TITLE: Pathway to Net Zero

Committee: Finance and Assets Committee

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1.0 Issue

1.1. To establish a clear pathway for the reduction in the Council's emissions to net zero, as well as reporting our latest emissions for 2024/25.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1. Members are requested to:

2.1. Approve the Pathway to Net Zero report at Appendix A
2.2. Note the latest emission monitoring report entitled Carbon Audit for 2024/25 at Appendix B

3.0 Background/Options

3.1. On 26 June 2025, this Committee approved a set of 'top 20' environment actions for 2025/26, including:

"Action 14: Prepare, by November 2025, a detailed step-by-step plan of how we will become a net-zero council"

3.2. The Council's Corporate Plan: Action Plan 2025/26, approved 18 September 2025, reinforced this commitment:

"Action: Produce a plan setting out how we will become a net zero council by 2036."

3.3. Attached is the proposed plan to meet those commitments, entitled *Pathway to Net Zero*.

3.4. In preparing the plan, as a starting point it uses the targets agreed by this Committee (June 2024) in its "*Our Climate and Nature Strategy 2024 to 2028*" (weblink available at Section 7.0 of this covering agenda report).

3.5. Those targets are:

Priority: *To put the council on a clear pathway to reduce our own direct carbon emissions (such as the fuel we use) to net zero by 2036, and our indirect emissions (such as from the goods and services we buy) to net zero by 2040.*

Goal by 2028: *By 2025/2026 reduce our direct emissions by 50% (compared with our baseline year of 2019/2020) and be on track to meet our target* *of an 80% reduction by 2030/2031. Establish more clearly and comprehensively what our indirect emissions are and demonstrate a clear downward trajectory of such emissions by 2028*

3.6. It can be noted above that the targets make a distinction between *direct* emissions and *non-direct* emissions, and these terms are explained further below.

3.7. **Direct emissions:** These are greenhouse gas emissions that arise when this council directly controls such emissions, such as fuel combustion in company vehicles or burning fuel (such as gas and oil) to heat buildings on-site. These direct emissions are, in technical terms, known as 'Scope 1' emissions.

3.8. We have therefore set ourselves a target to reduce these direct emission to net zero by 2036, with milestones of a 50% reduction by 2025/26 and an 80% reduction by 2030/31.

3.9. **Indirect emissions:** this is a more complex basket of emissions which arise from sources not controlled by the Council but are a result of activities of the Council. This includes electricity use (known as a 'Scope 2' indirect emission) and emissions arising from purchasing or using goods and services (known as 'Scope 3' indirect emissions). Scope 3 emissions are particularly hard to both calculate and reduce.

3.10. For these indirect emissions, we have set ourselves the target to reduce them to net zero by 2040. We have not yet set any milestone targets for reducing such indirect emissions, simply because we were not confident of the scale of such emissions presently arising by this Council, or what a realistic pathway to reduce them could be. This is not unusual - the vast majority of organisations, including the vast majority of councils, do not comprehensively calculate their Scope 3 emissions (if they calculate them at all). The Local Government Association estimate that 70-80% of a typical council's overall emissions are probably Scope 3 (i.e. only reporting on Scope 1 and 2 is a huge under-reporting of true emissions by a council).

3.11. Our Climate Officer has worked hard in the past few months to put us in a much better position to more accurately report our emissions, especially a considerable improvement trying to determine the true scale of our scope 3 emissions. By doing so, we can also more confidently target where the greatest emission savings can be made. Such reporting can be found in Appendix B, which is introduced in more detail later in this covering agenda report.

3.12. Having established what our corporate targets are and as robust as possible estimate of what our current emissions are (Scopes 1, 2 and 3), a pathway to reducing those emissions can then be prepared.

Pathway to Net Zero

3.13. The proposed Pathway to Net Zero report (Appendix A) is structured around each of the three 'Scopes' referred above, together with a special section on our pension investments (which also form part of Scope 3 emissions). Within each section it is set out what our source of emissions are, some key proposed measures to reduce such emissions, risks with achieving such reductions, and an overall forecast as to how such emissions will reduce over time.

3.14. The measures are considered realistic and affordable, but still ambitious, and include (by way of example):

2.3. Moving our entire fleet vehicle to electric between 2030-2035

- Reducing water use (both hot and cold), through water-efficient appliances
- Work more closely with contractors for any goods and services we buy, to make sure they minimise their emissions
- Engage with our pension administrators, encouraging, wherever possible, investments in low-carbon companies.

3.15. The aim of implementing these measures is not just to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions but are in many cases investments to save the Council money. For example, our recent £50,000 investment in solar panels on the roof of our E-Space North building has already ‘paid back’ 50% of that investment in its first two years of operation, through a substantial reduction in electricity now bought from the national grid.

