



**20 November 2024**

<b>Title</b>	Climate Change Adaptation Framework for Reading Borough Council
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Report author</b>	Peter Moore/Ben Burfoot (Sustainability Manager)
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Cllr John Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy & Transport)
<b>Corporate priority</b>	Thriving Communities
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the Committee approves the proposed Climate Change Adaptation Framework for Reading Borough Council included at Appendix 1.</li> <li>2. That the Committee notes the further work needed by all services to identify specific actions to make services and communities more resilient to climate impacts, within the context of this Adaptation Framework.</li> <li>3. That the Framework should be considered by other relevant Committees prior to submission to Policy Committee for adoption as Council policy.</li> </ol>

## **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. The last 10 years have been the warmest globally since records began. Global average surface temperature in 2023 was estimated at between 1.36-1.54 °C above the pre-industrial average – the high end of this range being above the 1.5 °C threshold to which the Paris Agreement seeks to limit the rise in global average temperature. At the time of writing, 2024 was considered likely to become the warmest year on record globally, following 13 consecutive months of record-breaking temperatures, including the hottest day in recorded history on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2024. In the UK, a Met Office ‘State of the Climate’ report in July 2024 warned that the record-breaking year of 2023 could be seen as a ‘cool’ year by 2100, and that 2023 was the 7<sup>th</sup> wettest year since records began.
- 1.2. These statistics are among many which illustrate the reality of global warming which is driving an increasing range of impacts, risks and costs at home and abroad including floods, heatwaves, storms and wildfires. The key risks facing the UK arise from warmer, wetter winters; hotter drier summers; and more extreme weather events. The warming trend will continue until ‘net zero emissions’ is reached and probably for some time beyond this due to the fact that some greenhouse gases remain in the atmosphere for decades. A 2021 study by UCL suggested that, by 2100, global GDP could be 37% lower when taking the effects of climate change on economic growth into account. It is well established that climate will have the greatest impacts on the most vulnerable in society as they are most exposed to these risks and have the least resources to adapt.
- 1.3. As a result there is a growing need for the Council, communities and partners to adapt to climate impacts. The Climate Change Adaptation Framework attached to this report has therefore been developed to help the Council, and the communities it serves, become more resilient to these impacts.

## 2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The Climate Change Act 2008 requires Government to produce a 5 yearly UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) to inform a 5 yearly National Adaptation Plan (NAP) setting out the national framework for climate adaptation. The Act also established the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), whose roles include production of an independent assessment of UK climate risk every 5 years to inform the CCRA and a biennial report on progress. The latest biennial report by the CCC (2023) concluded that the UK was not adequately prepared for climate change, that a step change in ambition was needed in this area, and that there was a key role for local authorities, Local Resilience Forums and Local Plans to improve UK resilience to climate impacts.
- 2.2. Despite this, there are currently no explicit statutory obligations on climate adaptation for local authorities arising from the Act. There is, however, separate legislation requiring Local Resilience Forums to prepare Community Risk Registers, within which climate and weather-related risks are among the risks addressed, and local authorities are obliged to respond to weather-related civil emergencies in their capacity as first responders. Councils also have statutory obligations in areas such as flood risk management, heatwave and drought planning, all of which are likely to become more important over time.
- 2.3. Notwithstanding the relative absence of statutory obligations in this area, the need to adapt to climate change has long been recognised in Reading and is addressed in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25, which was endorsed by the Council's Policy Committee in November 2020. Specifically, the need to adapt is reflected in the vision statement within the strategy for 'a net zero, *resilient* Reading by 2030'.
- 2.4. The Climate Emergency Strategy was informed by a climate change risk and vulnerability assessment commissioned by the Reading Climate Change Partnership in 2019. The latter document recommended that individual partners should develop their own understanding of, and plans to manage, climate risk, informed by some of the headline risks it identified. While the Climate Emergency Strategy does this to some extent, it is fair to say that it is more focused on climate mitigation (reducing emissions) than climate adaptation (preparing for impacts), and does not address climate adaptation comprehensively from the perspective of the Council's own services and responsibilities. As such, the need for a more bespoke climate adaptation framework for the Council was identified, and reinforced in an internal audit recommendation in 2022.

## 3. The Proposal

- 3.1. The Adaptation Framework attached to this report has been prepared to fill the gap identified in 2.4 in terms of giving the Council a clear framework to build on the foundations laid in the Climate Emergency Strategy by setting out in more detail the key risks, issues and objectives for the Council to pursue to make itself, and the communities it serves, more resilient to these impacts. It also provides a framework within which individual services can further develop their approach to managing climate risk as they become more climate risk aware.
- 3.2. The structure of the proposed Adaptation Framework (Appendix 1) is as follows:
  - A summary of the global, national and local context driving the need for adaptation (section 1)
  - Definition of climate adaptation and the benefits of adaptation (section 2)
  - Summary of the UK climate change adaptation policy framework (section 3)
  - The need for an Adaptation Framework and relationship with other strategies (section 4)
  - The scope of and objectives of the Adaptation Framework (section 5)
  - A summary of climate risk and vulnerability in the UK and in Reading (section 6)

- A summary of adaptation priorities and options with outline action plans for priority areas, with signposting to further information and support (section 7)
- 3.3. It is important to understand that climate adaptation is a process not an event, and dynamic assessment of climate-related risk will be required to continually update the response of individual services and the Council as a whole. Hence the approach has been to develop a 'framework' which can evolve over time and be updated in real time. The outputs from this can then be fully integrated into the Council's risk management, corporate/service planning and performance management frameworks, rather than sitting in a separate 'plan' which attempts to capture every possible action but which would quickly become dated.
- 3.4. In this spirit, it is proposed that, as a first step, SEPT Committee endorse the proposed Adaptation Framework at Appendix 1. Beyond this, services will need to apply the principles, objectives and risks identified in the Framework to their own contexts, enabling the Framework to be more fully developed. As this work progresses, given the wide-ranging nature of climate risk, it is proposed that the Adaptation Framework be considered by other Committees, and ultimately adopted by the Policy Committee as Council policy.
- 3.5. Other Options considered:
- **Do nothing:** there is no statutory obligation on the Council to produce a climate adaptation framework specifically, although, for the reasons set out in section 2 above, the inexorable increase in climate risk, and the practical and reputational risks associated with being under-prepared to deal with climate risk, mean that 'do nothing' is not considered a viable option.
  - **Development of a Berkshire-wide climate adaptation strategy:** discussions with the other Berkshire Councils indicate that there is some appetite for more joint working on climate adaptation, not least as some climate impacts transcend administrative boundaries. Such pan-Berkshire collaboration may indeed be both desirable and easier to achieve under the auspices of the Prosperity Board going forward, not least as climate risk is expected to become a key risk to Berkshire's prosperity. However, subsequent development of Berkshire-wide approaches to climate adaptation is not considered mutually exclusive to the development of a more locally-focused adaptation framework as proposed in this report.
- 3.6. For the reasons set out above, therefore, it is recommended that the Adaptation Framework proposed at Appendix 1 be endorsed by the Committee, that further work be done by services to populate the framework, and that when that work is complete the populated framework be submitted to the Policy Committee for adoption as Council policy, and subject to regular (at least 5 yearly) review thereafter.

## 4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. The recommendations in this report support Corporate Plan themes as follows:
- **Healthy Environment:** a healthy environment is a resilient environment, and by protecting and improving our green and blue spaces, we can help both nature and people adapt to climate impacts
  - **Thriving Communities:** communities, particularly vulnerable communities, face significant and growing risks from climate impacts such as increased flood risk and more extreme weather events including heatwaves and storms. To thrive communities need to become more resilient to these impacts.
  - **Inclusive Economy:** the economic impact associated with climate change are substantial and likely to rise over time – improving the resilience of infrastructure and businesses to these impacts, and ensuring that the costs of doing so are borne fairly, will be essential to achieve an 'inclusive economy'.

## **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed on this report which suggests a 'Net medium positive' impact, based on the fact that the Framework is designed to improve resilience to climate impacts. Care will be needed, however, to ensure that measures to adapt to climate impacts are consistent with the need to reduce carbon emissions. For example, responding to excess heat in buildings by installing fossil-fuel powered air conditioning will have a negative carbon reduction objectives. By contrast, using natural ventilation, shading, or linking installation of air conditioning with new renewable energy generation, would avoid or mitigate this negative impact.

## **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. Development of this Strategy has been informed by:
- Public consultation and engagement on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy
  - Stakeholder engagement on the review of the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy
  - Internal discussion with key services
- 6.2 Further community engagement, however, is implied or may be required in taking forward a number of the potential actions identified in this Framework.

## **7. Equality Implications**

8. Whilst the impacts of climate change will be felt widely by all members of the community in Reading, this report establishes an approach to assessing this risk and does contain specific projects or actions and therefore is not considered to require an Equality Impact Assessment at this stage

## **9. Other Relevant Considerations**

- Public Health implications: the climate crisis is a public health crisis and the two areas of policy are, increasingly, closely linked.
- Risk management implications: climate adaptation is fundamentally a risk management issues, and the
- Community safety implications

## **10. Legal Implications**

- 10.1. There are no legal implications arising though the report does highlight the potential for new statutory obligations relating to climate adaptation to be placed on local authorities, as recommended by the Committee on Climate Change.

## **11. Financial Implications**

- 11.1. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report, though implementation of the potential actions identified will, in some cases, have resource implications. The thrust of the report, however, is that climate risk needs to be treated as a mainstream risk management issue and integrated into business planning by all services accordingly. This approach will minimise additional resource requirements, though additional resources may of course be needed to implement measures to improve resilience (e.g. flood mitigation projects).

## **12. Timetable for Implementation**

- 12.1. The report emphasises that climate adaptation is a process, not an event, so there is no specific timetable for implementation. The Council and individual services can be

advised, however, to ensure that climate risk is more comprehensively addressed in the forthcoming review of the Corporate Plan and within individual Service Plans in their next iteration.

### **13. Background Papers**

13.1. There are none.

### **Appendices**

1. Reading Borough Council Climate Change Adaptation Framework
2. Reading Climate Risk Assessment spreadsheet (Annex 1 to the Climate Change Adaptation Framework)