

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 23 June 2022

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Rob Broom (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Jim Brown, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Claire Parris and Loraine Rossati.

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm

Time: End Time: 7.45pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Matt Creasey.

There were no declarations of interest.

At this juncture, the Chair welcomed new Member Councillor Bret Facey and returning Member Councillor Jim Brown to the Committee and thanked the outgoing Chair Councillor Michael Downing for the work already undertaken by the Committee. The Chair advised that he hoped to continue the progress achieved by the Committee to date.

2 **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Terms of Reference for the Environment and Economy Select Committee, as agreed at Annual Council on 25 May 2022 be noted.

3 **MINUTES - 23 MARCH 2022**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee held on 23 March be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE ZERO CARBON LAB REPORT FOR SBC**

The Committee received the report of Lubo Jankovic Professor of Advanced Building Design and Director of the Carbon Zero Lab from the University of Hertfordshire. The Professor's report focussed on potential carbon emission reduction scenarios with a view to informing the Council's Climate Emergency Response and net zero ambitions for 2030.

David Thorogood, Environmental Sustainability Co-ordinator for Stevenage Borough Council and East Herts District Council, addressed the Committee and provided

context as to how the report could be interpreted to help shape the Council's ambitions.

The following conclusions were made in the report:

- A number of interventions for reducing baseline emissions were identified. It was found that the different interventions had varying degrees of success in emissions reduction:
 - Internal temperature adjustment from 21 degrees to 19 degrees;
 - Retrofit of the domestic housing sector;
 - Transport electrification;
 - Purchasing renewable electricity;
 - Tree planting – would have a cumulative effect on gradual reductions over time depending on the number of trees to be planted, their age, species and the variety of the tree stock.
- The results were based on a series of assumptions and scenario calculations as supplementary materials;
- A more in-depth study was required in order to address details of many of the high level actions including all new homes to net zero with immediate effect; retrofitting of non-residential buildings; quantifying the effects of water savings and waste recycling;
- The collaboration between SBC and the University should continue and to seek strategic funding for developing methods and tools for the management of carbon emissions.

Members raised the following comments/questions:

- Concern was expressed regarding the issue and the cost of refitting homes and how to get people engaged particularly during the cost of living crisis. It was noted that there were a range of grants available for home upgrade, boiler replacement etc. It was agreed that key to the improved sustainability of the housing stock was the level of insulation in the properties;
- It was agreed that a modal shift was required to reduce the need to travel, it was suggested that the shift to electric vehicles also had implications dependant on the type of energy used to charge those vehicles;
- It was suggested that adaptation was not covered substantially anywhere in the report;
- Officers advised that although the baseline data reported was from 2018, this was the most recent available but a further data release was expected later this year;
- The Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) informed the Committee that one of the Council's aspirations was to include sustainability requirements in all its planning policy measures. In relation to those major planning developments approved by the Council, where the biodiversity net gain could not be achieved by the developer, an amount would be charged to the developer which the Council would then use towards biodiversity purposes;
- A Member suggested that the Professor's report had been useful in outlining the size of the task before the Council but did not provide the answers as to

how this was going to be achieved. It was also asked how this would feed into next year's budget process. Officers advised that work was being undertaken to ensure climate change was considered as part of the Budget planning process;

- A Member suggested that the Council should be more realistic in its aspirations as to when it would reach net zero;
- In relation to a question asked about the preferred species of trees, officers advised that the Forestry Commission had advised that every tree stored an individual level of carbon and that different size plots of land would be required for the planting of trees depending on the species;
- A 2 for 1 tree replacement scheme was in place for any tree lost as part of an approved planning development in the town;
- It was noted that Councillor Simon Speller, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change would be reaching out to schools to ensure the message of the climate change emergency was spread widely including to school children.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted subject to the comments above.

5 **CLIMATE EMERGENCY REVIEW UPDATED MAPPING EXERCISE DOCUMENT**

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the Climate Emergency Review updated mapping exercise document. He advised Members that Councillor Speller, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change was keen to meet with the Committee and this would be timetabled in for a future meeting.

It was also noted that a number of other Executive Members including the Leader, Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd (Resources), Cllr Richard Henry (Culture, Leisure, Children and Young People), Jackie Hollywell (Community Safety, Equalities, Health and Older People) and Councillor Sandra Barr (Communities, Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council) would be meeting the Committee to talk about the implications within their own Portfolio areas.

Members commented on the positive progress in several areas and the need to improve communication messages to share some of this progress more widely.

Members expressed concern regarding how well the emergency was embedded throughout the organisation and a member commented on the perceived lack of partnership working with organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Green Peace. Officers noted engagement was underway with the Friends of the Earth and that they would be invited to share information as part of the Scrutiny Review. It was noted that valuable work had continued with HEART (Hertfordshire for Enabling and Adapting for Resilience Together) as a critical friend to the Council. It was advised that HEART had been challenging and had focussed on what the Council was doing.

The Chair informed the committee that he was of the view that the work with these expert organisations should be balanced alongside views from the community and local residents. It would also be helpful for the Committee to see benchmark information against best practice in other local authorities.

The Chair stated that due to the complexity of this review there would have to be additional meetings for Members of the Committee. The Scrutiny Officer suggested that subject to the availability of Members, he could arrange informal meetings for them including desk top exercises and interviews to obtain evidence in between the formal Committee meetings.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Mapping Exercise be noted subject to the comments above.

6 **E&E SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022-23**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Environment and Economy Select Committee Work Programme for 2022-23 that had been previously agreed at its meeting on 23 March 2022.

The Chair advised Members that he would be adding to the work programme a review on the Cost of Living crisis in the New Year alongside work to be undertaken regarding the issue of serious delays in fencing repairs which many Members were being contacted about by local residents.

In response to a question regarding the Bus Interchange, the Strategic Director (TP) advised this would be kept under review by the Regeneration Working Group but there would also be an All Member Briefing arranged on the progress of all regeneration projects including the Bus Interchange.

A Member suggested a topic for the work programme related to how local people were able to access new opportunities particularly in relation to STEM job opportunities and training etc. The Strategic Director advised that this could be included as a sub-theme within the Cost of Living Review at Members' discretion or via a separate meeting, subject to capacity within the Committee's Work Programme.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Work Programme be agreed with the addition of a review on the Cost of Living Crisis.

7 **ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER**

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

8 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

9 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR