

SCRUTINY PANEL B

Virtual Meeting held on Thursday, 28th January, 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Christian Chapman in the Chair;
Councillors Ciaran Brown, Dale Grounds,
Trevor Locke, Phil Rostance and David Walters.

Apology for Absence: Councillor Melanie Darrington.

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

In Attendance: Councillor Daniel Williamson.

SB.10 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SB.11 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 12 November 2020, be received and approved as a correct record.

SB.12 Scrutiny Review: Climate Change

The Chairman introduced the item and reminded Members that the review had commenced in November 2020. An informal meeting of the Group had taken place the previous week, on 20 January 2021, to consider some of the Council's recent initiatives for tackling climate change and reducing the Council's carbon emissions.

The Council's Assistant Director for Assets and Investment, Ian Bailey and the Strategic Assets Manager, Darren Wardale were in attendance at the meeting to advise on how the Council was co-ordinating its approach to climate change across its many teams and service areas. Councillor Daniel Williamson, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Communications, Governance & Cross Portfolio Support was also in attendance to give an overview of the ruling Group's commitments in relation to climate change.

The Scrutiny Research Officer spoke to the Panel and informed Members that the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) had recently publicised a briefing paper regarding how local authorities could best review climate change at a local

level. It was acknowledged that the topic was far-reaching and it was in Member's interests to wisely select and focus upon areas of climate change that they could influence at a local level and offer sound, tangible recommendations to Cabinet for consideration.

Some of the questions/suggestions for Members to consider as part of the CfPS briefing paper included the following:

- how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted any current commitments for reducing carbon emissions;
- how to select pertinent, workable themes for review;
- the importance of gathering base level data to inform discussion;
- to endeavour to secure senior management buy-in to the importance of the review and subsequent recommendations;
- to engage fully with local communities including children through school educational programmes;
- to stay focussed on realistic recommendations with real value for money and impact for the local area rather than producing a wish list for global change.

Carbon Reduction Commitment – Current Picture

To enable Members to get a picture of the Council's current commitment towards climate change and reducing its carbon emissions, a presentation was given by the Assistant Director for Assets and Investment.

The Council had been committed to climate change for some time and was very aware of its importance and the need for a consistent, proactive response to reducing emissions. All decision-making processes within the Council now included a section to be completed in relation to environmental impact and a Climate Change Working Group had been operational for around a year to enable officers to consider all aspects of Council delivery against the backdrop of its effect on climate change.

Senior officers from the Planning, Waste, Environmental, Energy, Finance and Housing Teams were part of the Working Group and considered issues alongside other partners including the Local Enterprise Partnership, Midlands Energy Hub, Nottinghamshire County Council and Derby City Council.

Nottingham City Council were currently in the process of producing a Carbon Management Plan and were currently gathering baseline data and the latest available information regarding CO₂ emissions arising from buildings, street lighting, transport, waste and procurement, amongst other things. Once completed the document would be invaluable to the Council to enable officers to consider the current position and in comparison, to the last five years.

From that starting point, the Council would be working on an updated Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan to be consider by senior management and Members as its development progressed.

A piece of work had been commissioned to gather a snapshot of the Council's current position regarding its carbon load in relation to its housing stock, its buildings and its insulation measures to date. Once completed, this would give officers a good idea of what was required to enable the Council to continue to reduce its carbon footprint over the next few years.

Members, however, did acknowledge that however committed the Council was to achieving a carbon neutral position, it would only ever provide mitigation for around 3% of the total climate position. 97% would always be outside of the Council's control and be part of a wider, global movement to tackle the climate change emergency.

The Council's current efforts to tackle climate change included the following:

- publication of the Green Homes Grant on the Council's website;
- resident surveys to enlist views on climate change initiatives;
- the Council taking an active part in Energy Frameworks;
- the Council's move to using 100% cleaner, greener electricity from April 2021;
- ensuring a commitment to green credentials and carbon reduction measures are included in renewal of leases for Council owned properties;
- production of an Environmental Charter;
- the roll out of the Green Business Scheme encouraging local businesses to adopt and commit to green credentials;
- ongoing commitment towards tree planting across the District;
- rolling programme of renewal for a greener Council vehicle fleet;
- maximum use of solar panels on Council owned buildings;
- ongoing development of cycling/walking infrastructure in town centres;
- commitment towards improving recycling for local residents including plastics and food waste;
- commitment towards improving green ratings on Council owned housing stock;
- raising the standards of cleaner, greener households targeting vulnerable residents in the District;
- to endeavour to make all the Council's housing stock carbon zero with assistance from Government funding;
- consistently seeking out additional funding opportunities for cleaner, greener initiatives;
- investment in green partnerships and technology to improve connectivity locally and nationally;
- continuing to support agile working and working from home with the resulting reduction in the use of paper within the organisation;
- commitment towards a flood protection scheme in consultation with the County Council.

