

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 5 January 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor J E Kerr – Chair.

Councillors T Alban, M J Burke,
S Bywater, S J Criswell, J E Harvey,
N J Hunt, M Kadewere, C Lowe,
S R McAdam, D J Shaw and G J Welton.

APOLOGIES None.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors A M Blackwell, S Cawley,
L Davenport-Ray, I D Gardener, C M
Gleadow and N Wells .

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) meeting held on 1st December 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor T Alban declared a non-registerable interest in Minute 22/4 owing to his son working for a company which sells electric scooters.

3. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st January 2023 to 30th April 2023.

4. CLIMATE STRATEGY

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel were also invited to attend the meeting and to address the meeting on this Strategy given its anticipated impact across the Council. By means of a report by the Assistant Director Strategic Insight and Delivery (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Climate Strategy was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Shaw enquired how the Climate Co-ordinator role would be funded and the Panel heard that this was a planned expense for a fixed term role with bidding for a permanent role anticipated and would therefore not draw on the reserves mentioned within the report. Following a further question by Councillor Gleadow, the Panel heard that the role would include monitoring and reporting responsibilities but that any financial decisions would still be made in line with usual Council procedures. The role is seen as a vital part of the Council's journey to net zero carbon, co-ordinating work across service areas as required.

The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Shaw, that the Climate Strategy had a dual role in both allowing the Council to implement specific changes and also influence others. The Panel also heard that, once approved, the priorities of the Climate Strategy would be incorporated into all Council activities to ensure that any impact on the climate is considered, the development of a new Local Plan for Huntingdonshire was given as an example of where the Council's voice could be used to influence decisions and the impact of others.

In response to a question from Councillor Wells, the Panel heard that the Council had joined a fixed term energy tariff in Autumn 2022 which used 50% renewable energy, it was felt that this was the right decision at the time. The Panel further heard that the creation of an Energy Strategy would enable the Council to continue to make appropriate decisions about energy use and procurement in line with its priorities.

Councillor Cawley enquired whether there was any plan to offset carbon emissions prior to 2040 and the Panel were directed to the Hierarchy of Action diagram on page 9 of Appendix 1. It was advised that as 2040 approaches the Council may need to consider offset options once all other options had been exhausted.

It was queried by Councillor Alban why carbon offset was being seen as a last resort rather than looked at immediately for a quick win. The Panel were advised that the Council's most important role was to set an example to the wider community and that only by wisely using funds to address the source of the issue can a long term sustainable outcome could be achieved.

Councillor Cawley further observed that the planned £100,000 reserve was not a large sum of money considering the aspirations of the Strategy and enquired if there were plans to review the amount. The Panel were advised that in line with the Council's usual financial processes, reserves were able to be carried forward and the Medium Term Financial Strategy would also provide an annual opportunity for review. It was further

stressed that the reserve funds were to enable opportunities rather than implement them.

Following praise for the joint responsibility and ownership being taken by Officers and Executive Councillors, Councillor Cawley enquired whether or not there was a Plan B. The Panel were advised that a pathway of change was being established. The opportunities for how money is spent would inevitably change alongside the solutions available, but business cases would continue to be reviewed annually in order to help maximise opportunities. The Panel were further appraised that regular progress monitoring would ensure that the right technology be employed at the right price.

Both Councillors Hunt and Alban enquired where the quoted residential statistics in Appendix 1 came from. The Panel were advised that the figures were taken from the responses received to a survey of residents and businesses conducted in February 2021 and that the Strategy would be updated to reflect this. It was noted that whilst the response in 2021 had been reasonable, further support from Councillors for future surveys would be appreciated to drive engagement.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor McAdam, the Panel were advised that whilst there had already been an encouraging amount of engagement from Town and Parish Councils, this would continue to be developed to ensure best practice be shared as well as including stakeholders within the annual Climate Conversation. The Panel were further advised that the Council had worked alongside CAPALC to engage with local Town and Parish Councils to ensure involvement from the outset.

Following a question from Councillor Alban on fleet management and replacement, the Panel were advised that the Operations team had strong skills in maintaining the current fleet through good maintenance and recycling parts from decommissioned vehicles into the current fleet.

