

SCRUTINY PANEL B

Virtual Meeting held on Thursday, 12th November, 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Christian Chapman in the Chair;

Councillors Ciaran Brown, Dale Grounds,
Trevor Locke (Vice-Chair), Phil Rostance and
David Walters.

Apology for Absence: Councillor Melanie Darrington.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Mike Joy and Shane Wright.

SB.7 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SB.8 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 15 October 2020, be received and approved as a correct record.

SB.9 Scrutiny Review: Climate Change

The Chairman introduced the report and the new review topic in relation to climate change. It was intended that the meeting would open up any initial discussions in relation to the climate change agenda and enable the Panel to set the terms of reference for the review as appropriate.

The Scrutiny Research Officer reminded the Panel that Council had originally announced that it would be setting up a Climate Change Commission following consideration of a climate emergency motion at a Council meeting in July 2019. However due to a number of difficult challenges over the previous 12 months including the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been agreed to facilitate the review through a Scrutiny Panel instead.

The report attached to the agenda offered some introductory information including:

- the definition of climate change;
- the Council's Corporate Plan priorities and commitment towards the cleaner and greener agenda;
- the Council's actions thus far in reducing its carbon footprint;
- the outcomes from the 2019 employee survey regarding climate change mitigation.

The Corporate Plan outlined numerous key projects, programmes, and initiatives to be implemented within the next four years and reinforced the Council's goals and ambitions regarding climate change, along with any strategies and policies that were already in place.

It was now for Members to decide from a plethora of climate change considerations to choose what the Panel's focus would be. Once established, relevant officers would be invited to attend the meetings to offer insight and guidance to facilitate the review as appropriate.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services reiterated the fact that the subject of climate change was far reaching and covered a wide range of equally important topics to consider. It was therefore important that the Panel chose an area of focus that it could realistically hope to influence and would add real value to the Council's ongoing commitment towards climate change and mitigation.

It was also acknowledged that the Council worked with many partners that were also committed to reducing their carbon footprint and the remit of the review could include how climate change was being tackled simultaneously on a partnership level.

At this point in the proceedings, the Chairman introduced Arran Rangi from Green New Deal UK. Due to growing concerns around climate breakdown, the non-profit organisation was committed to lobbying government to step up and deliver a game-changing plan for health, for jobs and for climate action.

Mr. Rangi introduced himself and commented that it was great to see the Council taking action and with the District being traditionally shaped by industry and mining, it would be a great opportunity for Ashfield to be a forerunner and set a good example for climate change mitigation within the public sector.

Green New Deal UK was about decarbonising the UK, creating secure jobs, transforming the economy, protecting and restoring habitats and wild areas and promoting global justice.

Education at school age was a powerful tool to begin addressing climate issues and it was suggested that the Council could engage with local schools to ascertain their ideas/views and in particular, the Youth Council and Ecocommittee at Ashfield School, who were currently very active. It was also suggested that Members visited the Client Earth website which worked as a charity utilising the law to create powerful change and a future where people and the planet can thrive together.

Members took the opportunity to commence discussing the topic and commented that Nottinghamshire County Council had been committed to climate change mitigation for some time and inviting an officer from their Energy and Carbon Management team to gain some insight into Nottinghamshire's aspirations for reducing carbon emissions would be extremely helpful.

The Panel also discussed the Council's own commitments towards reducing its carbon footprint and agreed that officers from its Planning, Housing and Waste Management Teams would be able to offer an expert overview of the work currently being undertaken.

Having acknowledged the wealth of information to consider and examine, it was agreed that a series of informal Panel B meetings would be better suited to facilitating the review and would enable officers to focus more efficiently on each area of investigation. It was therefore mooted that four informal meetings should be scheduled to consider the following in turn:

1. The Council's current commitments to reducing its carbon footprint across its range of services;
2. How the Council's partners are committing to the climate change agenda;
3. How local businesses and community groups are playing their part to tackle climate change;
4. To ascertain the views of younger people regarding protection of their future planet.

As mentioned previously, education was a powerful tool to encourage people to contribute towards protecting their planet and Members agreed that a social media campaign offering ideas and tips for reducing their carbon footprint would be constructive.

Mr. Rangi spoke about the concept of retrofitting older houses and how this provided many longer term benefits to residents going beyond emissions savings, which included lower energy bills, warmer homes and enhanced health and wellbeing. The Chairman advised that the Council currently offered a 'warmer homes grant' and commented that the Authority had an excellent record of keeping its housing stock in good repair and was committed to green schemes wherever possible.

The Scrutiny Research Officer informed the Panel that the Council were currently developing an Environmental Charter and Climate Change Strategy and it would be useful to consider the draft documents when they became available and invite the officers/authors to discuss the content and methodologies of their research at a future meeting.

Mr Rangi commented that private transport was one of the world's biggest sources of greenhouse gases with emissions rising every year and local authorities could contribute to reducing the carbon footprint by investing in better public transport, investing in walking and cycling infrastructure and pedestrianising high streets wherever possible.

The Panel concurred with this view and acknowledged that Nottinghamshire County Council were consistently investing in their tram infrastructure and had recently purchased four more electric low emission buses to add to their growing fleet. It was also important to invest in safe and accessible walking and cycling routes to provide viable alternatives to using personal vehicles.

In relation to the debate surrounding cycling and walking infrastructures, a note of caution was raised by a Panel Member that any future development and expansion of greener infrastructure should not be at the expense of valuable greenspaces around the District that needed to be protected for the future.

Members discussed the merits of tree planting and it was acknowledged that whilst small tree planting initiatives were laudable, the commitment to tree planting to offset carbon emissions would need to be on a much larger scale and be more radical in nature, to have any real effect. However the Panel did accede to the fact that small steps taken by many people ended up making significant changes and any efforts to make carbon savings, both organisationally and on a personal level, were to be welcomed.

Having raised the issue of waste recycling and the required focus around resource efficiency and waste prevention, Members were reminded that they already had an item on the Scrutiny Workplan for 2020/21 to look at waste recycling within Ashfield. It was agreed that it would be prudent not to duplicate work and once the Waste Recycling review was commenced in early 2021, the Panel could then consider any pertinent issues with regard to waste collection at that point.

To conclude the evening's debate, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank Arran Rangi for his attendance and contribution to the discussion. He responded by saying that the enthusiasm of the Panel was great to see and that engaging local communities would be paramount to effecting real change on a wider scale.

RESOLVED that

a) the terms of reference for the 'Climate Change' review be as follows:-

Review Objectives

- Understand progress against the Council's 'Cleaner and Greener' priority, including the development of key policy documents such as the Environmental Charter and the Climate Change Action Plan
- Understand what measures the Council may already have in place to mitigate the impact of climate change
- Consider how the Council works with key partners regarding climate change mitigation

Methodology

- Examine key Council policies, strategies and action plans
- Understand national context to give the review context
- Informal working groups dedicated to key themes within the review
- Work with key partners
- Examine best practice examples from other organisations

Involvement

- Council Officers working to deliver the 'Cleaner and Greener' corporate priority

- Key partners committed to the climate change agenda
- Local schools and youth groups
- Local businesses and community groups

Information

- National and local data
 - Ashfield District Council's Environmental Charter, Green Business Scheme, Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan
 - Details of national initiatives
 - LGA guidance and case studies
- b) it be agreed that the initial exploratory work be commenced via a series of informal meetings to enable Panel Members to engage expert witnesses and capture pertinent data as required to facilitate the next stage of the review.

The meeting closed at 8.23 pm

Chairman.