3.16. Section 6 of Pathway to Net Zero then briefly explains our approach to offsetting any remaining emissions, once we have minimised as much as possible of our Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions. Whilst some offsetting will likely be necessary (and such offsetting can often have wider environmental benefits, such as from tree planting), the proposed approach is very much that offsetting should be seen as a ‘last resort’ once all efforts to reduce our emissions have been taken.

3.17. Importantly, ‘alternative pathways’ (section 7) and ‘out of scope emissions’ (section 8) are also included in the Pathway to Net Zero report, so that we can be as transparent as possible as to what might happen and what hasn’t been included (for example, emissions arising from The Hive or Palace Green Homes are not included, whilst emissions from the Bereavement Centre are intended to be included because that is an ‘in-house’ operation).

Latest emissions monitoring report

3.18. At Appendix B is a monitoring report setting out the latest data of how much emissions we are responsible for and from which sources. This report is a vital piece of evidence informing the preparation of the Pathway to Net Zero report.

3.19. The monitoring report is much revamped from previous versions we have published, helped by bringing the compilation of the report ‘in-house’ (which in turn has been a financial saving).

3.20. We have utilised the freely available Local Partnerships tool to compile our emissions data, which has the considerable added benefit of being able to compare ourselves with many other councils who likewise are now starting to use this tool.

3.21. But perhaps most important element to note is the considerably greater efforts we have taken this year to capture our ‘scope 3’ emissions, and thereby publish a more accurate set of emissions data (rather than considerably under-reporting of such emissions previously). It must be caveated that, despite considerable improvements this year, reporting our Scope 3 emissions remains incredibly challenging and relies considerably on assumptions. For example, and following the methods recommended by Local Partnerships, emissions arising from goods purchased is often based on the assumed weight of such items, which is then converted (using a formula depending on what those items are made of) into likely emissions arising. To be more accurate would require each individual supplier to provide accurate information themselves (many of which could not, even if asked), and then for the Council to maintain a detailed spreadsheet matching each purchase with the reported emissions from the supplier. At this stage, this is simply not a practical option.

3.22. Our Climate Officer is committed to further improvements in data collection for scope 3, where practical and reasonable to do so.

3.23. There are some key ‘headlines’ to draw from the monitoring report:

- **A reduction in Scope 1 emissions by more than 50%.** It is pleasing to see we have met one of our ‘Goals by 2028’. This reduction is primarily driven by our switch from diesel fuel to HVO fuel in the majority of our fleet vehicles.
- **Scope 2 emissions (i.e. electricity) have broadly flatlined in recent years**. We had hoped to see these emissions drop slightly, year on year, partly due to the national grid further decarbonising and partly through energy efficiency measures (such as PV panel installation at E-Space North and removal of vending machine). Unfortunately, however, our net total electricity use appears to be creeping up, partly, it seems, due to increasing electricity use in our public toilets, but also elsewhere on our estate. There are no known reasons for this. Increased electricity use also has an increased energy bill cost as well.
- **Reported Scope 3 emissions have dramatically increased for 2024/25 compared with previous years.** However, this is because we are now accounting for far more scope 3 emissions than we previously have, so in effect we are ‘re-setting’ the baseline for scope 3 emissions. Within the year, a notable amount of scope 3 emissions have arisen from new bin purchasing (to meet the new resident waste collection requirements), other wider goods bought (IT equipment, paper, furniture, etc), staff commuting and staff pension fund investments.

4.0 Arguments/Conclusions

4.1. The proposals in the Pathway to Net Zero are considered ambitious, achievable and affordable, and should help achieve the Council’s priority of a *Cleaner, Greener East Cambridgeshire*.

4.2. Our updated and more comprehensive emissions monitoring report is also considered approaching ‘best in class’ when compared with other peer councils, albeit it should not be underestimated the ongoing challenge of accurately calculating the true scale of emissions arising from our ongoing operations.

5.0 Additional Implications Assessment

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Human Resources (HR) Implications
No	**No**	**No**

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA)	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)
No	**No**	**No**

Financial Implications

5.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5.2. However, achieving all of the measures set out in the Pathway to Net Zero will require considerable investment, decisions on which will be taken following the usual decision-making process. Many of the measures will, of course, have financial benefits as well, such as reduced energy bills.

Legal Implications

5.3. The Council has no direct statutory responsibility to mitigate climate change or report on its emissions arising.

Carbon Impact Assessment

5.4. Similar to the financial implications section, there are no direct carbon impacts arising from this report, but the intention is for considerable positive carbon implications to arise should the measures proposed be implemented. However, that will be a matter for individual decision-making, as and when each measure is taken forward.

6.0 Appendices

Appendix A: Pathway to Net Zero Report
Appendix B: Carbon Audit 2024 to 2025

7.0 Background documents

"*Our Climate and Nature Strategy 2024 to 2028*" – East Cambridgeshire District Council, June 2024 [pdf 0.2MB] https://eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-11/Climate%20and%20Nature%20Strategy%202024-2028%20-%20adopted%20June%202024.pdf