In response to a further question from Councillor Kerr on the potential move to electrical vehicles in the future, the Panel heard that research is underway to monitor electrical fleet within neighbouring districts and thereby establish best practice for the Council. In addition, it was observed that reducing the amount of waste to be collected across the district would reduce the fuel and potentially fleet required to collect waste. It was clarified, following a question from Councillor Criswell, that no reduction of fleet or collections is planned or would be implemented until there was sufficient reduction in the volume of waste to be collected.

The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Criswell, that circular recycling is already in use by the Council and that

residents benefit from sustainable solutions. The Council developed that relationship as part of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership of collection and disposal authorities (RECAP). The Panel were further advised that the Council would be asking the disposal authorities in RECAP to plan for future waste generated by new technologies such as lithium batteries from electrical vehicles.

Councillor Gleadow highlighted the three Council Key Priorities outlined in Appendix 1 and asked what Priority 3 Procure Wisely would look like. The Panel were advised that an action in the climate action plan is to update the Council's Procurement Rules so that consideration could be given to environmental impact alongside other priorities during the procurement process. The Panel were assured that this adjustment to the Procurement Process was already being developed to allow for implementation as swiftly as possible.

Councillor Alban further queried whether ethical considerations were also considered as part of the procurement process and the Panel were advised that the procurement process allowed Officers to make an informed decision. Where technical questions were unanswered, technical advice could be sought to ensure that the right advice was given at the right time.

Following a question from Councillor Lowe on the inclusion of solar panels in new developments, the Panel heard that the development of a new Local Plan was imminent, and that best practice from other authorities would be considered for inclusion within the new Local Plan.

Councillor Criswell requested that regular monitoring of progress and reporting be brought to the Panel. It was noted that carbon calculations could only be done annually. The Panel were assured that the team would continue to engage with the Climate Working Group and that all further Strategies would be brought through the Democratic Process once ready. It was further noted that regular feedback would also be given on the Action Plan following its implementation.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Gardener, the Panel were advised that climate and environmental goals would be considered in all Council reports going forward. The way this is presented will continue to evolve to enable Councillors to make informed decisions.

Councillor Bywater highlighted the importance of education and enquired regarding planned engagement with the younger generation, as well as engagement with local businesses. The Panel were advised that a Communications Plan was being developed to ensure engagement with communities. In particular, it was noted that the Economic Development Team

were working with local businesses on how to be greener and providing details of available grants and funding.

Councillor Hunt echoed the need to engage with the younger generation and the Panel were advised that although links were already established with Anglia Ruskin University, the Climate Co-ordinator role would also assist in maximising communication with this demographic, with Youth Councils specifically being targeted for engagement.

It was observed by Councillor Alban that tree planting which had been implemented along the A14 had failed in places, the Panel were assured that the Executive Councillor would pass this along to the relevant agencies to action replanting to assist in carbon absorption.

Councillor Alban observed that following comments from the Panel, it would be good to establish yardsticks against which progress and timescales could be measured and requested that the Panel have sight of this to aid future scrutiny and structure. Whilst the Panel were advised that some yardsticks were already included within the report, Councillor Alban observed that this would not be an exhaustive list, he therefore proposed that an additional recommendation be added to encompass this.

In response to a question from Councillor Gardener about information and funding for Parish Councils looking to install Electric Vehicle charging points, the Panel were advised that the team were happy to share any knowledge on the subject and it was further advised that an Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy was in development which would further educate and support on the subject. It was also observed that the annual Climate Conversation needed to include updated funding opportunities as it was recognised that these opportunities could be sporadic.

The report was highly praised by the Panel who thanked Officers and Local Partnerships for their diligence and hard work in the production of the Strategy.

The Panel requested that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

d) to establish a set of measures against which progress and timescales can be monitored through regular reporting to Overview and Scrutiny.

With the addition of this recommendation, the Panel

RESOLVED

to encourage Cabinet to endorse the remaining recommendations within the report.

5. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was presented to the Panel.

Whilst discussing items for future agendas, Councillor Criswell enquired if a report could be brought to the Panel encompassing healthcare issues experienced by local residents. The Panel were assured that this was in progress and would be covered in presentations due to be brought to the Panel over the coming months.

Chair