

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 22 July 2020 at 6.00 pm via Remote Meeting

Present: Councillors M Boylan, G H Cook, V J Holt, T L B Janke, T J Nelson, G L Offland and G C W Reynolds (Chair).

Also Present: Councillor C Healy (Cabinet Member for Visitor Economy, Historic & Natural Environment and Climate Change)

In Attendance: A Lowe (Associate Director: Policy & Governance), F Mercer (Director: Communities, Customer & Commercial Services), H Rayet (Climate Change and Sustainability Coordinator) and K Robinson (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer)

Apologies: None

ENVSC5 Declarations Of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

ENVSC6 Minutes Of The Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

ENVSC7 Climate Change

The Committee received the presentation of the Director for Communities, Customer & Commercial Services and the Climate Change & Sustainability Coordinator. The presentation covered a broad range of issues.

The presentation gave Members an overview of the science underlying climate change. Officers provided an explanation of the greenhouse gas effect and effects this had on both the United Kingdom and, locally for the Borough. On 25 July 2019, the Council declared a Climate Emergency and made a commitment for carbon neutrality from the Council's controlled operations and activities by 2030. A further commitment was made to engage with residents, businesses, public sector organisations and partners to work together with the aspiration for the Borough to also be carbon neutral by 2030.

To meet the 2030 target, the Council would focus on reducing emissions as far as possible. If this measure was unable to decrease emissions sufficiently, the Council's Action Plan called for measures such as habitat creation and tree planting as a means of offsetting emissions. Climate action has to benefit the Borough's communities, providing employment prospects and inward investment – it was important not to heighten inequality. The Council's climate

action is not new, its carbon footprint has reduced by 44% since 2005, and action has accelerated over the past year with the introduction of Green Guarantee sites and a number of projects; namely switching to LED and retrofitting buildings with solar power. In the year just gone, the Council had also switched to a 100% green energy tariff for the Council estate, streetlights, and schools.

Officers noted the duality of COVID-19 in respect of the Council's climate change agenda. On the one hand, the pandemic had slowed efforts down due to redeployment of staff and a shift in immediate priorities. Whilst on the other, there had been significant environmental benefits from the closure of public buildings and home working, reduced business miles, and a substantially reduced reliance on printing.

Moving forward, over the next year, the Council planned to continue with a number of measures. Additional buildings were to be retrofitted, the efficiency of fleet services would be reviewed, and procurement of a multi-partner electrical vehicle framework would begin. Alongside these measures would be nature-focussed work that would look at enhancing and restoring grassland, heathland, and wetland on council land and scoping the creation of community forests.

The Council recognised the need to work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders for climate policies to be effective. To this end, the Council had established Climate Change Partnership, which had a broad membership representing business, education, community groups, and the public sector. Its membership would be widened further via a sub-group system of working, allowing other interested parties to become involved. The Partnership was not Council led but Council supported.

A new initiative, Climate Change Champions, was to be launched and would open up volunteering opportunities to all in the Borough. The idea was to have a programme of events throughout the year in the community to reach out to residents and to hear a range of ideas. This initiative fit into a broader programme of engagement that also included a resident's survey.

Members asked a number of questions as follows:-

Was electricity produced by the Council's solar farm still fed into the National Grid, as opposed to stored locally?

At present, excess energy produced by the solar farm is fed into the National Grid. The alternative to this meant that the Council would lose the Feed-In Tariff payments that made up a significant proportion of the project's revenue. The preference would be to install a private wire system to benefit local businesses if there were changes to the system.

Would the Council extend its sustainable building initiative to the private sector?

There is already grant funding for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) but not through this project. The Council was looking to promote the Marches

Renewable Energy (MarRe) funds, which covered up to 50% towards the installation of renewable technologies. The funding would be available until 2021 and was also available to town and parish councils.

When Officers discussed the decrease in business mileage during the pandemic, did the figures include the Councils partners' mileage?

The figures only cover the Council officers but it was hoped it would include partners later.

How would the Council's Carbon Neutral Action Plan be future proofed?

There would be a combination of finding savings in existing buildings and environmental impact reports for new projects and policies. Building environmental considerations into new projects from the outset was one of the best ways. Additions would be made to the action plan when necessary and procurement had an environmental assessment built into their process, where environmental issues were 10% of the overall weighting.

How many electrical vehicle charge points was the Council looking to procure? And, would the charge points be on Council property or would this project be carried out with the private sector?

There wasn't a specific number available but a report was being prepared that would have a number. The charge points would be located in both public and private spaces.

Did the Council know how many of the town and parish councils had converted their footway lights to LED lighting?

The Council was aware that town and parish councils had a significant amount of work in this area. It would be useful for town and parish councils with experience to share their skills so that others can make the most of what others have learnt.

Could the Council ask the town and parish councils to provide numbers of LED and non-LED street lighting?

This was a good suggestion and could be on an agenda of the Partnership Group. Encouraging town and parish councils to use LED lighting was a 'win-win' project due to the climate and financial benefits.

Is there anything in the upcoming community survey about resident's interest in taking responsibility for environmental projects?

This was timely, as the survey would be finalised that week. Officers would investigate the plausibility of its inclusion.

Members also briefly discussed the role of the role of the Committee moving forwards and the importance of monitoring governance and tracking targets. Members also discussed opportunities for resident engagement through community ownership schemes.

Officers made clear that input of Scrutiny was valuable and the views of a wide range of stakeholders would be taken into account.

ENVSC8 Chair's Update

Connection with the Chair was lost at 19:33 before this item could begin.

The meeting ended at 7.37 pm

Chairman:

Date: Tuesday, 27 October 2020