

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 MAY 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.30 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: David Cornish, Andy Croy (Chair), Norman Jorgensen and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Andrew Mickleburgh, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick and Sarah Kerr

Officers Present

Ian Bellinger, Service Manager for Growth & Delivery
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Andrew Collins, Specialist Climate Emergencu Officer
Robert Curtis, Transport Planning Team Manager
Ian Gough, Energy Manager
Rhian Hayes, Assistant Director, Economic Development & Growth

12 ELECTION OF CHAIR

The Committee elected a Chair for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED: That Andy Croy be elected as Chair of the Committee for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

13 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Committee appointed a Vice-Chair for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED: That Chris Johnson be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

14 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Michael Firmager and Chris Johnson.

Pauline Helliar-Symons and Al Neal attended the meeting as substitutes.

15 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 March 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

16 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

17 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no Member questions.

18 PROGRESS AGAINST TASK & FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 11 to 32, which gave details of progress against the recommendations of the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group (2020 and 2021).

Sarah Kerr, Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services, attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions. Councillor Kerr noted that she had been a member of the second Task and Finish Group (2021).

The report stated that, in July 2019, Wokingham Borough Council declared a climate emergency and committed to do as much as possible to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. Following the declaration, the Council published a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), in January 2020. In February 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee established a Task and Finish group to review the Wokingham Borough Climate Emergency Action Plan and provide recommendations improvement.

Following completion of the Task and Finish Group review, in July 2020, the Group proposed 14 recommendations to strengthen the CEAP and make the reporting process more transparent. Another review of the CEAP by the Task and Finish Group took place in early 2021. This review focused on four key elements of the CEAP: transport, homes, renewable energy and behaviour change. The Group received evidence from internal and external individuals representing the Council, Imperial College London, University of Leeds, National Grid, Giki Zero, University of Reading, Reading Buses, and the Executive Member for Climate Emergency. The results of the review, including 25 recommendations, were presented to the O&S Management Committee in July 2021.

This report included an update on the progress made against the 2020 and 2021 Task and Finish Group recommendations. A summary progress update was presented in the report together with additional officers updates have been included in Appendix 1. It was noted that the recommendations were made in reference to the first and second iterations of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). All of the Task and Finish Group recommendations were found to be still relevant to the delivery of the current CEAP.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

The 2020 Task and Finish Group recommendations referred to the need for strengthening of the in-house Climate Emergency team to ensure that increasing complex issues could be addressed effectively. It was confirmed that the team consisted of one manager and three officers. Moreover, the team had no budget of its own with which to tackle projects. Delivery of the CEAP depended on various in-house teams so it was essential that the CEAP was embedded across every Council service. The Climate Emergency team also looked to find alternative funding sources such as Government grants. The lack of statutory powers was limiting factor in relation to funding.

The report referred to the emerging Climate Emergency Communication and Engagement Plan. When would this plan be shared with Scrutiny Members? It was confirmed that the plan should be ready for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee in July 2023.

What progress had there been in relation to the roll-out of solar panels for schools in the Borough? It was confirmed that 70% of local schools currently had solar panels, with plans for further additions.

Could solar panel be introduced into car parks across the Borough? It was confirmed that opportunities were being explored but the challenge was to achieve suitable grid connections. The Council was lobbying hard on this issue.

The 2020 report included a recommendation on the development of a methodology to measure the carbon impact of key decisions. What progress was there? It was confirmed that an impact assessment tool had been developed and was currently being trialled by two teams prior to roll-out across the organisation.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Sarah Kerr and the supporting officers be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the emerging Climate Emergency business strategy be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee;
- 3) officers be requested to work with other Berkshire councils to lobby the Government about “green skills” shortages and the appropriate strategies to address them;
- 4) the Committee supports the Task & Finish Group recommendation relating to an independent carbon audit of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and refers this matter to the Audit Committee for comment;
- 5) officers be congratulated on the significant progress made in implementing the Task & Finish Group recommendations.

19 CEAP AND THE LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 33 to 44, which gave details of the actions taken within the Local Plan Update (LPU) to embed the Council’s Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP).

Lindsay Ferris (Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan) attended the meeting to introduce the report and answer Member questions, supported by Ian Bellinger (Service Manager for Growth and Delivery).

The report reminded Members that the Council was currently preparing an update to its planning policies, known as the Local Plan Update (LPU). The LPU was being prepared in the context of existing national planning policy, guidance and legislation. Its principal aim was to set out the strategy and associated policies for managing future development in the Borough.

To date, the Council had consulted on two draft strategies for the new local plan – the Draft Local Plan in 2020 and the Revised Growth Strategy in 2021 to. Key evidence based studies had been and continued to be developed to support the LPU. The LPU’s approach to the spatial strategy – where development will and will not go to accommodate its needs – and to individual development management policies had been influenced by the declared Climate Emergency and the associated Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). Key aspects of the spatial strategy and an overview of the key policies which had been consulted upon to date, were detailed within the report.

The report stated that officers from the Planning Policy and Climate Emergency teams collaborated on an ongoing basis to share best practice and monitor progress towards the achievement of the CEAP’s goals. This included research into the successful

approaches of other local authorities to ensure best practice was embedded into the CEAP and LPU.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions:

What steps were there to future proof key planning documents to ensure that sustainability was embedded? It was confirmed that the updated Local Plan would provide a comprehensive definition of sustainability. A key aim was to require developers to provide accurate information on the sustainability of new developments.

Was the Climate Change Interim Position Statement (CCIPS) in place and being implemented? It was confirmed that the statement was in operation. It encouraged developers to go beyond existing standards and had been useful in some planning appeals. However, the new Local Plan would be the key document moving forwards.

The importance of embedding the CEAP into the LPU was emphasised. In order to ensure that Members were up to speed on progress, it was suggested that specific training and briefings be provided for all Members.

In relation to environmental standards for residential and non-residential development, what were the prospects for including the provision of solar panels in new buildings? It was confirmed that some councils were adopting a “fabric first” approach which promoted heat pumps and solar panels. Update building regulations could include a menu of options including solar panels.

In relation to changing behaviour, what teeth did the Council have in relation to setting standards above Government standards? It was confirmed that the teeth related to the enforcement process. WBC was of a small number of councils which had a compliance team for major developments.

In relation to the CCIPS, what sort of actions were developers taking in order to go beyond existing standards? It was confirmed that more effective use of insulation was a good example. The use of new technologies was driven by competition amongst developers and higher expectations from residents. The CCIPS did apply to single house developments.

Policy SS9: Adaptation to Climate Change, required development proposals to incorporate adaptive measures, including increased resilience to higher temperatures. What was expected from developers? It was confirmed that developers would be expected to look at solar gain and use systems which avoided heat gain.

In relation to flood risk and sustainable drainage, what measures could be taken to mitigate against flood risk? It was confirmed that the aim was to avoid putting infrastructure in areas liable to flood. The developer had to show that new development would not increase the risk of flooding. As an example, the proposals for Hall Farm could include

mitigation through redesigning the river valley to enable it to hold more water. Officers were discussing this idea with the Environment Agency. It would be important to avoid knock-on effects further downstream.

Could the provision of high speed broadband be included? This would enable more residents to work from home thereby reducing traffic on the Borough's roads. It was confirmed that this issue could be addressed within major developments. This could be pursued through the LPU.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Lindsay Ferris and Ian Bellinger be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) a further update report be submitted to the Committee, in due course, on the emerging policy direction and links between the LPU and the CEAP;
- 3) all Members receive briefing/training on the emerging LPU and the importance of embedding the CEAP into the new Local Plan;
- 4) officers seek to include appropriate provisions relating to the delivery of high speed broadband within the LPU, as this would help to reduce travel and carbon emissions across the Borough;
- 5) officers continue discussions with the Environment Agency on potential "downstream" measures aimed at mitigating against the risk of flooding in the Borough;
- 6) officers be congratulated on the progress made to date in embedding Climate Emergency measures within the emerging LPU.

20 CEAP TRAFFIC REDUCTION TARGETS - UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out in the Supplementary Agenda, which gave details of progress against the traffic reduction targets in the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

Paul Fishwick, Executive Member for Active Travel, Highways and Transport, attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions, supported by Rob Curtis (Transport Planning Team Manager).

The report gave details on the current traffic levels in the Borough and explained the progress made on each of the transport interventions in the CEAP. It outlines some of the current drivers for active and sustainable travel and explained how this led to a reduction in traffic.

