

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 Start Time: 6.00pm

Time: 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