

Public Document Pack



ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: Thursday, 15 December 2022

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Contact: Lisa Jerome 01438 242203

committees@stevenage.gov.uk

Members: Councillors: R Broom (Chair), A Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), Ashley-Wren, S Booth, A Brown, J Brown, M Downing, B Facey, C Parris and L Rossati

AGENDA

PART 1

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - 17 NOVEMBER 2022

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Environment and Economy Select Committee meeting held on Thursday 17 November 2022.

Pages 3 – 8

3. DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT - COST OF LIVING SCRUTINY REVIEW

To consider the draft scoping document for a scrutiny review of the cost of living crisis.

Pages 9 – 12

4. DRAFT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

To consider the draft report and recommendations of the Environment and Economy Select Committee's review of the Council's response to the climate emergency.

13 – 24

5. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

To consider any Part I business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

6. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

To consider the following motions –

1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 17 November 2022

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete

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

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.44pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Stephen Booth.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 20 OCTOBER 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Economy Select Committee held on 20 October 2022 be approved for signature by the Chair.

3 INTERVIEWS WITH HCC EXECUTIVE PORTFOLIO FOR ENVIRONMENT & CHAIR OF HERTFORDSHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY PANEL

Members received a presentation from Hertfordshire County Council Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment, Councillor Eric Buckmaster and from the Chair of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP), Councillor Graham McAndrew.

Councillor McAndrew advised that the HCCSP had been formed in January 2020 following the Herts Leaders' Group had considered a report setting out opportunities for collaborative working on climate change at a county level. The Stevenage representative on the Partnership was Councillor Simon Speller, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, supported by the Assistant Director Planning and Regulation, Zayd Al-Jawad.

The following points were made by Cllr McAndrew:

- the key aim of the HCCSP was to develop county level interventions to support local efforts that all Councils were making to meet their respective climate change targets. The HCCSP respected local District /Borough and

Herts County Council Climate Change Plans and strategies and did not seek to duplicate effort.

- the broad linkages between HCCSP and the other key groups within the county in particular Herts Growth Board, the Infrastructure and Planning Partnership (HIPP) and the relatively recently formed Infrastructure and Development Forum;
- HCCSP had approved four action plans – carbon reduction, water, transport and biodiversity. Cllr McAndrew informed the Committee of practical examples from each of the action plans. The fifth plan on behaviour change was in draft form and currently out to stakeholders for feedback, and a sixth topic on Adaptation was shaping up with a clear focus now in place.
- Examples of what HCCSP had worked on included:
 - shared communication campaigns such as the Affinity Water ‘Save our Streams’ campaign and Clean Air Day which covered interventions to address engine idling;
 - collective lobbying on issues including single use plastics, sewage discharge and sustainable drainage;
 - the delivery of climate and carbon literacy training to partner organisations as well as the delivery of on-line events with external speakers;
- A publicly available calendar for events had been produced;
- Regular meetings were held between HCCSP’s Co-ordinator and all Comms leads from districts and boroughs to disseminate information and share learning;
- Collaborative working opportunities on projects such as EV infrastructure roll out and shifting Private Hire Vehicles and Hackney Carriages to low emission vehicles.

The Chair then invited Councillor Eric Buckmaster to respond to the questions set from the Committee for this session.

1. Where can local authorities turn to for financial assistance, to assist the transition to net zero and is there a real risk that actions that are required now will be delayed because of other priorities?

There were a number of opportunities for Local Authorities to access funding from external partners and via Government funded schemes from sources including the LGA, BEIS, OZEV, DEFRA, Forestry Commission, and Natural England.

Members were encouraged to hear about the network of sharing information around funding opportunities and were encouraged if they had not already done so to look at downloading the Energy Saving Trust Heat App.

2. What plans are there in Hertfordshire regarding upskilling and training opportunities for a green economy in the County?

The provision of Green Skills was a key and growing area for the LEP going forward. An Environment and Green Careers profile page for HOP (Hertfordshire’s Opportunity Portal) had been created to encourage residents

(particularly young people) to go into green careers. Working with FE Colleges and major landowners/ developers to develop and deliver a coordinated and consistent approach from pre-construction, construction and post construction phases of the Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter and Hemel Garden Communities developments.

A question was asked regarding the capacity and skills gap in the local area for the green industry. Julie Greaves, HCC Head of Sustainability, advised that the skills gap in this area was recognised but that the college and LEP was working towards filling this gap.

In response to a question, members were advised that any net zero new builds were not regularly monitored but the responsibility of the building occupier to maintain the net zero standard.

3. How are you reaching out to influence partners, residents and businesses in Hertfordshire towards our shared climate change ambitions?

HCCSP has worked closely with partners in developing the strategic action plans for water, biodiversity, carbon and transport. Communities, partners and businesses have benefitted from free training delivered by HCCSP. Behaviour change projects were planned to engage on key issues identified by Communications Strategy. An Autumn Event for community stakeholders to be held in November would feature behaviour change breakout groups and advice and insight on community resilience and adaptation.

