

SCRUTINY PANEL B

Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Thursday, 22nd July, 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Christian Chapman in the Chair;

Councillors Jim Blagden, Dale Grounds,
David Walters and Caroline Wilkinson.

Apology for Absence: Councillor Melanie Darrington.

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

SB.1 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SB.2 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 28 January 2021, be received and approved as a correct record.

SB.3 Scrutiny Review: Climate Change Mitigation

The Scrutiny Research Officer presented the report to the Panel and advised that the document was split into two halves, the first part outlined some outcomes from the 2019 Council commissioned Carbon Management Plan for Ashfield (as compiled by Nottinghamshire City Council) and the current work programme emerging from the Council's internal Climate Change Working Group (attended by senior officers from Assets & Investments, Place & Wellbeing, Waste & Environment, Planning, Procurement and Finance), including development of its draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

The second part of the report outlined some case studies (compiled by the Local Government Association [LGA]) which highlighted some of the work and initiatives being carried out by local authorities across the country regarding climate change mitigation.

Draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan

The Director of Housing and Assets had provided a briefing note to the Scrutiny Team and advised that the following strategic actions were currently being considered by the Working Group to form part of the upcoming Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan:

- applying for future funding for all Scope emissions - £2m funding already secured
- improvement to the efficiency of current fleet use and consideration of share of electric vehicles
- increasing the availability of electric pool cars
- promoting more sustainable methods of employee commuting, such as cycle to work schemes, car sharing and electric vehicle charging points
- investment in walking and cycling infrastructure and pedestrianising the high street where possible
- reducing the total volume of waste generated where possible through greater reuse, and behavioural change campaigns
- investigating the potential to increase water reuse, for example through grey water recovery systems to reduce wastewater
- flood management and biodiversity
- tree planting
- supporting local businesses and promoting good sustainable behaviours with a Green Business Scheme
- working with and influencing community volunteers and local businesses to help with climate change
- mitigation to encourage an increase in ownership of community open spaces
- asset rationalisation and enhancement
- internal reviews such as procurement, waste/recycling etc.
- requesting allocation of monies from the recently awarded Towns Fund to develop green projects within the town centres (i.e., bee meadows at bus stops).

Members took the opportunity to discuss some of the potential actions and debated the following:

- the negative impact of some pedestrianisation schemes on town centre footfall and acknowledgement that many people still wished to drive to access shops and town centre facilities
- success of the Hucknall pedestrianisation scheme in particular and how the town centre is now thriving due to ease of access and connectivity

- acknowledgement that the Housing Strategy 2021-2023, considered and approved at Cabinet earlier in the week, contained various decarbonisation initiatives for the Council's housing stock with a future eye to the development of greener more sustainable properties
- the importance of the draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan being submitted to the Scrutiny Panel at an early stage to enable Members to consider its content prior to adoption by Cabinet
- realisation that the weather was changing due to shifts in global temperatures and the importance of local authorities being equipped and ready to act should any freak weather emergencies unfold locally (reference to the recent freak storms in Germany and the tragic loss of life that resulted).

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services referred to the LGA's recent compilation of climate change case studies (including questions to be considered and asked by Members as part of climate change mitigation discussions) and reflected that all local authorities were now being encouraged to prioritise and develop their climate change strategies and action plans to support the global effort to mitigate against inevitable climate change.

It would be imperative that Panel Members had sight of the draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan as soon as practicably possible to enable them to consider its content and submit their comments/responses to Cabinet in a timely manner. Members needed to become much more proficient in their knowledge of climate change, how the pandemic had impacted the delivery of any climate change mitigation initiatives and to be equipped with the latest benchmark data and information to enable the cascade of data and education of residents as required.

Members discussed the following:

- concerns that back bench Members were not being given enough information and were being kept out of the loop in relation to the Council's priorities and initiatives
- reference to a previous Ashfield Flood Plan document and concerns as to whether the document remained viable and if it had been updated within the last few years
- the desire for more information from Cabinet in relation to the Council's emergency planning and flood defence programme for dealing with freak weather emergencies including incidences of flooding and storm damage
- the importance of having sight of any recent data in relation to freak weather incidences within Ashfield and any subsequent damage or danger experienced by local residents
- to alleviate any confusion going forward, an urgent need for Members to become conversant as to the correct chain of command for emergency planning responsibilities and operations from County Council level down to District Councils as required

- concerns that the District was home to many disused mining seams and how this could make areas of Ashfield vulnerable to the appearance of sink holes following any sustained incidences of extreme weather and flooding.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services acknowledged that no training sessions had been delivered to Members for some time in relation to climate change mitigation and suggested that it would be good to consider this as part of the review process. Members could formulate some proposals as to how best this training could be delivered i.e., via a face-to-face session, circulation of information via electronic means or the delivery of updates at Council meetings on a regular basis.

A Member suggested that it might be useful for the Panel to speak to a Planning officer at a future meeting in relation to how the Council was intending to regulate the building of new sustainable homes within the District in the future (to reduce carbon emissions) and what national regulations were currently in place to guide this process.

Whilst considering the Council's current efforts for addressing climate change mitigation, Members were reminded that an Environmental/Sustainability section was included on the Council's corporate report template to be completed by the author in relation to how their report and recommendations might have any local environmental or sustainability implications. It was suggested that going forward it would be more prudent (and lend more weight) to have an expert officer consider and complete the section rather than the author as per current practice. Members suggested that this expertise could maybe be commissioned from the County Council if needed.

The Panel acknowledged that the Council needed to maintain its presence on regional boards and focus groups to ensure that the needs of the District were conveyed, and that local businesses were also signed up and committed to the Council's climate change mitigation programme. Procurement by the Council should prioritise organisations that were committed to decarbonisation and not always opt for the cheapest option. The Council also needed to ensure that the residents of Ashfield were also fully onboard and educated in relation to the Council's efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

To conclude Members were asked to take a look at the Friends of the Earth's 33 actions which had been published on their website to assist Council's in mitigating against global warming and encouraging reduction of their carbon footprint via a range of measures.

RESOLVED that

- a) an informal meeting of the Panel be arranged in October 2021 to consider the following areas of interest and formulate a set of suitable recommendations for submission to Cabinet:
 - the Housing Strategy 2021-2023 as recently approved by Cabinet;
 - the draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan as developed by the internal Climate Change Working Group;

- the 10 questions published by the LGA in relation to Scrutiny Member involvement in any climate action debates within councils;
 - the potential for requiring expert officers to appraise all Council, Cabinet and Committee reports from an environmental/sustainability perspective;
- b) to furnish Panel Members with copies of the Council's Housing Strategy 2021-2023 and the LGA published questions regarding climate change;
- c) to extend an invite to the Chief Executive and/or the Portfolio Holder responsible for Climate Change to the informal meeting to take part in the discussions and contribute to the review as required.

(During consideration of this item, Councillor Caroline Wilkinson left the meeting at 8.14pm.)

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm

Chairman.