Following the presentation, the Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services opened up the debate to the Panel and advised that residents were taking more interest in climate change issues and a question was due to be asked by a member of the public at the next Council meeting in relation to the Council's fleet and its plans to use electric vehicles in the future.

The publication from the CfPS had talked around the long term investment for Council's in relation to tackling climate change and the importance of raising public awareness and offering education to residents regarding ways to help reduce carbon emissions in their own households as well as contributing towards the wider cause.

The Panel would need to carefully consider their focus for the review and as part of their deliberations, be aware that the Covid-19 pandemic had greatly impacted on the delivery of many green initiatives from both the Council and also local businesses within the Ashfield area.

Members debated the issues and were of the belief that the baseline carbon emissions data, once received, would enable them to have the foundation to conduct a well-focussed and effective review. The Assistant Director for Assets and Investment reiterated that the information would be available in the final report due to be publicised by the City Council at the end of April 2021. It would hopefully be providing huge amounts of data that would inform and direct the Council's development of a targeted and effective Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan for the future.

Portfolio Holder for Corporate Communications, Governance & Cross Portfolio Support

Councillor Daniel Williamson took the opportunity to advise the Panel that the Ashfield Independent Group had been committed to tackling climate change for some time which had commenced with a formal motion to Council to acknowledging and committing to the climate change emergency being faced by the planet.

Tackling climate change was a passion of his personally and the Ashfield Independent Group were working tirelessly to facilitate sustainable growth within the District. The recently adopted Environmental Charter was a step in the right direction and the Council has also recently secured £1 million pounds of funding to improve the sustainability and green credentials of its own housing stock. Councillors were also committed to replanting trees wherever possible and a further thousand were due to be planted over the coming months.

The Scrutiny Research Officer thanked Councillor Williamson for his input and commented that buy in and commitment to carbon reduction was also needed from the Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) as well as from the Councillors and the ruling Group.

Members then went on to discuss the following:

Waste Collection and Recycling

Waste collection and recycling was an area of growth that could hugely contribute towards an ongoing reduction in resident's carbon footprints. It was noted that the provision of additional facilities for residents to recycle for example food waste and a wider range of plastics was under review at the moment nationally and it was rumoured that legislation might change to make recycling of such items mandatory.

Vegetarianism/Veganism – Growing Trend

The growing trend of vegetarianism/veganism and the move away from eating animal products had been very much in the news over the last couple of years. It was suggested that the Council could endeavour to promote awareness of this lifestyle choice and how the reduction in consumption of meat/meat products could potentially contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere.

Charging Points

The Council had already invested in the provision of electric charging points at some of its car parks and the Council main office building but some companies were now offering installation of charging points at no cost to local authorities. A note of caution was expressed that the offers were often not all they seemed, and installation of the charging points were part of a contract where the provider continued to make a profit on use.

In relation to the operation of an all-electric vehicle fleet, the provision and storage of batteries could be vastly expensive and as these types of vehicles were still in their infancy and there were many unknowns, any investment in such a fleet would need to be carefully considered before a commitment by the Council was made.

Agile Working/Working from Home

The events of the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to facilitate employees working from home over the past 11 months had had an impact on the use of personal vehicles and travel to and from the workplace. This had resulted in a positive reduction in many employees' carbon footprint and so it was envisaged that working flexibly from home/agile sites would be here to stay.

To conclude, the Chairman thanked Ian Bailey and Darren Wardale for being in attendance at the meeting and their valuable contribution towards progression of the review.

RESOLVED

that further exploratory work be undertaken via an additional informal meeting, prior to the next Panel meeting on 18 March 2021, to enable Members to select the most appropriate climate change theme and facilitate the next stage of the review process.

The meeting closed at 8.33 pm

Chairman.