SBC have been active members of HCCSP since its inception and are represented at the HSOG and HCCSP and actively participate in discussions. Matt Partridge is the lead officer for climate change for EELGA and represents the Herts Chief Exec Group at the HCCSP executive meetings and also represents the County at the East of England LGA Climate Change Forum.

Members agreed that although the work undertaken so far was effective in engaging partners, organisations and groups, the general public also needed to be empowered to make the change to behaviour and sustainability.

4. What actions would you highlight as the most significant towards Hertfordshire Councils achieving their Net Zero ambitions, specifically regarding (i) domestic housing and (ii) transport?

It was noted that there were some actions that are within the control of Local Authorities and which may be easier and cheaper to implement than others, eg switching energy suppliers to a renewable contract, updating of heating controls, switching to LED lights, cavity wall insulation, double glazing, replacing gas boilers with heat pumps etc.

It was noted that all local authorities were now being looked at in terms of the potential retrofitting of housing stock but the knowledge and skills gap

alongside the lack of funding was a major issue for Councils.

Julie Greaves, HCC Head of Sustainability, stated that it was accepted across local government that legislation on building control measures needed to be tighter on developers for new builds moving towards carbon neutrality. All now agree that there should be PV solar panel on all new builds and Passivhaus Standards.

In relation to transport, the aim was to get a draft Local Transport Plan for public consultation and final adoption in May 2024. The main focus for HCC was supporting the local bus market through bidding opportunities to access electric bus investment. The first electric vehicle would also be running on HertsLynx (with some stops in Stevenage and the surrounding area) in the coming months and used as an opportunity to learn lessons on its operation and efficiency.

Members agreed the importance of increasing the patronage of the bus service but this would not happen until there was an improvement in the service both in terms of reliability and cost. Transport also needed to be looked at holistically with trains, coaches and buses linking up.

5. What mitigations and adaptations over the current decade and beyond do you see might be necessary if the global target of keeping temperature increases to 1.5 degrees centigrade this century is not achieved?

There was a statutory obligation on councils to prepare for and minimise the longer-term impacts of climate change. This was reinforced by expectations for community resilience and business continuity by both residents and businesses.

Through an Adaptation Sub-Group, work would be undertaken to facilitate councils' adaptation plans, identify key risk leads and provide them with the necessary guidance and direction using the Local Partnerships adaptation toolkit as a guide. HCCSP members would be maintained as informed advocates to cascade the importance and urgency of this piece of work, while providing managerial support that officers in the sub-group would need to support delivery of this work.

Members agreed the importance of recognising the needs of some residents during extreme heat periods as well as extreme cold weather. Julie Greaves, HCC Head of Sustainability, advised that HCC had an extreme weather plan for summer heatwaves and winter extreme cold. Officers at HCC were working on adaptations. However, not many local authorities had embraced adaptations yet, but this needs to become a 'business as usual' activity in all authorities. Julie agreed to share with Members the HCC extreme heat and cold plans.

6. From what you know about Stevenage Borough Council's efforts to move the area to net zero, how would you describe the Council's

strategies and progress so far to move towards Net Zero? What areas should SBC be looking to improve upon?

SBC had declared a climate emergency in 2019 and have a strategy in place based on the principles of Lead, Enable and Inspire which is similar to the HCC strategy and action plan. The Plan had been prepared with community engagement, youth engagement and input from Friends of the Earth and University of Hertfordshire. SBC was an active member of HCCSP and provided input to the officer meetings and delivery of the regional work.

7. Across Hertfordshire do you think climate change yet has the priority it needs?

The County Council and the ten District and Borough Councils have either declared a climate emergency or passed a motion recognising the importance of climate action. All LA's were progressing with their individual climate action plans in addition to actively working on countywide plans. All LAs were represented on the HCCSP and HSOG and provided officer support and resources to work on the subject specific topic groups. A Behaviour Change Strategic Action Plan was presented to and agreed by HCCSP at its meeting in January 2022 and approved by partners in June 2022. It was advised that cost could be a barrier to success being achieved in this area. Accordingly, this will need to be given thought as the interventions were scoped. Officers were now working internally to develop climate adaptation plans, using a Local Partnerships toolkit, in anticipation of subsequently developing a county-wide risk assessment if deemed appropriate.

The Chair thanked Councillors McAndrew and Buckmaster for their presentations who advised that any further feedback could be shared via the Chief Executive, Matt Partridge or the Climate Change Portfolio Holder Councillor Simon Speller.

4 UPDATED MAPPING EXERCISE DOCUMENT FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY REVIEW

The Scrutiny officer presented an updated Mapping Exercise Document for the Climate Emergency Review for noting and any potential additions.

In response to a question regarding how the Council would know that the work on sustainability was making a difference, Members were advised that indicators provided by the Government were regularly reported to Members although 12 months behind. The last update had been included in the October Executive report.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that a productive meeting had been held with Members of the Youth Council.

