

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 13 July 2022

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

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

Start / End Start Time: 06:00 pm

Time: End Time: 08:12 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jim Brown and Loraine Rossati.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 23 JUNE 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Economy Select Committee held on Thursday 23 June 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 INTERVIEW WITH THE LEADER AND THE EXECUTIVE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR RESOURCES & IT

The Chair welcomed Councillor Sharon Taylor the Leader of the Council and Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd Executive Member for Resources and Information Technology. The Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Resources and Information Technology were invited to meet with the Committee regarding their Portfolio area and the climate emergency scrutiny review. The Leader of the Council thanked the Committee Members for the work the Committee had done on the climate change emergency. She provided the following answers to the Committee:

- The Science was getting clearer on climate change and in 2018 there seemed to be a tipping point for influencing people and the figures were more alarming for lowering of the world temperature. The Council like many other Councils across the country declared a climate emergency. The Council had a unique role to influence residents and businesses to deliver the Council's net zero target for 2030.
- The Council faced financial challenges and needed more funding to deliver on

the net zero target. In addition to reducing local authorities core funding Central Government have so far seemed reluctant to fund Climate Change initiatives at the level that is required to sufficiently address it.

- The leader thanked Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) for supporting the Council's £13m bid for electric buses for Stevenage and helped the Council to develop plans for a combined cycle and car multi-story car park.
- The Council was working closely with HCC and partners including Herts Sustainability Action Plan and the Herts Growth Board with a programme on the climate change. The Leader advised that the partnership was important for shared goals. The Leader mentioned that all partners were also facing funding issues including the NHS.
- The Council would need to set good examples with transport and housing in the community to help promote the climate change emergency.
- The Council saved 1.7 tonnes of CO2 without the Transformation Programme by printing 400k less papers last year. The Council had bid for £1 million to help convert 400 social housing to a low energy by providing them with solar panels and insulation.
- The Leader regarded community engagement as important, and by having a community forum which represented the wider community this would in turn help raise awareness on climate change. The Council needed to work with Stevenage and Hertfordshire wide partners to ensure all were working in the same direction for shared goals.
- The Council had built energy efficient houses on Pine Tree Way, and although they cost more to build, the running costs were less than a standard built home, and by using less energy they also produce less CO2.
- Regarding the COP26 conference in 2021, the Leader mentioned that there was a lack of collective action on the 2050's net zero targets. Absence of the Leaders of the countries such as China and Russia had made it harder on any collective action. However, the Leader noted that there were some encouraging signs including the use of clean technology.
- The Council had a number of priorities over the last couple of years, including dealing with a two-year pandemic and a current cost of living crisis, and a housing crisis. The Leader hoped that the climate emergency would move-parallel with other emergencies.
- The Leader regarded public engagement as vital for going forward and achieving net zero targets for 2030.

In response to a question from a Member, the Leader of the Council advised Members that even if the Council were to use all of its non-statutory spend, that would still not be enough to deliver the whole of the climate agenda, therefore, the targets would be difficult to achieve if external funding were not received, thus, the Council would continue to lobby for funding support.

Members noted that there were challenges for achieving net zero as there were people in the community that were in denial about climate change or those that did not see any urgency in the context of the challenges, they already face on a day to day basis, and it would be more challenging to engage with them. Members highlighted that the lack of any significant Central Government funding was one of the core challenges the Council faced in achieving its climate change targets for 2030. Members supported wider engagement with the school children

and agreed to invite the Youth Mayor to a future Environment & Economy Select Committee meeting.

The Leader reiterated that the Council was treating this as an emergency and that the Executive had refreshed the approach it was taking by creating a specific Executive Portfolio Holder area for Climate Change and providing extra senior officer support in this area. The Council was very much at the centre of partnership working, focusing on things it had influence over including engagement with the local community and was getting on with what it can to plan for the major challenges ahead. Underlying all of this work was the need for significant support financially from Central Government to give local government the tools to make it happen.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council for attending the meeting and answering all the questions regarding the climate change emergency in detail.

The Chair invited the Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources and I.T to answer the questions submitted to her. The Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources and I.T thanked Members for inviting her to the Committee and advised that she was from a science background and understood the logic regarding the technology and improvement that needed to be brought forward. Cllr Mrs Lloyd provided the following update to the Committee:

- that Central Government needed to provide sustainable funding for climate change emergency. There were several areas where Cllr Mrs Lloyd could influence toward shared climate goals. As part of her portfolio, Cllr Mrs Lloyd worked with the Herts Property Partnership to bring forward projects that could improve housing emissions and to secure funding to build new energy efficient houses.
- Cllr Mrs Lloyd recognised the cost of moving to net zero was a significant challenge. It would require a substantial amount of funding from the government and a robust plan for the use of the funding whenever it is received to tackle the climate change targets. It was estimated that to decarbonise the Council's housing stock of 8,000 homes would cost in excess of £204m to retrofit each property. There were several areas for the Council to focus on net zero targets. This included moving the social housing to a high standard, moving to energy efficient heat pumps, improved insulation, solar panels and any new technology that would help improve emissions.
- The Council would need to look at improving emissions for commercial buildings and improve their EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) to at least category C in the future. Also, there was a need to improve how the Council was processing waste and recycling.
- Cllr Mrs Lloyd mentioned that funding was needed to build more efficient buildings and facilities like the newly built bus interchange.
- The Council had provided the opportunity for the Council staff to work hybrid and flexibly which helped in reducing their carbon footprint. The Council had also removed some printers from the building as part of its digital drive.
- The Council had encouraged the use of bus and other sustainable transport.
- Cllr Mrs Lloyd was encouraged by the outcomes from COP26 which had brought new awareness, and now people could better understand the need to

- work collectively on climate change, to produce the greatest impact.
- Cllr Mrs Lloyd regarded engagement with people in the community as vital, but it was challenging to keep everyone on board. Cllr Mrs Lloyd mentioned that the more awareness people in the community had, there would be a better chance of tackling it.

A Member asked if the Executive were making provision for a small part of the budget for areas such as estates, housing, fleet etc. to be set aside for a seed fund for each to be able to use to research and bid for funding streams as and when they become available. The Leader said that this was a good idea and could be in part addressed when the HRA business plan and General Fund budget is looked at again in November.

In response to a question about the provision of EV parking spaces available in Stevenage compares to other districts in Hertfordshire, Cllr Lloyd stated that part of the problem was the 'new town' design of Stevenage and more charging points were being provided in communal car parks.

In response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Director for Planning and Regulatory advised Members that the Planning and Development Committee had granted permission for 41 new fast charging points at the West of the A1M development, as well as new EV charging points in some of the neighbourhood shopping areas which would encourage electric vehicles use in the town.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update from the Leader of the Council and the Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources and I.T be noted.

4 **UPDATED MAPPING EXERCISE DOCUMENT FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY REVIEW**

The Committee received the Mapping Exercise Document for the Climate Emergency Review. The document contained useful information for tracking the progress of the Climate Change Emergency review detailing, what had been achieved so far, and showing any outstanding data or interviews still to be undertaken. Members were invited to provide feedback on the Mapping Exercise Document.

The Committee previously interviewed Councillor John Gardner former Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change and would arrange to interview Councillor Simon Speller the Executive Member for the Environment and Climate Change. Councillor Speller would share his work on how he was engaging with the wider community.

The Committee would also interview Councillors Sandra Barr the Executive Member for Communities, Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council, Councillor Jackie Hollywell the Executive Member for Community Safety, Equalities, Health and Older People and Councillor Richard Henry the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure, Children and Young People, in October 2022.

The Committee considered links with the Youth Council and suggested that a representative group of Members could attend their meeting or Members of the Youth Council could be invited to the Committee's meeting, which could be a useful exercise. Alternatively, a Zoom meeting could be arranged for Members and Members of the Youth Council.

The Committee would invite Cllr Phil Bibby the HCC Executive Portfolio holder for Highways and Transport along with Eric Buckmaster the Executive Portfolio Holder for the Environment for the Committee's November 2022 meeting. This would be a good opportunity to discuss the work the County was currently undertaking on Climate Change Emergency.

Members agreed that the Committee could perhaps ask the NHS Trust for East and North Hertfordshire for a written submission on their work on the climate change emergency, and how the Trust was tackling their carbon footprint.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Mapping Exercise Document for the Climate Emergency Review be noted.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Note required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR