

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 4 JANUARY 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.11 PM

### **Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Andy Croy (Chair), Michael Firmager, Chris Johnson (Vice-Chair), Norman Jorgensen and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

### **Executive Members Present**

Councillors: Sarah Kerr, Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services

### **Officers Present**

Sabrina Chiaretti, Climate Emergency Project Officer

Andrew Collins, Climate Emergency Officer

Rhian Hayes, Assistant Director Economic Development and Growth

Callum Wernham, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

### **1 ELECTION OF CHAIR**

Chris Johnson nominated Andy Croy to be elected Chair for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year. This was seconded by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey.

**RESOLVED** That Andy Croy be elected Chair for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.

### **2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

Alistair Neal nominated Chris Johnson to be appointed Vice-Chair for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year. This was seconded by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey.

**RESOLVED** That Chris Johnson be appointed Vice-Chair for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.

### **3 APOLOGIES**

An Apology for absence was submitted from David Cornish. Alistair Neal attended the meeting as a substitute.

Gregor Murray attended the meeting virtually, meaning that he could participate in discussions but not vote.

### **4 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Andy Croy declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was on the Board of the Barkham Solar Farm project.

### **5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

### **6 MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

### **7 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee considered their Terms of Reference, set out in agenda pages 5 to 10, as agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

**RESOLVED** That the Terms of Reference be noted.

## **8 CLIMATE EMERGENCY POSITION PAPER**

The Committee considered the climate emergency position paper, set out in agenda pages 11 to 14, which outlined the progress made in relation to the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP).

The report outlined a number of areas where positive action had been taken, including an increased rate of recycling across the Borough, multiple Council-owned assets undergoing energy efficient retrofitting, and over 15,000 trees having been planted. Upcoming areas of focus included costing of delivery of component elements of the CEAP, sustainable procurement considerations, and supporting individual Council teams to deliver upon the CEAP. A number of challenges were present, including financial pressures relating to the cost-of-living crisis, the cost of delivering the CEAP without a dedicated climate emergency budget, and the lack of Central Government support through grants or statutory powers for Local Authorities.

Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services), Rhian Hayes (Assistant Director Economic Development and Growth), Andrew Collins (Climate Emergency Officer), and Sabrina Chiaretti (Climate Emergency Project Officer) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Of the planned 190 electric vehicle charging points due to be installed, would these be fast or slow chargers? Executive Member response – A mix of infrastructure would be used, suited to the location where they were to be installed;
- What additional powers, devolved from Central Government, would help the Borough achieve carbon neutrality? Officer response – For significant change to occur, Central Government would need to empower local Authorities to implement additional climate emergency policies with associated funding and grants;
- What were the timescales for costing the delivery of component elements of the CEAP? Officer response – The work programme report was started each April, with the final version ready in the summer. Best estimate costings would hope to be presented in the summer of 2023;
- Were there any additional actions that could be taken over the next few months that would have a significant impact on reaching net zero emissions? Officer response – The key issue with delivering the CEAP was that it needed to be done via building partnerships. Encouraging people, either residents or businesses, as partners to make positive changes in their lives was one of the most cost effective ways to see real change in the Borough;
- Would new house and office builds within the Borough require higher environmental standards? Executive Member response – Building regulations were mainly responsible for the standards that developments were built to, and the update to standards in June 2022 were a step up to get people ready for full implementation in 2025. Even these standards would not require a passive design, though they would reduce emissions. Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) could encourage developers to exceed standards, but we could not mandate them to do so. An Individual Executive

Member Decision paper approved an interim Climate Change Interim Policy Position Statement in December 2022, which would form part of the material decision making process when considering planning applications. By 2050, eighty-percent of the UK's housing stock will have been built pre-2021, which placed a greater emphasis on retrofitting properties. Changing people's behaviour was key, and informing people and helping them understand this issue was a major focus. The home decarbonisation service was hoped to be launched soon which would provide people with the information to implement some of these changes;

- It was noted that the final climate emergency team member post was hoped to be filled by March 2023. This was the final post within the current budget envelope;
- Would WBC meet the 2030 goal of net-zero emissions? Executive Member response – The CEAP at present would not meet this goal, and it was already a significant challenge to deliver what was within the plan whilst further substantial actions would also need to be taken. The key to making progress towards this goal was increased partnership working;
- Were officers aware that utilising the Borough Design Code, which was currently being updated, could allow for enforcement of green initiatives? Officer response – This would be taken away and explored with planning officers;
- What were some examples of other Councils tackling the climate emergency particularly well? Executive Member and officer response – Different Councils were good at different things, and officers were constantly looking at examples of best practice. Wokingham was performing well, whilst Councils such as Nottingham and Bristol had large climate emergency teams with very good resourcing. Where possible, WBC tried to compare like with like, for example South Cambridgeshire had some different targets to WBC, however they had good examples of particular projects and initiatives;
- What differences would be seen if the climate emergency team had additional resources, in terms of meeting our net-zero ambitions? Officer response – Additional resourcing could mean that high-cost and high-impact schemes could be delivered quickly. The team currently had to weigh up priorities and deliver them in the most effective and efficient way possible;
- Did WBC encourage services which were outsourced to be environmentally friendly wherever possible, for example were cleaning services solvent and aerosol free? Executive Member and officer response – This was part of considerations when awarding contracts, and a more in-depth answer could be provided from officers who dealt with these negotiations. There were a multitude of contracts issued by the Council, and it was planned to assess these over time as part of the sustainable procurement process;
- It was noted that small schemes operated by the Council could more easily show people what the Council was trying to achieve, by working 'from the ground up';
- Would the Climate Emergency Engagement Officer's role include publicising the successes of the Council and encouraging residents to make lifestyle changes? Officer response – Their role would be to raise awareness of the work and actions

delivered by WBC in addition to providing information on the actions that residents could take;

- Of the 15,000 trees planted, approximately 5,000 of these were hedgerows. Would statistics such as these be more transparent in the future? Executive Member and officer response – The most recent CEAP had been amended to show that these trees were a mix of both trees and hedgerows. The Tree Strategy was currently out for consultation, and all residents and members were encouraged to get involved. A more detailed paper on our Tree Strategy could be requested by the Committee, if desired;
- It was noted that the 15,000 trees planted was the total number of trees planted across the Borough, by WBC and partners and businesses;
- It was noted that WBC could not achieve net-zero emissions by 2030 on its own, and it was crucial to work with partners, for example via delivery of tree and hedgerow planting, to achieve these ambitions.

The Committee raised a number of potential topics for future meetings, which were in summary:

- Ensuring that the Tree Strategy and tree planting projects were progressing;
- Scrutinising plans to manage traffic, congestion, and car emissions within the Borough;
- Exploring what local electricity providers were doing to improve the local network, in anticipation of higher electric vehicle uptake and usage;
- Scrutinising the home decarbonisation service – what would be included, what would it cost, and how would it be delivered;
- Monitoring the delivery and operation of WBC's solar farms;
- Ensuring that updated planning guidance made provisions for suitable environmentally friendly requirements, which were enforceable wherever possible;
- Reviewing recommendations from the 'Let's talk Climate' event;
- Understanding the impacts of behavioural change programmes;
- Understanding how we could work better as partners with the business community within the Borough to achieve net-zero ambitions;
- Reviewing the need and delivery of an energy strategy;
- Reviewing what changes had been made to the CEAP since recommendations from the two Climate Emergency Task and Finish Groups were presented;
- Assessing what had changed with relation to the CEAP since the last meeting of each Committee.

The Committee agreed that the Chair would liaise with officers to prioritise the above set of items, the first set of which would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) Sarah Kerr, Rhian Hayes, Andrew Collins, and Sabrina Chiaretti be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) A written answer be provided as to whether WBC encouraged services which were outsourced to be environmentally friendly wherever possible;
- 3) The Chair liaise with officers to prioritise the potential set of items for consideration, the first set of which would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

**9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED** That the next meeting of the Committee be held on 14 March 2023 at 7pm.

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