The Chair advised the Committee that in addition to the Climate Change Scrutiny Review he was keen for the Committee to look at the Cost of Living Crisis and in particular from the viewpoint of residents, local businesses as well as the Council. It was suggested that a presentation from the Citizen's Advice Bureau could also help

the Committee get a clear view of the implications for residents.

It was **RESOLVED** that the mapping Exercise Document be noted.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

DRAFT

Template Scoping Document

<u>Environment & Economy Select Committee</u>	
<u>Scrutiny Review Title:</u>	Cost of Living Review
<u>Background issues</u> to review – rationale for scrutinising this issue:	When Members considered their work programme for the 2022-23 Municipal Year at its meeting on 23 June 2022 it was agreed to include a review item on the Cost of Living.
Is this issue covered by Corporate Plans?	Not directly.
<u>Focus of the review:</u> (State what the review focus will be)	<p>The Chair has stated that he would like to widen out the discussion on the cost of living and invite some of the Council's partners in the VCSO community to give their take on what is going on, such as Stevenage CAB. This review is not to offer a critique of SBC position, but rather provide some local intelligence gathering to see how the Council and the voluntary sector in Stevenage are working together. All recognise that for some in our community these are very difficult times, but by sharing information and signposting a lot can be achieved locally.</p> <p>In discussion with the Chair and Vice-Chair it has been suggested that there could be a focus on three elements of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the following areas over three themed meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Residents – exploring the impact on different demographics, impact across the income deciles• Businesses – especially small to medium sized enterprises (SME's). Highlighting energy crisis for businesses, material cost inflation, business rates• Council – stress on services such as Housing, Rents, Customer Service Centre and pressure on staff re heating at home/travel costs

	Depending on what progress is made in the three sessions further consideration could be given to whether the three themes could be revisited in the new municipal year for 2023-24?
Timing issues: Are there any timing constraints to when the review can be carried out?	There is an Executive and Cost of Living Working Party so any work that is undertaken by the E&E Select Committee would need to be may need to be co-ordinated with this group. The review would start in January 2023 and hold a couple of evidence gathering meetings prior to the election period starting in April 2023.
The Committee will meet on (provide dates if known):	Dates: Day/Month/Time/Venue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 January 2023 – Officer presentation and draft scoping document – Focus on impact on residents • 22 February 2023 – Focus on SME Businesses • 23 March 2023 – Focus on the Council (close off review for election period)
SBC Leads (list the Executive Portfolio Holders and SD's Heads of Service who should appear as witnesses):	<i>Officers have suggested the following people:</i> <u>Regarding the impact on residents</u> <i>Draw on some of the following for input:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ben Threadgold, Interim Head of Policy and Communities • Daryl Jedowski, Corporate Policy and Research Officer • Charlotte Blizzard Welch, Citizens Advice • Sharon Bell, Children's Centre • Housing Team – what are they finding amongst the Council's tenants? • Gemma Marret, SBC Senior Play Worker- regarding Warm Spaces <u>Regarding the impact on SME Businesses –</u> <i>Draw on some of the following for input:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mena Caldbeck, Business Relationship Manager • Representatives of SMEs – perhaps a business based at the BTC • Representative of WENTA who have oversight of the BTC • Indoor Market Trader

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Local Chamber of Commerce representative</i> • <i>Herts Growth Hub representative</i> <p><u>Regarding the impact on the Council (corporately and on staff)</u> <i>Draw on some of the following for input:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Clare Fletcher, Strategic Director (CFO)</i> • <i>Brian Moldon, Assistant Director Finance</i> • <i>Kirsten Frew/Clare Davies, HR Manager</i>
Any other witnesses (external persons/critical friend)?:	To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting. <i>Possible options identified by officers:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
Allocation of lead Members on specific individual issues/questions: Any other Questions Members wish to cover:	To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting. Members will undertake their own desktop and fact-finding research and ask questions on the following areas (list the issues to address during the interviews): <i>To be identified</i>
Site visits and evidence gathering in the Community	Unless directed by Members, it is not considered that this review would be suitable for site visits.
Equalities and Diversity issues: The review will consider what the relevant equalities and diversity issues are regarding the Scrutiny subject that is being scrutinised	It was agreed that the review would address equalities and diversity issues directly in the review. <u>Equalities & Diversity Issues</u> – Are there any E&D issues to consider in this review? – The review should consider what equality and diversity issues there are for the cost-of-living crisis? Residents who are in receipt of benefits and/or on a low income are experiencing the most acute financial pressures affecting their ability to pay for rent, food, transport, and domestic energy.
Constraints (Issues that have been highlighted at the scoping stage but are too broad/detailed to be covered by the review):	<i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting in December 2022 (These issues can be captured and dealt with via other means – Briefings/email/officer action etc)</i>

<p><u>Background Documents/data</u> that can be provided to the review</p>	<p><i>As identified by the Committee at the draft scoping meeting in December 2022:</i> Evidence requested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (?)
<p><u>Agreed Milestones and review sign off</u> -To be agreed by Members and officers</p>	<p><i>Formal response from Executive Portfolio Holder (Executives have a Statutory requirement to respond to Scrutiny review recommendations two months after receiving a final report and recommendations of a review: Date Executive Portfolio responses are expected (dependent on the final report & executive portfolio response template publishing date): DD MM YY</i> Date for monitoring implementation of recommendations – final sign off (typically one year from completion of the review): DD MM YY (Close to this date the Select Committee will receive a report at a Committee meeting to agree the final sign off of the review recommendations)</p>

PART I
Release to Press



Agenda
Item: **3**

Meeting: ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Portfolio Area: Lead Portfolio Area – Environment & Climate Change/All Portfolio Areas

Date: 15 DECEMBER 2022

***DRAFT* REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY**

Author – Stephen Weaver Ext No.2332
Contact Officer – Stephen Weaver Ext No.2332

Contributors – Councillor Rob Broom, Chair of Environment & Economy Select Committee; Assistant Director, Zayd Al-Jawed, Lead Officer, Climate Change Lead Officer, Veronica Chan

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To consider the report and recommendations of the Environment & Economy Select Committee Scrutiny review into the Council's response to the Climate Emergency.

2 BACKGROUND & SCRUTINY ISSUE IDENTIFIED

2.1 In 2019 the Council along with other local authorities declared a climate emergency. The then Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee, Cllr Michael Downing on 22 June 2021 invited the committee to make this its main review for 2021/22 and this was agreed by the Select Committee.

2.2 Due to the scope and size of the review it has been conducted over 2 municipal years.

2.3 Scope and Focus of the review

2.3.1 The Committee met on 4 and 24 October 2021 [Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 21 October 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#) to agree the scope for the review, and it agreed should consider the following areas:

- How are the public engaged in this project?
- Establish how the funding to support measures are being implemented to mainstream this work?

- Compare with other local authorities of a similar size and demographic to see how the plans look?
- Establish what equalities and diversity measures will be considered for this project?
- What does the Council need to do that it currently isn't doing that will help mainstream a climate emergency approach to its day-to-day practises?
- What should Council's be doing to lead on Climate Change?

2.4 Process of the review

2.4.1 The Committee met formally on 11 occasions over the two years in 2021 and 2022 and informally on 3 occasions to undertake the review and received input from the following groups and people on the following dates:

- Monday 4 October 2021, received an officer presentation and considered the scoping document
- Thursday 21 October 2021, interview with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, Cllr John Gardner and updated scoping document
- Thursday 18 November 2021, interview with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe; HEART environmental community group and considering a mapping exercise document
- Monday 10 January 2022, interview with the Director of the University of Hertfordshire Zero Carbon Lab, Professor Lubo Jankovic; Members mind mapping and quick wins; notes from a COP26 seminar for local government and notes from a post COP26 LGiU seminar
- Monday 17 January 2022 informal meeting of E&E Members on Zoom to look at possible long term strategic recommendations and short-term quick wins from the review
- Thursday 3 March 2022, informal meeting of the Committee to interview the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas
- Wednesday 23 March 2022, interim report and recommendations of the Select Committee
- Thursday 23 June 2022, consider the University of Hertfordshire's Zero Carbon Lab report providing theoretical carbon reduction measures which could help the Council reach its net zero ambitions
- Wednesday 13 July 2022, interview with the Leader of the Council, Cllr Sharon Taylor and Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources and ICT, Cllr Joan Lloyd
- Tuesday 22 September 2022, interview with the new Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Simon Speller
- Thursday 20 October 2022, interviews with the Executive Portfolio Holders for Culture, Leisure, Children and Young People, Cllr Richard Henry; Communities, Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council, Cllr Sandra Barr; and Executive Portfolio Holder for Community Safety,

Equalities, Health and Older People and updates on tree policy and recycling

- Monday 24 October 2022, informal meeting of the Committee to interview Friends of the Earth, Peter Foord and Andy Holtham
- Wednesday 16 November 2022, representatives of the Committee met Members of the Young People's Climate Change Committee (a sub-group of the Youth Council) to engage with young people re climate change
- Thursday 17 November 2022, interviews with HCC Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment, Cllr Eric Buckmaster and Chair of the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership, Cllr Graham McAndrew, and with HCC Head of Sustainability, Julie Greaves and Lead Officer for Climate Change, East of England LGA, Matt Partridge

2.4.2 The review provided an interim report and recommendations on 23 March 2022 based on the work the committee had undertaken from October 2021 to March 2022 including sessions with three of the Executive Portfolio areas, HEART community group and the University of Hertfordshire Zero Carbon Lab.

2.4.3 The interim report of the Committee agreed 23 specific recommendations under areas such as:

- Mainstreaming of climate change activity including protection in the Council budget
- Creation of a full-time post to lead on climate change
- Decarbonising the housing stock
- Improved resident engagement
- Encouraging local, small scale, micro-ward events that can focus resident's involvement in green environmental projects
- Improved recycling rates
- Increased tree planting to meet the 2% gap in the Stevenage tree canopy
- Moving to strengthen local plan that has climate change as its core
- Transport – promotion of EV and modal shift
- Improved performance reporting for progress against the baseline figure and milestones around projects
- Improved communications channels
- Promotion of 20 Minute Neighbourhoods

3 REVIEW FINDINGS

3.1 Conclusions of the Environment & Economy Select Committee

3.1.1 In addition to the Committee's interim report and based on the input provided to Members conducting the review the Committee have made the following conclusions:

3.1.2 Progress achieved since declaring a climate emergency

- 3.1.3 Since declaring a climate emergency progress has been made in the following areas:
- 3.1.4 **Establishing a robust base line figure for the town's carbon footprint.** As part of the review the Environmental Sustainability Co-ordinator, David Thorogood, presented to Members CO2 emission data for Stevenage, which showed a spread of the carbon footprint by sector. Transport (34%) produced the biggest CO2 emission followed by the domestic (28%), commercial (18%), industry (13%) and public sector (7%). In fact, transport and domestic emissions combined were almost 2 thirds of the overall emissions for the area (64%), so this provided Members with a clear idea about where the focus of all partners should be regarding reducing the areas carbon footprint. The way progress against the 2018 baseline figure is measured as part of the annual report update on Climate Change to the Executive and the way it is more widely publicised needs to be thought through so that this is clearly described to show what progress is being made each year and understood by officers, Members and by the public. These finding should be subjected to an annual audit process, which is perhaps built into the work of the audit committee and subjected to scrutiny by members on an annual basis.
- 3.1.5 **Appointment of a lead Climate Change Officer.** The appointment of this post and budget provision for a new post of Head of Climate Change Service has shown real commitment to taking a lead and mainstreaming climate change activity. The hope is that this post will enable a framework for working within SBC, which enables climate impacts to be assessed as a routine part of council working, and that SBCs sustainability goals become a factor in the appraisal process of the organisation.
- 3.1.6 **Leading on Biodiversity.** Stevenage is one of the leading authorities in Hertfordshire on promoting biodiversity and has been praised by Friends of the Earth for its Collaborative work with the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust as a model for other council to adopt. The hope is that SBCs expertise in this area is disseminated via HCCSP and other county wide forums. However, Stevenage and other authorities, need to work hard to address the depletion of native species and plant types in Hertfordshire in recent years.
- 3.1.7 **Improved energy efficiency of its housing stock.** Having a key focus on improving the energy performance of its housing stock with a target to reach an EPC rating of C or better by 2030 and the aspiration to make new build net zero by 2030, has been welcomed by Friends of the Earth who agree with SBC's focus on home insulation. Progress in this area has started slowly, and this is largely due to only limited amounts of funding available to local authorities by way of competitive bids to government funds bidding against other authorities. The pace of change is comparable to other authorities with a housing stock or for any social landlord. There will be a requirement for greater funding streams or funding options being made

available from central government to meet the level of investment that is required.

3.1.8 **Following Industry wide local government best practice.** The Scrutiny Officer attended a post COP26 local government seminar hosted by the LGiU, at which advice was given about how local government can best influence residents and business in its area. The advice is to work collaboratively and be science led. On both these issues the Council is on the right path. SBC is an active member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership and Matt Partridge is the lead CEO for climate change in Hertfordshire and represents the Herts Chief Exec Group at the HCCSP executive meetings and represents the County at the East of England LGA Climate Change Forum. The authority also has dialogue with leading environmental groups in the area including Friends of the Earth and HEART. The work that the Council is doing in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire Zero Carbon Lab gives a sound scientific basis to provide leadership. This work continues through the HSCCP on research about lower carbon buildings.

3.1.9 **Tree Planting** - The Council's Climate Change Strategy (September 2020) has a target plan to plant 2,000 250 trees a year by 2030 – equivalent to 200 trees per year for ten years. However, current budget only enables the planting of 80-100 standard trees (2-3m tall) per year. In 2022/23 officers are working with schools, volunteers and residents to plant around 4,000 tree whips (60-100cm tall) to create a new community woodland. All trees require a level of care and maintenance to give them the best chance of survival and long-term establishment. Standard trees make a quicker impact due to their size and are more suitable for specimen planting in open spaces and residential areas, but will require a high level care (through provision of and future checking of stakes & ties, and watering) for at least the first three years after planting. Whip planting is more suitable for hedgerow and woodland planting, but due to their smaller size take longer to make a visual impact. They don't require the same high level of maintenance as standard trees. Members were made aware of the rate of sequestration of carbon that trees and grasslands have to absorb carbon, which is greater than any other measure. However, grasslands and ponds also help to sequester carbon and it is important to provide a matrix of habitats in order to support the widest benefits to biodiversity as well as mitigating the impact of climate change.

3.1.10 **Aspirational target of Net Zero by 2030 for the area of Stevenage**
Members are of the view that having the target of being net zero by 2030 for the area of Stevenage is very challenging and at this stage it would be more realistic to say that the Council's carbon footprint will be net zero by 2030 but the whole area will be harder to achieve. However, having a tough target will encourage all partners to keep its focus and aim on meeting it. If a less ambitious target of net zero by 2050, as is the government's national target,

will push off any urgency into the distance and would very much slow progress.

3.1.11 **Change of working practises since the pandemic** A change to the way work is carried out with an increase in home working has had an impact with reduced travel from outside of Stevenage into the town. However, it is worth noting that the emissions of working from home are included within the greenhouse gas protocols under scope 3 (which are the same category as staff commuting) and that some of the emission sources would be transferred. However, it is hard to know the impact (either positive or negative) as the carbon emissions from commuting were not included in the SBC baseline calculation. In time, hybrid working could lead to a smaller office space being required, which would in turn give a lower carbon footprint arising from the gas and electricity consumption in the office (scope 1 and 2). However, the ability of all staff to work from home is not equal so there is a limit to the benefits that hybrid working can achieve. The town centre regeneration will deliver a public service hub, and this represents an opportunity for SBC to deliver a fully sustainable, low carbon building, which offers efficient use of space and energy.

3.2 **Challenges**

3.2.1 Two aspects – SBC carbon footprint and town wide emissions

3.2.2 **Pathway to 2030 and how to measure progress**– A critique of the Council's Climate Change strategy from Friends of the Earth is that there is no clear targets or pathway to see how Stevenage gets from where it is now, to net zero by 2030. There is a need for interim targets or other ways to measure progress such as carbon budgets. Linked to this critique, Members of the Select Committee had earlier in the review suggested that the Executive and Strategic Leadership Team consider how to represent the progress of the strategy by way of a Fishbone chart or Gantt chart with key target lines and KPIs, which would make it possible for Members and for the public to see how the Council is working towards its target for net zero by 2030.

3.2.3 **Pace** – A further critique from Friends of the Earth has been around the pace the Council is addressing climate change, they recognised that it is hard for Councils to move quickly, but the 2008 Climate Change Act was made legislation 14 years ago. It could be argued that nationally most of those years have been a missed opportunity and could be called lost years up to 2019 when the Council declared a climate emergency. Friends of the Earth challenged the Council if it is really being treated as an emergency? This links to the question that the former Chair of the Committee consistently raised about if the issue was truly being treated as an emergency. The Council needs to ramp up the pace to get to net zero for the town by 2030.

3.2.4 **Travel** – Within the Council's existing travel strategy there are good initiatives to decarbonise taxis and buses which is a good plan, but the policy

is less strong on reducing emissions from cars such as trying to get people out of cars for short journeys and to use public transport and other modes of zero carbon active travel such as cycling and walking. Due consideration needs to be given to the promotion of and increasing the use of the excellent cycle path network in Stevenage. Members recognise that for the majority of local residents the option of converting from fossil fuel to EV is prohibitively expensive.

3.2.5 **Improve Public Engagement** – The annual report on Climate Change has identified this as an area for focus with work with residents. The initial work with the Citizen's Panel was good but this was not followed up in a timely way so lost momentum. At this stage this is an area that needs development. Members are aware that the new Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Simon Speller, is in the process of changing this approach to improve the current position with two levels of engagement with environmental expert activists in one reference group and ordinary members of the public, acting as a sounding board to policies. The opportunity for detailed consultation on practical, small scale project (recycle rates in flat blocks) (Grey water capture at neighbourhood centres to water flower beds) should not be lost.

3.2.6 **Behaviour change** - This is an area local government can champion, and it is cost neutral to change behaviour. For individuals there is a huge up-front cost to mitigations like solar panels, Electric Vehicles, and air source heat pumps but no up-front investment needed to change behaviours. Councils could do much more here to promote eating less meat, flying less, and cycling and walking more. There will be opportunities to link up with the HCC Behaviour Change unit to work together on this. A consequence of the extreme rise in energy costs in 2022 has made the public look at their domestic energy consumption, so this links with the campaign to get households to lower their thermostats by 2 degrees. If this habit becomes established behaviour even when the unit price of energy eventually decreases, then the adjustment may become a permanent feature for some households. [\(Public Pack\)HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE UNIT PRESENTATION Agenda Supplement for Cabinet Panel on the Environment, 06/07/2021 19:30 \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

3.2.6.1 Harnessing public behaviour change is not easy to achieve, as a 2021 Kantar Public survey of 10 countries (including the UK, Germany, New Zealand and the US) showed that, as part of this survey, although 78% of Europeans consider climate change as a very serious problem, this only translates into the mid 30% taking direct action to change behaviour such as eat less meat and use alternative modes of transport and overall 46% of respondents feeling that there was no real need for them to change their personal habits [PUBLIC Journal 04 \(turtl.co\)](#)

3.2.7 **Helping SME's** – SBC are providing support to the Small to Medium Enterprises in the area. Big businesses based in the area are leading on climate change and have set ambitious targets to be net zero by 2030. SME's will find the journey to net zero far more challenging as they have

competing priorities in the cost of living/energy crisis. SME's lack the capacity and expertise to progress on climate change, but SBC can provide support with networking, sharing knowledge and joint bids.

