. The Council has also adopted the three national climate change indicators, namely CO₂ reduction from local authority operations, per capita reduction in CO₂ emissions in the local authority area and tackling fuel poverty.

1.4 Conclusion

1.4.1 The “Lofty ambitions” document has given us a useful checklist against which we can measure ourselves. In the main we appear to be leading by example and measure up well. There are areas for improvement, namely:

- developing area based initiatives with external partners; for example the ‘Heatseekers Initiative’ with Mark Insulation, previously mentioned at the October 2008 meeting of this Board. This initiative is to be reviewed following the findings from the pilot area initiatives in other areas in Kent and nationally;
- ensuring funding is targeted at those households most in need of support. The Housing Assistance Policy is to be reviewed to ensure Warm Homes Assistance is targeted at those most in need, for example older persons on a low income; and
- exploring the opportunities to make use of the Council’s own land for renewable energy generation.

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 None arising from this report.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 The provision of financial assistance to improve the energy efficiency of privately owned homes is subject to available funding from Government as part of the North & West Kent Private Sector Renewal Partnership bid. The funding for the final year (2010 -11) of this three year funding period is only indicative at the current time.

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 As identified in the Housing Risk Register, if funding from Government for the final year of the North & West Kent Private Sector Renewal partnership is reduced then the Council may:

- not achieve the Government’s 2010 Decent Homes target;

- put at risk the achievement of the aims and targets set out in the Council's adopted Climate Change Strategy;
- not achieve the objectives and outcomes for the renewal partnership;
- result in an increase of energy inefficient private sector homes; and
- suffer damage to it's reputation.

Background papers:

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Nil

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