

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Draft Report to Cabinet
Date: 9th September 2024
Reporting officer: Director (Corporate Services)
Subject: Climate Change Strategy

Purpose and summary of report:

To enable Cabinet to reflect on the delivery of the council’s Climate Change Strategy thus far and to allow consideration of the future strategic direction of the council’s climate action given the changes to national policy, the economic situation of the county and the council’s financial position since the council adopted the Strategy in December 2020.

Recommendations:

1. Cabinet recognises the climate action delivered since 2019.
2. Cabinet acknowledges the increasing challenges in delivering the council’s target for decarbonising its own operations and the limited impact this will have on wider borough emissions.
3. Cabinet recognises the opportunity for the council to refocus its activity on wider climate action and the co-benefits of this and agrees for activity to commence on the development of a new Climate Strategy for the Council.

Key Implications:	
Item	Implications
Legal	None identified.
Finance and Value for Money	The council has established a Climate Change Reserve which currently stands at £381,100.
Corporate Plan	One Council: a well-run and innovative authority, defined by its skilled and valued workforce, committed to developing its local social impact.

	Climate Action: as a socially responsible and carbon literate council, deliver on our corporate climate pledge for net zero by 2030.
Climate Change	In order to meet our net zero target by 2030, it's essential to revisit our climate change strategy to sharpen our focus on the most impactful areas of work.

1. Background

1.1. In June 2019, the council declared a climate emergency and pledged to take action and prepare for the borough to become net zero by 2030. This was followed in December 2021 with the publication of the council's ambitious Climate Change Strategy. The strategy set out the council's approach to not only taking action against its own emissions but also supporting communities in the borough to reduce their emissions and carbon footprint through three key priority areas of work:

Priority 1 – Gravesham Borough Council – the organisation

The council is targeting its operations to be carbon net zero by 2030.

Priority 2 – Gravesham Borough Council the housing provider

The council will do what is possible within the resources available to work towards the UK Government's target for social housing providers, as set out in the Clean Growth Strategy, to attain the minimum rating of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C for rented properties by 2035 where practical, cost-effective, and affordable. We will work with tenants to support them in the use of the tools and technology they have available to improve energy efficiency in the council housing stock.

Priority 3 – Gravesham Borough Council the community leader

The council cannot tackle climate change alone. By working with partners, residents, community groups, and other interested parties across the borough, we can continue to drive down the level of emissions across Gravesham, helping the borough to focus on those areas where emissions are highest.

2. Progress Updates of the Climate Change Delivery Plan

2.1. Over the last five years the council has developed and delivered a wide range of projects which have contributed to and supported residents, businesses, communities and schools to undertake their own actions and initiatives to deliver reductions in the borough's carbon emission levels. These have included:

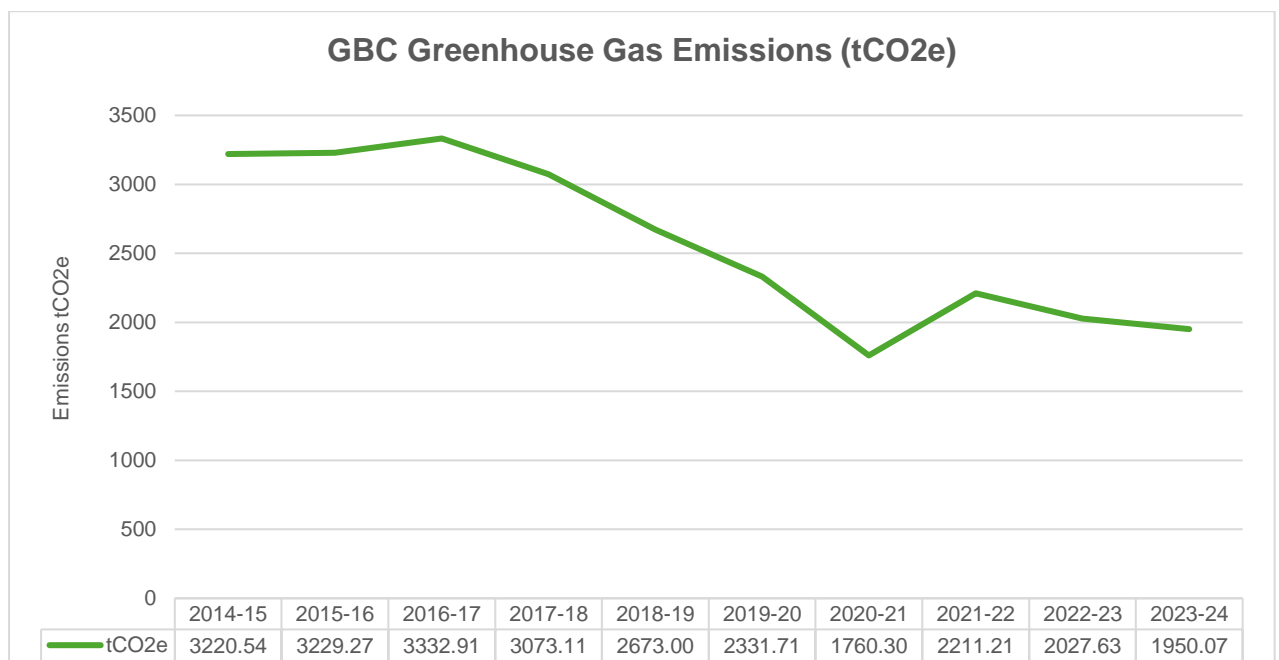
- Developing a programme to decarbonise the council's fleet vehicles, with 15% of these vehicles now electrified and 18 Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) installed at Brookvale depot, resulting in reduced fleet emissions of 10.13% between 2021-22 and 2023-24.
- Developing plans and securing planning permission for a more energy-efficient leisure centre at the Cascades site. As outlined within the energy statement for the current permitted scheme, the reduction in emissions indicates that levels will be reduced by 13 times and would produce 45% less carbon than a Building Regulations-compliant building with a predicted EPC rating of Band A and close to a net zero carbon building.
- Securing Sports England Swimming Pool funding to enable retrofit works at Cygnet Leisure Centre which will see a potential saving of £54k in the annual heating costs once the work is completed.
- Introducing energy efficiency measures at the Civic Centre resulted in a decrease in usage by 10.62% (electricity) and 27.41% (gas).
- Providing alternative travel options for staff including Cycle to Work scheme and Electric Vehicle Salary Sacrifice Scheme.
- Installing a total of 50 Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Points in council car parks along with an ultrafast taxi EV charging facility in Parrock Street, providing residents and taxi drivers with improved charging facilities to encourage the switch to electric vehicles.
- Improving the EPC rating of council-owned housing stock through installation of LED lights, loft and cavity wall insulation, ground source heat pumps, solar panels and more. This has resulted in annual carbon savings of approximately 171 tonnes, reduction in fuel bills, improved heating, hot water and thermal comfort. And a significant increase in the proportion of the council's housing stock rated at EPC C and above (from 66% in 2021 to 83% in 2024).
- Bringing forward new housing developments at St. Columbas and Worcester Close which incorporate low-carbon renewable heating such as ground source heat pumps, Air Source Heat Pumps and EV charging infrastructure.
- Expanding the ability of residents to recycle through the introduction of recycling in flats has led to a rise in the percentage of flats with recycling (62.5%) and food waste collection (16.9%), 18 new small recycling points in the borough have yielded 16,500 items in the first 9-months, weighing in at 14.6 tonnes, alongside projects with Ellenor to reuse household items, street champion projects and bin sensor trials.
- Planting 3,174 trees, building a sensory garden, improving garden and open spaces by planting wildflowers and grass pathways, and installing boxes for birds to reduce emissions and promote biodiversity which has a positive impact on the environment, air quality and resident's health and wellbeing.