- 3.2.8 **Strengthening sustainability through the Local Plan** - The Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) informed the review that one of the Council's aspirations was to include sustainability requirements in all its planning policy measures. This can only happen in an enforceable way once it is in an early version of the next Local Plan. In relation to 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 area wide biodiversity purposes.
- 3.2.9 **Waste and recycling** – The review supported the input received from officers regarding developments with waste and recycling and wishes to promote using and consuming less as the principal focus for waste and recycling followed by reusing including promoting the use of clothes banks and upcycling of clothes and household goods. A growing model in this regard are Repair Cafés. Members are keen to support a repair café in the town should residents in Stevenage be inclined to start one.
- 3.2.10 **Training** - The Committee recommends the creation of a climate change training package for members, and additional training for senior officers, on climate change mitigations and adaption. This will help support future decision makers who are well informed in all aspects of the councils' operations, and the bearing climate change mitigation and adaption may have on them.
- 3.2.11 **Review mapping document** – Given the size and scope of the review Members used a mapping document through out the review process (see the latest iteration which was presented to the 17 November 2022 meeting - [https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s33020/Mapping_exercise_for_EESC - Climate Change Emergency Review - Update for 17 Nov 2022 EESC.pdf](https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s33020/Mapping_exercise_for_EESC_-_Climate_Change_Emergency_Review_-_Update_for_17_Nov_2022_EESC.pdf)) There were a few areas that the review has not been able to completely consider highlighted in the document and are as follows:
- Engage with E&N Hertfordshire NHS Trust re the plans for the Lister Hospital. Attempts have been made to explore their position re climate change but have so far not been successful. Officers will follow up on this to try to get a response
 - Make links to tenant and leaseholder representative groups. Due to the changes in the governance and engagement model it has not been possible so far to make contact with these groups
 - Although some contact with young people has been made with a small sub-group of the E&E Select Committee and a young people's Climate Change Group linked to the Youth Mayor and Youth Council, limited progress was made in this area. The Committee will look to the Executive Portfolio Holder covering Children and Young People to

take a lead in this area and report back progress to the Committee at a later date.

3.3 **Main conclusions**

3.3.1 **SBC focus**

3.3.2 **Decarbonising the housing stock** - As demonstrated in the paragraphs above there has been good progress shown since declaring a Climate Emergency in 2019 but unless there is serious funding made available by the government then SBC will not deal with its main challenge of funding £240Million decarbonising its housing stock of 8,000 properties.

3.3.2 **Fleet emissions** - Tackling fleet emissions is a challenge, replacing the fleets smaller vehicles with Electric Vehicles will be possible over a period of time, but the larger vehicles and specifically the freight refuse vehicles will require a decision in the next 2 to 3 years on replacements vehicles. In this area the technology is developing with one authority in the UK operating a hydrogen fleet at Aberdeen City Council, [H2 Aberdeen | Aberdeen City Council](#) which removes close to a 1000 tonnes of CO2 a year per refuse vehicle. Lessons from this example will need to be considered. An option will need to be decided upon, but this will have significant budget implications as well as environmental considerations to factor in. It may therefore be possible in future years that a hydrogen power source for the larger freighters is possible or perhaps a hybrid option dual power source may have to be considered.

3.3.3 **Greening of the Council's Estate** - The Council's estates assets are being considered in audits which will need to consider what the long-term needs for repairs and future proofing is required as well as future use and or disposal is required. The regeneration plans include the demolition of Daneshill House with a replacement building in the civic hub incorporating, health, library, museum and civic offices and council chamber. If the SG1 plans were to stall or be altered and Daneshill House is retained, then a deep retrofit would be required. Other existing buildings, such as the leisure centre and the swimming centre are inefficient and poorly insulated buildings. Therefore, the regeneration plans with have a crucial impact on how the Council develops the climate impact of its buildings. There are trade-offs between new builds with low energy needs but high carbon upfront impacts, against the carbon saving of repurposing existing buildings. This will be a consideration for the new leisure buildings as part of the Council's regeneration plans.

3.3.4 **Community Energy Projects** a future consideration for the Council, potentially in partnership with other local authorities, is community energy projects. [Hotting up: the growth of district heat networks - LGiU](#) the examples given in the LGiU link are for larger unitary Council's, it is hard to find comparable examples for district councils, the most likely development would seem to be working in partnership with other districts and the County Council to explore options for similar schemes locally. [How Cambridgeshire Council is](#)

[raising revenue with solar farms | Climate Action \(takeclimateaction.uk\)](#) Tempering this there is a recent example of a failed Solar Energy Company owned by Thurrock Council resulting in a £655 Million loss.