The DfT's Decarbonising Transport strategy set out a number of commitments under the heading "Increasing Cycling and Walking". This included a commitment to deliver a world class cycling and walking network in England by 2040. Government guidance was being reflected by the emerging guidance for Highway Authorities to follow when producing their Local Transport Plans and would be reflected in Wokingham Borough Council's LTP4.

Transport was key a priority area for Carbon Savings as set out in the Council's CEAP due to higher than average car ownership in the Borough and it being a key emissions contributor. The CEAP stated that 10% of the targeted Carbon Savings were to be achieved from an increase in "Active Travel" such as walking and cycling. This work, along with the work of the My Journey programme was essential if we are to support residents, particularly those on lower incomes, to be feel safe and confident enough to walk and cycle more.

The report stated that walking currently accounted for only 5% of the total distance travelled in England. Around 49% of trips in towns and cities under 5 miles were made by car in 2021, with around a quarter of all car trips in England less than 2 miles. Many of these trips could be walked, wheeled, or cycled, which would help to reduce the 68 megatons (Mt) carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) emitted from cars in 2019. Active travel could also reduce the proportion of people driving children to school by up to 33%.

The report gave details of progress against the key transport targets in the CEAP, including:

- Development of an Electric Vehicle (EV) strategy for the Borough.
- Reviewing business and residential electric charging infrastructure.
- Supporting local businesses to transition their commercial fleets to EV.
- Promoting lift sharing opportunities through the My Journey programme.
- Developing and implementing a Bus Service Improvement Plan.
- Reviewing home to school transport contracts.
- Developing and implementing the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).
- Completing the Cross-Berkshire Cycle Route.
- Producing Local Transport Plan 4 to achieve greater coordination and opportunities for Government funding – the aim was to seek approval of LTP4 by the summer of 2024.

The report stated that monitoring and evaluation of the CEAP in terms of decreasing car use and motorised vehicle mode share and the subsequent emissions calculations would be more formally defined by the Local Transport Plan 4. This would take into account the targets of the CEAP as well as emerging guidance from the DfT (due in 2023).

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions:

In relation to active travel, was WBC consulting widely about potential schemes? Was the input from users being incorporated into potential schemes? It was confirmed that the LCWIP had been the subject of extensive consultation. An Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group had also been established and had met in March 2023. The Task and Finish Group was looking initially at the proposals for improved cycle provision on the Reading Road. The group included Ward Members and representatives from cycling groups. It would meet regularly as implementation of the LCWIP progressed.

It was noted that small wins based on imaginative projects could come out of the consultation process for the LCWIP. These could be delivered through cross-team working. It was confirmed that Active Travel England required schemes to meet relevant standards in order to attract funding, so there was a balance to be met when considering projects.

Electric, driverless cars were being trialled in the US. What progress was there in the UK? It was confirmed that the new Local Travel Plan (LTP4) would include a future mobility strategy which would do some horizon scanning in relation to driverless cars and electric scooters, etc.

Were there any recent updates on bids for external funding? It was confirmed that £400k had been awarded under the BCIP. The Government had also extended the £2 fare cap up to October 2023. The cap would then increase to £2.50 in order to encourage bus usage.

In relation to the loops used to measure traffic, the report indicated that there were 58, but less than 10 were currently working. What were the reasons? It was confirmed that contractors damaged the loops but didn't reinstate them properly. The situation was being reviewed in order to increase the number of loops which were operational.

There was concern about that state of pavements in the Borough in relation to access issues and problems caused by vegetation. It was confirmed that these issues should be identified through highway inspections. The Council could serve notice on private landowners or carry out works and recharge. The Council had a reporting system for use by residents.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Paul Fishwick and Rob Curtis be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) progress against the traffic reduction targets in the CEAP be noted;
- 3) further progress reports be submitted to the Committee in due course.

21 WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

The Committee considered its Work Programme for 2023/24, as set out on Agenda page 45.

RESOLVED: That the next meeting of the Committee consider the fourth CEAP Progress Report and use that document to inform the Work Programme for 2023/24.

22 ACTION TRACKER

The Committee considered the regular Action Tracker report, set out on page 47 of the Agenda.

RESOLVED: That the Action Tracker report be noted.

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