- Implementing initiatives to support residents in reducing their emissions.
 - The Solar Together Scheme alone has led to 161 residents installing 1,784 PV panels, 145 batteries, 10 EV chargers and seven retrofit storage facilities resulting in a reduction of 155,174kg of carbon from the environment each year.
 - Delivering other initiatives to support residents, businesses, and schools include the Warm Homes Grant, Sustainability events, Gravesham Business awards, Youth Climate Conference, information packs and advice through newsletters, social media platforms and website which has seen a positive number of participation from residents and businesses and has influenced them to reduce their carbon footprint.
- Ensuring climate considerations are understood by senior officers and Members and helping them make informed decisions around climate change, 68 Officers and Members completed Carbon Literacy training, 42 of which are certified, and achieved Bronze level status as an organisation.

3. Current Position and Challenges

Council Operational Emissions

3.1. The council's own operational emissions have continued to reduce over the last five years.



3.2. It is becoming clear that the council is unlikely to meet its operational net zero target by 2030:

- Whilst the fleet replacement programme is focused on acquiring more efficient and less polluting vehicles, it is not currently possible to make this operation net zero as the electric waste vehicles available do not currently have the range or reliability required to support efficient and effective waste and

recycling services. If full decarbonisation of the fleet were to be possible, it is estimated that it would cost approximately £12 million to replace the whole fleet.

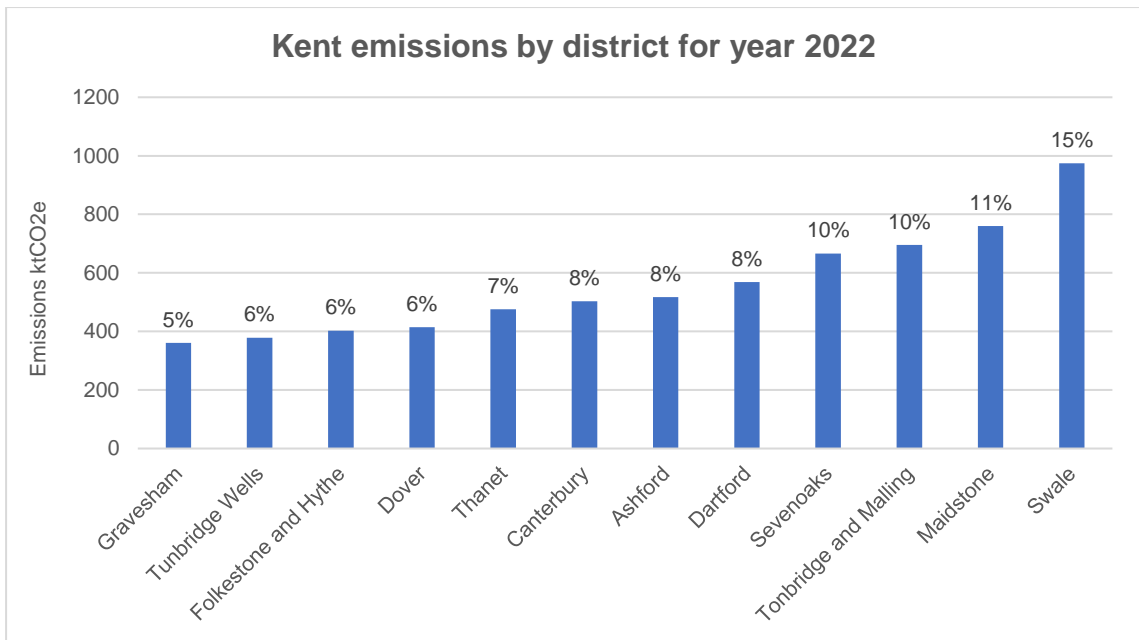
- Plans to deliver the new leisure centre at Cascades are currently financially unviable without significant external funding and the approximate cost for the new facility is currently £40 million.
- Decarbonising the council's other key operational buildings is currently estimated to exceed £20m and decarbonising the council's Housing Stock has been estimated at £107m. Even with this level of investment, net zero will not be achieved and the council would need to consider carbon offsetting measures.
- With the council's own current financial position, alongside limited government funding for decarbonisation projects and a changing policy landscape, it will be difficult to deliver these projects before 2030 and offsetting the emissions to meet the net zero target will cost far beyond the resources the Council has available to it.