3.3.5 **Stevenage Progress** - Stevenage has clearly made some good progress in the last few years, and for a district Council of its size is showing good ambition to make a difference in its areas for climate change. Stevenage is some way behind other leading local authorities such as Bristol City Council who have been on a 20-year journey towards net zero, but this is well ahead of most authorities. [Bristol City Council: Share insights and evidence of success | Local Government Association](#)

3.3.6 **Adaptations** - The review established that due to extreme weather events linked to climate change there is already a need for adaptations to buildings and for up-to-date emergency response plans to care for older residents in Council run sheltered housing schemes. A need for an audit of all adaptations required will be a recommendation of the review.

3.4 **Area wide focus**

3.4.1 As well as dealing with its own carbon footprint which is estimated to be 2% of the areas CO2 (or up to 10% if all of the Council's housing stock is included), the Council has a role in influencing partners, business based in the town and with residents.

3.4.2 There has been progress with the big companies in the town, but more work needs to be done to encourage SME's to make the necessary changes required.

3.5 Influencing behaviour change with residents is the biggest challenge to affect the area wide target. The area of behaviour change that is needed which costs little is around lifestyle issues such as eating less meat, using less resources and repairing rather than disposing and replace clothes and household gadgets and for travel encouraging families to consider flying less, and for short journeys cycling and walking more and using rail and buses for long and medium length journeys. However, as stated at 3.2.6.1 this is not an easy task to achieve given people's reluctance to make individual changes.

3.6 **Equalities & Diversity issues**

3.6.1 The issue of equalities and diversity and the climate emergency are interlinked. Throughout the review Members have seen that there can be different impacts on protected characteristic groups, with impacts on older people becoming a concern in extreme climate change related weather events. The impact on those on low income or in receipt of benefits is also noteworthy as this group have little chance to make household interventions to lower their carbon footprint with heat pumps, insulation, solar PV and EV, and also the lifestyle changes are a challenge due to the focus being on economic and social survival. However, this does not mean that people from

this demographic group are not unaware of or unable to make some lifestyle choices around climate change.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 That the Environment & Economy Select Committee considers the findings of the review, contained within this report and the recommendations below be presented to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Simon Speller; the Assistant Director, Zayd Al-Jawed and Lead Climate Change Officer, Veronica Chan and that a response be provided from these and any other named officers and partners within two months of the publishing of this report.
- 4.2 **SBC and area wide pathway and targets** It is recommended that clear targets and a pathway to 2030 for both SBC targets and area wide targets need to be established. It is not currently clear what the targets or pathway are to see how Stevenage gets from where it is now to 2030. The way progress against the 2018 baseline figure is measured and publicised needs to be thought through so that this is clearly described to show what progress is being made each year and understood by officers, Members and by the public.
- 4.3 **Pace** Is the climate emergency really being treated as an emergency? It is recommended that there is a need to ramp up the pace to get to net zero for the town by 2030. Members accept there are challenges around funding but where it sits in corporate priorities is an area that is a decision for the authority. Members will be looking to see how the pace is picked up leading to 2030.
- 4.4 **Adaptations** The review established that due to extreme weather events linked to climate change there is already a need for adaptations to buildings and for up-to-date emergency response plans to care for older residents in sheltered housing schemes. It is recommended that there be an audit of all adaptations required across the Council.
- 4.5 **Behaviour Change** It is recommended that officers from SBC link up with officers from the HCC Behaviour Change unit to work together on behaviour change initiatives.
- 4.6 **Future review** It has been recommended by the Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee that the issue of the climate emergency should be under regular review by the Committee and that a progress report should be brought back to the committee on a yearly basis.
- 4.7 **Training** The Committee recommends the creation of a training package for members, and additional training for senior officers, on climate change mitigations and adaptation, so that future decision makers are well informed in all aspects of the councils' operations, and the bearing climate change mitigation and adaptation may have on them.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

A number of the review recommendations would have a financial implication, but these are as yet undefined. Depending on the Executive Member response to the recommendations these implications would need to be fully costed by officers and brought back to the Executive Portfolio Holder before any spending was agreed.

5.2 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications for this report.

5.3 Equalities Implications

The Equalities implications have been addressed within the report at paragraph 3.6.1 There are no further equalities implications for this report.

5.4 Climate Change Implications

By definition this report has climate change at its main focus and therefore climate change implications are addressed throughout the report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Links to the E&E Select Committee Meetings:

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Monday, 4 October 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 21 October 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 18 November 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Monday, 10 January 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Wednesday, 23 March 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 23 June 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Wednesday, 13 July 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Tuesday, 20 September 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 20 October 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 17 November 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)