

SCRUTINY PANEL B

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

on Thursday, 28th October, 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Christian Chapman in the Chair;

Councillors Dale Grounds, Trevor Locke and David Walters.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Jim Blagden, Melanie Darrington and Caroline Wilkinson.

Officers Present: Ian Bailey, Lynn Cain, Mike Joy, Darren Wardale and Shane Wright.

SB.4 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SB.5 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 22 July 2021, be received and approved as a correct record.

SB.6 Scrutiny Review: Climate Change Mitigation

The Chairman welcomed everyone present to the meeting and introduced the Council's Assistant Director for Assets & Investments, Ian Bailey and the Strategic Asset Manager, Darren Wardale, who were in attendance at the meeting to offer advice and assistance to Members as part of any ensuing discussions.

The Scrutiny Research Officer summarised the current position in relation to the Climate Change Mitigation review including the outcomes from the recent Informal Working Group meeting held on 5 October 2021. The report also presented the Council's draft Climate Change Strategy document and the emerging Net Zero Strategy as set out by the Government.

To enable the review to progress to a successful conclusion, it was suggested to the Panel that it would be prudent for Members to start formulating some draft responses and recommendations to Cabinet following receipt of the above documents and the evidence gathered and considered to date by Members.

Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener

Published by Government on the 19 October 2021, the Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener policy paper set out policies and proposals for decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy to meet a net zero target by 2050. Members' attention was drawn to the section regarding 'Local Climate Action' which outlined in more detail how the Government would be supporting decarbonisation and regeneration in local areas and communities.

The following key commitments were outlined:

- setting clearer expectations on how central and local government will interact in the delivery of net zero
- building on existing engagement by establishing a Local Net Zero Forum to bring together national and local government senior officials on a regular basis to discuss policy and delivery options on net zero
- continuing the Local Net Zero Programme to support all local areas with their capability and capacity to meet net zero including provisions to continue with Local Net Zero Hubs, promoting best practice and support for local authorities to develop net zero projects (to attract commercial investment) and increase knowledge sharing to demonstrate and share successful net zero system solutions.

It was envisaged that the Government would be working with local authorities to support and aid the transition to net zero by financing strategic infrastructure projects (as led by local authorities) whilst providing advice and expertise in order to strengthen the pipeline of investable projects.

It was also hoped that an array of funding streams would become available to enable local authorities to build capacity and capability locally whilst managing expectations for the local economy during the transitional phase.

In relation to the Council, local priorities would be in relation to the following:

- energy provision and heating/maintenance of Council assets and buildings
- greener solutions to upgrade and maintain Council housing stock
- transport and fleet provision
- District-wide green infrastructure
- environmental improvements.

Climate Change Committee: 2021 Progress Report to Parliament

Members were also asked to note the Government's response to the Climate Change Committee's 2021 progress report to Parliament regarding progress being made nationally in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Following the update from the Scrutiny Research Officer, Members discussed the following:

- the Chairman's disappointment at the content of the Government's Net Zero Strategy and its route towards shifting responsibility for tackling climate change and reducing carbon emissions onto local authorities;

- recognition that the Council had been committed to tackling climate change and introducing greener alternatives wherever possible, for the past 10 years;
- the importance of ensuring the Council's housing stock is consistently upgraded to greener alternatives as required and to continue to maintain the decent homes standard as a priority
- the data surrounding total carbon emissions within Ashfield (around 36,000 tonnes per year) and the realisation that the Council can only effectively control and actively reduce around 5% of those emissions
- the recent increase in provision of electric charging points around the District
- the Council's track record in prioritising and upgrading its Council housing stock and its commitment to the provision of greener alternatives wherever possible
- the reasons why Ashfield District Council chose a carbon neutral date of 2030; 5 years earlier than the Government's aspirational target of 2035
- the benefits of continuing to promote agile working within the Council and how it could assist with enabling the Council to reduce its need for unnecessary office space and as a result, its carbon load
- the possibility of making the Council's green bins bigger to encourage additional recycling at an individual level
- the merits, or otherwise, of additional tree planting and its contribution to the reduction of carbon emissions overall
- acknowledgement that the Council's portfolio of investment properties have, in themselves, a carbon load with a requirement that the levels are added to the Council's overall total receipt for carbon emissions
- the possibility of the Council investing and recruiting in a full time Climate Change Mitigation officer to oversee the implementation of the Climate Change Strategy and action plan going forward.

Ashfield District Council: Draft Climate Change Strategy

Following the discussion, the Assistant Director for Assets & Investments expanded on some of the points raised and spoke about the recent housing decarbonisation initiatives that the Council had bid and received funding for. It was noted that the Government was not making it particularly easy for local authorities to gain access to the funding and officers were spending increasing amounts of time putting together bids for funding with no guarantee of success.

It was also acknowledged that the timescales for accessing the funding were extremely tight and delivery of the projects were being hampered by a shortage in specialist contractors to undertake the works (i.e. wall insulations).

This shortage was becoming an issue nationally and was showing no signs of abating at the present time.

To further hinder progress particularly in relation to wall insulations, new recognised standards of work had now been introduced that had resulted in a cost of over £5,000 more per property which inevitably reduced the amount of properties being treated and upgraded.

The target for all homes was to achieve an 'A' energy efficiency rating but this rating was hard to attain and most properties within Ashfield were currently being upgraded to a 'C' rating which was still to be welcomed in the current climate.

Members were also asked to note that the draft Climate Change Strategy document attached to the agenda, whilst outlining the Council's main objectives for climate change mitigation, did not yet contain the detailed action plan which was currently being worked on by officers. This action plan was a 54-page technical document, compiled in conjunction with specialists from Nottinghamshire City Council, which would outline the Council's specific emissions, its Scope 1, 2 and 3 categories and all the supporting data and evidence used in conducting the study.

Ashfield District Council had set a target of being carbon neutral by 2030 in relation to the carbon emissions that the Council were responsible for and it was intended that a consultant would be engaged to assist with the development of the action plan as required. A realisation for all local authorities was the fact that becoming carbon neutral was expensive and many Councils would be having frank conversation about finances to make difficult decisions regarding investment in such mitigation requirements.

It was again noted that the Council did not have any control over the carbon footprint of the goods and services that it purchased, but it was possible to restrict the use of contractors/organisations to those evidencing a certain level of green credentials at the tendering stage. It had also been mooted in an effort to overcome the shortage of specialist contractors undertaking carbon reductions works, that the Council could invest and train an in-house team, possibly taking advantage of any 'back to work' or rehabilitation projects available in the area.

Once the action plan had been finalised, allocations and responsibilities would be passed onto service areas to commence work on achieving the carbon neutral target by 2030.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services thanked Ian and Darren, on behalf of the Panel, for their valuable contributions to the review and advised that he hoped the Panel could see the document at its earliest opportunity to enable Members' views to be considered and incorporated into the action plan prior to its submission to Cabinet.

To conclude, Panel Members were asked to give thought to any possible recommendations that could be presented to Cabinet alongside the Council's Draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan and were assisted with suggestions as to the following themes:

- an increase in the provision of electric charging points around the District
- a commitment towards the expansion of a greener Council transport fleet
- continued investment in renewable technologies, i.e. solar panels for all Council owned buildings
- ensuring all contractors commissioned by the Council have proven green credentials
- a requirement to replace any felled trees within the District as a result of planning re-development (through S106 agreements)
- commit to planting wildlife verges in appropriate places and to consider bee sanctuaries through partnership initiatives
- to continue to support and promote energy saving initiatives to the residents of Ashfield
- to consider a possible group/individual reward scheme for successful climate reduction projects within the District
- continuing to work with schools to educate children and students on climate change and reduction initiatives
- a commitment towards involving local businesses in the Council's climate reduction strategy and action plan to gain support and buy in to collectively commit to the 2030 target
- consider 'community garden' projects for older residents to involve communities in increasing, maintaining and taking pride in green spaces across Ashfield.

RESOLVED that

- a) the Assistant Director for Assets & Investments be requested to release the draft Climate Change Strategy Action Plan to Panel Members for consideration as soon as practicably possible;
- b) as a result of a) above and upon release of the draft Strategy Action Plan, the Scrutiny Research Officer convene an Informal Working Group meeting to enable Members to consider its content and formulate a draft set of recommendations for presentation to Cabinet alongside the Climate Change Strategy report in early 2022.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm

Chairman.