3.3. It is therefore recognised that the council needs to review what can be achieved in terms of reducing emissions within the resources it has available to it.

Boroughwide Emissions

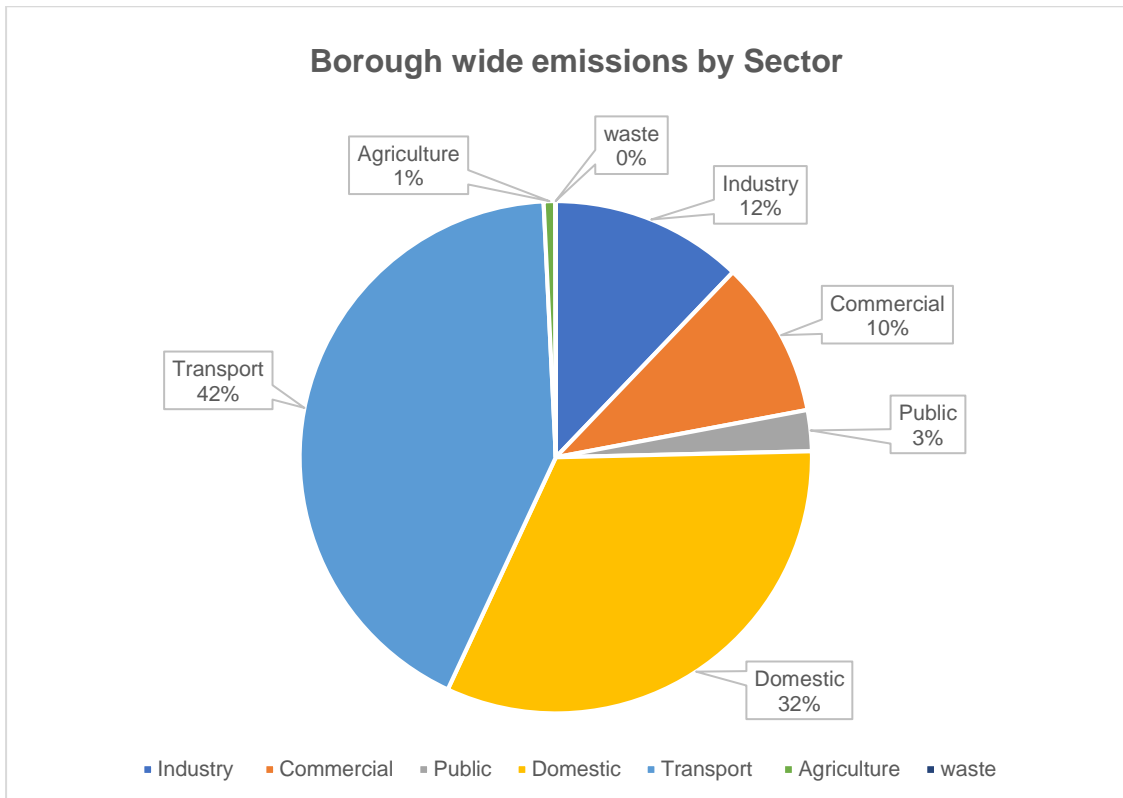
3.4. The most recent data from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) indicate that the council's own carbon emissions, i.e. 1950.07 tCO₂e for the last financial year (2023-24) only account for around 0.54% of those across the Borough as a whole which is 361 KtCO₂e.

3.5. In the year 2022, the borough emitted 361 ktCO₂e (the DESNZ figures lag by two years), which is approximately 5% of Kent's overall carbon emissions and is the lowest emitting borough in Kent.



Source: [The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero](#)

3.6. The Council has limited scope to directly influence the four major sources of Borough emissions: Transport, Domestic, Industry and Commercial. Together, these sources account for 96% of the Borough's total emissions (42%, 32%, 12% and 10% respectively).



Source: [The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero](#)

- 3.7. Council emissions, which account for 0.54% of total borough emissions, are included in the Public segment of the above chart, which accounts for 3% of the total emissions.

Recognising the Co-benefits of Climate Action

- 3.8. It is widely recognised that taking action to reduce emissions and vulnerability to climate events can also deliver co-benefits to areas and its communities, as well as helping the council deliver on other corporate plan priorities. Co-benefits can include cleaner air, improved health and wellbeing, improved thermal comfort, support of biodiversity through improvement or expansion of green space, creation of green jobs and delivery of financial benefits.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. The proposal therefore is that the council shifts its limited resources to activity that will make the most impact to the emissions of the borough as a whole.

- 4.2. Whilst activity will continue to reduce the council's own operational emissions where this is practical and financially viable to achieve, the council are best placed to make a difference in reducing the carbon emissions of the Borough through its community leadership and placemaking role, working in partnership and engaging with its residents, businesses and local community groups to raise climate awareness and promote opportunities to take action to reduce emissions whilst also emphasising the co-benefits of doing this. In practice, this could mean:

- Improved engagement with the local community to increase awareness and delivery of climate action.
- Promoting active travel and collaborating with partners to provide the necessary infrastructure for alternative travel solutions.
- Work to improve energy and water efficiency of council-owned and privately-owned dwellings.
- Work to improve energy and water efficiency within the Gravesham business community.
- Improve the availability of reuse and recycling opportunities.
- Promote the benefits of the natural environment.
- Within the resources available, continue to look for ways to reduce the council's own emissions as a community leader.

- 4.3. This adjustment of approach will continue to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan and recognise the importance of the 'partnership first' approach referenced in the Corporate Plan, alongside embracing the promotion of Gravesham being a listening council.

- 4.4. The new strategy will have a robust and inclusive approach ensuring that climate change is consistently at the forefront of all Council decisions, across all service areas, innovating and working together to instil positive behaviour change.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1. Subject to Cabinet approval, officers will commence the process for developing a new Climate Strategy for the council, working with the Climate Change Officer group and Climate Change Advisory Board and using established routes to ensure community engagement in this process before it is presented to Full Council for consideration and adoption.

6. Appendices

- 6.1. There are no Appendices.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1. [Meeting minutes of the full Council in June 2019 declaring a Climate Emergency](#)
- 7.2. [Meeting minutes of the full Council in November 2021 agreeing the formation of the Climate Change Advisory Board](#)
- 7.3. [Climate Change Strategy 2022-2030](#)
- 7.4. CCAB reports since we adopted the Climate Change Strategy
 - [CCAB - 24th Jan 2022](#)
 - [CCAB - 10th May 2022](#)
 - [CCAB - 12th Oct 2022](#)
 - [CCAB - 3rd April 2023](#)
 - [CCAB - 9th Oct 2023](#)
 - [CCAB - 8th April 2024](#)
- 7.5 Climate Change Annual Reports from 2020-2023
 - [Climate Change Annual Report – 2020](#)
 - [Climate Change Annual Report – 2021](#)
 - [Climate Change Annual Report – 2022](#)
 - [Climate Change Annual Report – 2023](#)

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Secondary Implications	
Risk Assessment	The report recognises the risks to the council relating to achievement of its Climate Change Strategy and proposes the council shifts its limited resources to activity that will make the most impact to the emissions of the borough as a whole.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	<p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data?</p> <p>A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice?</p> <p>N/A</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk.</p> <p>N/A</p>
	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain the answer.</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain the answer.</p> <p>No</p>
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
Crime and Disorder	There are no crime and disorder implications resulting from this report.
Digital and website implications	There will be a requirement to upload our new climate change strategy and delivery plan if there is a change resulting from this report.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	There are no safeguarding children and vulnerable adults implications resulting from this report.