

Case study: Buckinghamshire County Council

“Great pace, informal, fun & thought provoking”

“The time flies by in the meetings”

General overview of organisation

Buckinghamshire County Council is an upper tier local authority in the South-East of England with key responsibilities for public health, children and young people services, education and skills, environment and planning, and highways. The majority of staff and services are located in Aylesbury and serve a relatively affluent county that, none the less, has pockets of deprivation and poverty.

Number and format of sessions

6 sessions of two hours each: 10 am to noon (within core working hours) spaced approximately at fortnightly intervals. Between the fifth and sixth sessions there was a gap of about a month. A group of 8 people.

Sustainability work outside of Carbon Conversations

The Council has a strategic carbon reduction plan with a newly formed Sustainability Service team which brings together all staff working on sustainability-related activities including employee engagement, wider community outreach and sustainable transport. At the time of the Carbon Conversations course, the team was putting together the Council’s Carbon Management Plan for 2012-17.

Impetus for including CCs in the organisation’s work

In the context described above, Carbon Conversations was offered to the sustainability team itself and served two purposes: to enable the team to consider and experience a powerful tool that they could then decide how to use in their work implementing the Carbon Management Plan; and to function as a team-building process, helping the team to get to know each other and share their respective areas of expertise on carbon reduction. The programme complemented the group’s other training on behavioural change (how to plan a behavioural change project, good practice, and monitoring and evaluation) which is the team’s key specialism.

High level overview of group participants

The seven-strong group consisted of the Council’s newly-formed sustainability team as described above.

Synopsis of meetings

The group enjoyed the meetings and found the combination of the personal and professional stimulating. As the programme progressed, they got to know each other better and were increasingly able to share the

challenges of moving towards a lower-carbon lifestyle: for example, in the meeting on consumption and



Sustainability, step by step

purchasing, one member of the group, in a powerful moment, honestly shared her recognition of and frustration with the peer pressure she experienced to consume more. The team's manager joined them for the last meeting and commented on the energy and focus of the action planning discussion.

Plans arising

During the last meeting, the group produced a comprehensive and detailed list of ideas for workplace initiatives to reduce carbon, pooling their different areas of expertise and the ideas that had been generated in the meetings on energy, travel, food and purchasing. The list served to move the group actively towards implementation of the Carbon Management Plan.

In the feedback afterwards, all of the team said they had found the programme valuable or very valuable, despite already having expertise in the field. All but one made definite plans to take additional carbon-reduction actions at work, and all planned to do so at home. Four out of the seven said that they would 'definitely' or 'probably' use the ideas in their work – for example, taking a more mindful approach to purchasing, and communicating more effectively with staff over sustainability actions. The co-ordinator for the Buckinghamshire Energy Champions network, along with a volunteer Energy Champion, are currently (December 2013) scheduled to undertake facilitator training in order to run courses at a community level in Buckinghamshire.

“Carbon Conversations has helped provide a support network with others to feel more confident about starting to integrate our message elsewhere within the Council.”