

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 January 2024

Report of the Interim Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet

1 CLIMATE CHANGE GAP ANALYSIS OF PROGRESS TOWARDS CARBON NEUTRAL 2030

To provide a gap analysis of progress towards carbon neutral by 2030 and present options that put ‘recognising climate change as a corporate priority’ into practice.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 In July 2019 Full Council adopted ‘the aspiration for Tonbridge and Malling to be carbon neutral by 2030’. The Council has a Climate Change Strategy 2020-30 that sets out emissions by sector in the borough, and which is delivered through annual climate change action plans. Progress on emissions reductions is monitored through action plan progress reports, carbon audits and government data, all published annually.

1.1.2 A July 2023 report to Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee (CESSC) found that significant further emissions reductions are needed to make progress towards carbon neutral by 2030, and that a report be brought to a future Committee ahead of the preparation of the 2024/25 Climate Change Action Plan. This report has been requested by the Chair of this Committee.

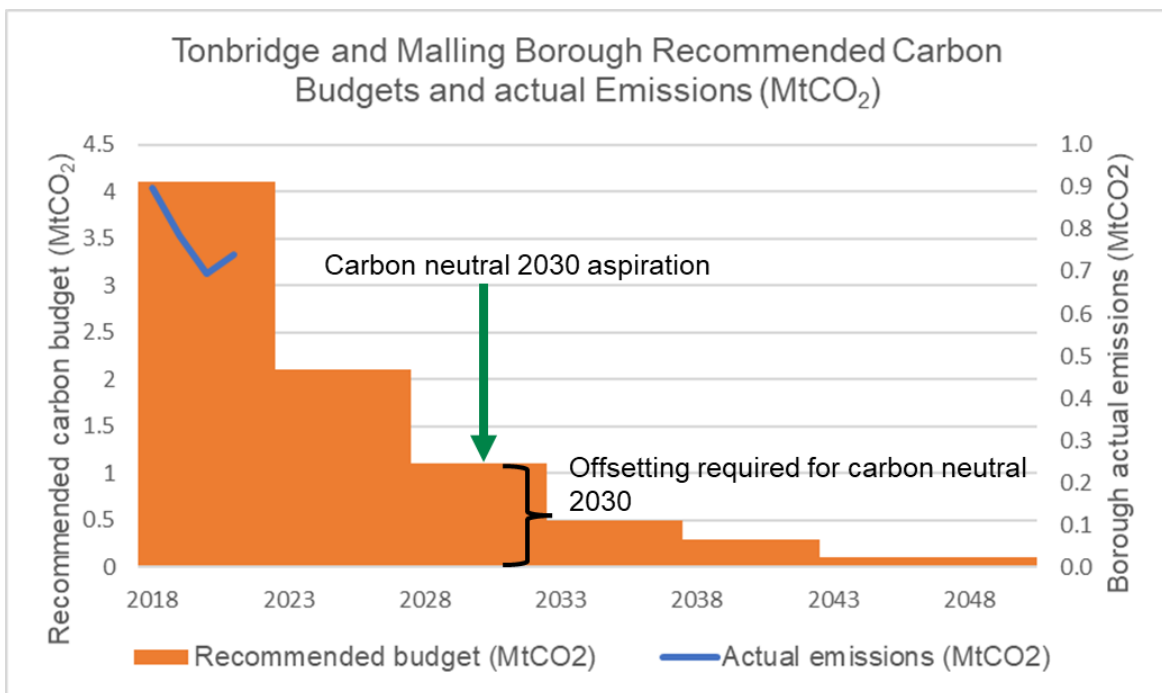
1.1.3 Achieving significant emissions reductions will require changes in how and what we do. The Corporate Strategy 2023-27 sets out the key values of Innovation, Transformation and Delivery for the Council, providing a framework through which to deliver options for greater emission reductions.

1.2 Gap analysis

1.2.1 The last three years of actions undertaken by TMBC through the Climate Change Action Plans have reduced emissions below the 2019 baseline. The largest emissions fall took place during restrictions due to COVID but the latest emissions data shows that some of these reductions have been sustained into 2023. Good progress has been made in key areas, such as installing solar panels on Larkfield Leisure Centre, another successful round of Solar Together, and Green Business

Grants. However, the 2022/23 carbon audit, that was reported to CESSC, found that total emissions from TMBC's estate and operations are no longer reducing, and actually grew slightly between 2021/22 and 2022/23¹. This suggests that the Council is at the end of 'easy win' emissions reduction measures.

- 1.2.2 Carbon neutral by 2030 cannot be reached through 'business as usual'. The scale of the carbon neutral challenge can be illustrated by the indicative carbon budgets for Tonbridge and Malling produced by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research.
- 1.2.3 The carbon budgets are the contribution that the borough needs to make to be consistent with the UK Government's Net Zero 2021 strategy, the Net Zero 2050 target set out in the Climate Change Act (amended 2019), and the UK's Nationally Determined Contribution to the 2015 Paris Agreement. The carbon budgets are based on 2017 data and could be updated, however they illustrate the significant gap between action and aspiration.
- 1.2.4 The chart below shows the borough's actual emissions compared with five-year carbon budgets to 2050.



- 1.2.5 Emissions from the borough are likely to roughly meet the first carbon budget total of 4.1MtCO₂ when emissions data for 2022 are published. However, emissions are not falling in line with the carbon budget pathway.

¹ Emissions from TMBC's own estate and operations are published in the annual [carbon audit](#) .

1.2.6 In the first four years of the current carbon budget, Tonbridge and Malling borough has already produced 1Mt *more* carbon dioxide the total allowance of the next carbon budget (2023-2027).

1.3 Moving towards climate change as a corporate priority

1.3.2 At the simplest level, if actions by the Council do not reduce carbon emissions, then this is moving in the wrong direction. Climate change is a cross-cutting issue that is not only relevant to the climate change action plan. Every action, or inaction, by TMBC has an impact on emissions through energy use, travel, waste, and other environmental impacts. It is important to understand these impacts in an accurate, accessible way to enable decision-making, alongside other considerations such as cost-effectiveness, relative priority, and alternative options for achieving outcomes and benefits.

1.3.3 Tackling greenhouse gas emissions requires action to:

1. Reduce energy use and decarbonise energy
2. Tackle travel behaviours, infrastructure and decarbonise transport
3. Maintain and enhance the environment, including by establishing trees.

1.3.4 Each of these three areas includes emissions from the TMBC estate and operations; and from the rest of the Borough.

Action 1: climate change as a heading in all reports

1.3.5 The first TMBC climate change action plan for 2020/21 completed the action to include climate change and biodiversity as Policy Considerations on all Committee report templates. This has been a positive step that could be strengthened by including climate change as a heading within all reports.

1.3.6 To facilitate this change, officers would draw on the corporate climate change resource to support evidence and understanding of:

- why or why not emissions are a policy consideration;
- the scale of impact on emissions (from negligible to significant).

1.3.7 After piloting this approach, some pro forma wording could be developed to streamline the process.

1.3.8 This option would support delivery of the Council's commitment to 'Recognise climate change as a corporate commitment for the Council', that has been the first theme in the climate change action plan for the last four years. Management Team have discussed this option to ensure that all reports have been seen or discussed with the Climate Change Officer before being submitted.

Action 2: the contribution of each team to achieving carbon neutral

- 1.3.9 Every Directorate and service has the potential to contribute to achieving carbon neutral by 2030. However, with Council emissions remaining stubbornly over 3ktCO₂e per year, a more comprehensive understanding of how each team could positively contribute to the Council's adopted carbon neutral aspiration would encourage innovation and ownership of climate actions within teams, as well as providing decision-makers with a sense of scale and priority for emissions reductions within and across portfolios.
- 1.3.10 An assessment of the potential of each Directorate and Portfolio to contribute to achieving carbon neutral by 2030 should not be a 'one-off' exercise but the beginning of a process that would include additional, tailored support for teams by the climate change function. This support could include benchmarking as appropriate, sharing case studies, and development of new opportunities for emissions reductions, such as undertaking pilot projects on emission reduction schemes with other Kent Districts.

Action 3: strengthening oversight and monitoring of emissions reductions

- 1.3.11 Following today's Committee meeting, there are four months until the next annual climate change action plan is produced for 2024/25. That action plan will mark the half-way point to 2030 and presents an opportunity to demonstrate the innovation, transformation and delivery that are at the heart of the Corporate Strategy 2023-2027, and to keep climate action on track with the carbon neutral aspiration. It would be helpful for officers to have a view from this Committee on the level of ambition expected from services in developing the 2024/25 action plan.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 None.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 The above actions are judged as being within existing climate change officer capacity.
- 1.5.2 The recommendations, if enacted, would lead to greater financial benefits and value-for-money through supporting understanding and delivery of co-benefits, investment returns, and future costs avoided through enacting well-designed and evidence-based decisions that take climate change into account.
- 1.5.3 The Council already bears high costs of flooding, heat waves, damage to infrastructure and risk to residents and business. These risks and costs will only increase unless progress is made on significant emissions reductions.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 The Council faces a reputational risk of stagnating emissions that will, year-by-year, make carbon neutral more challenging and costly to achieve. Taking action now will help to ameliorate that risk, and associated future costs.
- 1.6.2 There is also a financial, and further reputational, risk that delaying action will lead to the Council facing higher costs for measures that could have been implemented sooner.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Policy Considerations

- 1.8.1 Climate Change
- 1.8.2 Biodiversity & Sustainability

1.9 Recommendations

- 1.9.1 That the following actions are **RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet:
1. That climate change is included as a mandatory heading for all Committee and Scrutiny Select Committee report templates (as set out in paragraphs 1.3.5 to 1.3.8).
 2. That an assessment of the potential of each Directorate and Portfolio to contribute to achieving carbon neutral by 2030 should be carried out (as set out in paragraphs 1.3.9 and 1.3.10).
 3. That the 2024/25 climate change action plan is prepared with significant further ambition and new commitments (paragraph 1.3.11).
 4. That the corporate climate change function support teams in the delivery of recommended actions.

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Background papers:
Nil

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