

Leading for Sustainability in BLMK – a burning ambition for change

On 15 November, delegates from across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes joined a Leading for Sustainability Summit at the Christian Centre in Milton Keynes.

Led by Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board, leaders in the climate conversation joined a seminar with youth councillors from across our region, to discuss how climate impacts health and why we have a burning platform to change the future for generations to come.



The world is not inherited from our ancestors, it's borrowed from our children...

Dr Rima Makarem, Chair of Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board opened the seminar with a stirring call to action, for partners to do more to collaborate in our region, to improve the environment, increase sustainability and leave a legacy to be proud of.

It's time to act...

Dr Makarem is supported by Vineeta Manchanda, Non-Executive Member for the ICB and Chair of the Audit Committee who has sponsored the seminar. Vineeta told delegates that the NHS contributes almost 6% of the UK's carbon emissions and two thirds of this come from the NHS supply chain.

She explained that there are opportunities to be had, and 6,700 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent emissions had already been reduced through changing the types of anaesthetic gases and inhalers we use.

She called on partners in Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes to play their part in tackling the impact we have on climate and calls on leaders to work together to refresh the Green Plan in BLMK to make a real and lasting difference.



Collaboration is key in a changing world



Alistair Strathern MP for Hitchin and Chair for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Environment was the first of our keynote speakers, joining from parliament, where he explained how Government is leading the charge to create a greener, low carbon future.

He reminded delegates about the devastating effects of the floods which affected the region in the autumn – harming local businesses, shattering communities and causing untold disruption to our lives.

He explained that weather events which used to be considered a one in every two-hundred-year event are becoming more common and local partners, especially in health and local government will need to be prepared to manage a changing world.

Alistair encouraged delegates to reflect on the influence we have and explained how Trusts are already decarbonising, how food waste has been saved over the last few years and how technology and neighbourhoods are reducing the need to travel to access health and care services.

He told conference that the NHS has removed 350,000 tonnes of CO₂ – and reduced emissions by 60% since the 90s. A great start, but there's more to do.

Live from COP29



Dr Tim Simmance, Associate Director of Sustainability and Growth was the second of our keynote speakers and he introduced Martin Baxter, Deputy Chief Executive of the Institute of Environmental Management who joins the seminar live from COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

His message to the seminar was that we need to match ambition with action...

Investment in skills and leadership is necessary to upskill our workforce to ensure we have the right green skills place across systems to drive the changes we deliver for our planet and the health of the population.

The case for change...

Questions from the floor prompted Dr Tim Simmance to reflect on the reasons why we need to tackle the climate emergency. He talked about the social and moral obligations but told the conference about the link to health and how supporting a thriving environment is key to preventing disease.

Every one-thousand tonne of carbon dioxide emitted to our environment is estimated to cause one death. If that's not enough of a reason to act, then what is, he asked?

A sobering thought which led to a conversation about the impact of climate change.

Sian Pither, Sustainability and Growth Programme Manager for the ICB joined Dr Simmance on stage to talk about some of the specific impacts of the environment on health.



With plastics already being found in the food chain, more children experiencing asthma, and babies being born to breathe polluted air, she explained that there is a proven link to health and environment which will result in generations to come experiencing the impact of the climate emergency.

A time to collaborate ...



With real life examples of the impact of the changing climate ringing in the ears of delegates, attendees joined roundtable discussions to review the BLMK Green Plan and make recommendations for action.

Recommendations from the working groups included the need for triple-bottom-line reporting, the need for clinically-led transformation and the development of clinical fellows, harnessing the power of anchor organisations to support local communities, VCSEs and neighbourhood teams and to collaborate on environmental education for young and older people alike.

Passing the baton...

Joining the roundtable conversations were members of the Youth Council from Bedford Borough, Luton and Milton Keynes. The young people all shared an interest in the environment and were keen participants, challenging delegates and calling for action on net zero carbon policies.





Following the roundtable, local author Jeremy Williams (writer of *Climate Change is Racist*) chaired a panel of youth councillors to seek their views on the discussions.

Relationships and trusted community engagement was the advice from young people on how organisations should tackle the environment and health. They encouraged organisations to help them break the stigma associated with activism and gave clear directions on how to engage with young people to increase participation.

Leading a masterclass on community engagement, the youth councillors left delegates with one key ask... “do not leave the room and forget about these conversations, your time to act is now”.

This is not the end, today is just the beginning...

After rousing applause for the young people, Vineeta Manchanda addressed delegates, calling on partners to heed the advice of the youth councillors and look to their organisations to implement the green plan.

She celebrated the simplicity of action outlined by the youth councillors, reflecting how organisations talk about “left shift” and our communities refer to community engagement and action.

In closing Vineeta encouraged the young people to keep challenging organisations and holding them to account because today marks the beginning of change in health and the environment in BLMK.

The Leading for Sustainability webinar was a great coming together of youth councillors, partners and local people - focused on improving the health and wellbeing of local people, by introducing policies to tackle the impact of climate change.

For more information on the BLMK Green Plan, visit our [website](#).

