

Climate Change Sub-Group
8 November 2023

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CLIMATE CHANGE SUB-GROUP held on Wednesday 8 November 2023 at 7.30 pm in the Via Zoom

PRESENT: Councillors J.Weston (Chairman)

R.Grewal, A.Hellyer, S.Kasumu, G.Moore, A.Nix and
J.Cragg

OFFICIALS
PRESENT:

16. APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lake for whom Councillor Cragg substituted.

17. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

18. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 8

There were no items of urgent business.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Cllr Zukowskyj declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of Hertfordshire County Council.

20. UPDATE REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The meeting received the Update Report on Climate Change. The Climate Change Officer advised that the Climate Action Plan had been updated. There were now 101 actions of which 35 had been completed, 23 were in progress, 35 were ongoing and 8 had not yet started; of the latter, at least half would start in the next few months. There were two new actions: implementation of an environmental management system (ISO 50001); and the creation of a 'transition to net zero strategy' document which had been added at the request of members and which would outline the Council's vision, what it did and planned to do, and what others could do to meet the net zero target. It was expected that both pieces of work would be completed by the end of the financial year. The greenhouse gas assessment for the most recent financial year was expected by

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the end of the month; once it was received, officers would be better able to provide a more tangible update on progress towards becoming a net zero organisation by 2030.

Officers highlighted some key points:

- It was intended to plant at least 300 street trees per year; planting should start at the end of the month.
- Hertfordshire County Council was running 'Your Tree, Our Future' again with 10,000 trees due to be given away on 9 December 2023.
- In terms of promoting energy efficiency, a number of schemes were intended to support residents to lower their household emissions and reduce their bills. The Home Upgrade Grant had now been launched which targeted lower-income households not connected to mains gas; targeted letters were being sent to around 600 homes. In relation to the ECO flex4/Great British Insulation Scheme, a statement of intent had recently been published on the Council's website which essentially broadened the criteria to allow more households to be eligible for funding. Officers had partnered with National Energy Foundation and residents could seek advice and assistance in applying for funding through their Better Housing Better Health platform. A boiler upgrade scheme offered up to £75k worth of grant funding to eligible properties to replace existing heating systems with low carbon heating systems. The Solar Together scheme had now closed with around 101 registrations from Welwyn Hatfield.
- With respect to 'nudge' behaviour, a climate hub would be created and as a first step, a climate action survey had been launched which would run until the end of November 2023 with a draw where a participant would win a £30 gift card; Members were encouraged to share the survey with residents.
- Hertfordshire County Council had a staff group tasked with facilitating the districts and boroughs to complete a climate change risk assessment and ensure actions were defined to mitigate climate risk. Officers noted extreme weather could mean an increased demand for and pressure on services, disruption in access to assets, services, IT and communications etc. The template had been circulated to the Council's senior leadership team for risk leads to complete. Approximately 20 climate risks had been identified across the Council using the Local Government Association's risk matrix. Once the risks had been scored, officers would develop actions to reduce the residual risk.
- Referencing the retrofit programme and the delivery of the social housing decarbonisation fund, officers advised 187 properties would have retrofit works carried out as part of the social housing decarbonisation fund; 50 had been completed to date.
- Environmental Services officers had attended two events at the University of Hertfordshire to promote borough waste initiatives and had planned a door knocking event with the university's partners last month. Consideration was being given to developing a workshop pack that could

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provide school teaching staff with the necessary tools to target key learning outcomes.

- Climate Emergency UK had released Council Climate Action scorecards last month. The average district borough score was 29% and WBHC had scored 28% which was disappointing; officers were appealing the result. A lot had changed in the Council since the action plans were marked and officers would continue working towards a net zero target.
- The next Council meeting would look at renewing the borough's commitment to being a net zero Council by 2030, step-up climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, leading by example, encouraging others to make positive change and increasing and promoting biodiversity.

Members raised the following points:

- The significant progression on projects set out in the report was welcomed.
- A Member asked how engagement with the community and stakeholders would take place. Officers noted the strategy would be put out for consultation.
- A Member asked how it was determined in which areas trees would be planted. Officers advised it depended on factors such as areas where other trees had been removed during the year, requests from Members or residents etc.
- A Member asked how the Council's work on climate change was aligned with work at County Council level. Officers explained that anything under the remit of local authorities would be included in the action plan and provided an overview of officer groups dealing with different elements of climate change.
- A Member asked which service areas were likely to be covered via the implementation of ISO 50001. Officers explained it applied to any building the Council paid energy for including leisure facilities, communal areas in housing blocks and sheltered accommodation.
- A Member asked about for how long the Council would be planting 300 trees a year and officers said there was not a time limit on tree planting. Bulb planting at Woodhall which was referenced in the report had taken place last month.
- A Member asked where the survey linked with 'nudge' behaviour would be sent and asked whether the gift card worked as an incentive. Officers said any incentive was beneficial; the survey was being promoted on social media and on tablets in the reception of Campus East.
- A Member referenced the process relating to the Council Climate Action scorecard. Officers said that following the initial scoring they had highlighted areas where information had been missed and were appealing the score. The Member commented that the borough had come last in terms of collaboration and engagement and asked what the score was for. Officers said it included engaging with schools, information on the website etc, and undertook to provide further detail outside of the meeting.

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- A Member was pleased that installation works funded by the social housing decarbonisation fund were starting. He asked if the sub-group would receive further updates about both the progression of registrations for Solar Together and detail about service leads' risk assessments which officers agreed would be shared. Members were keen to see completed risk assessments and ensure the Council was more adaptable to the changing climate. Another Member asked whether a project would emerge from the risk assessments in following up the actions or whether the results would inform policies. Officers said the assessments would set a benchmark, future actions would be identified to further mitigate the situation and other projects would be developed so the Council was better prepared and more adaptable; they would likely be integrated into the climate plan. Members noted service leads would be encouraged to think about the impact of climate change, how the Council could better adapt and a joined up approach to work.
- A Member noted project 87 in the climate action plan was not in the officer report and was about bidding to put public sector decarbonisation scheme to replace gas boilers with air or water, source heat pumps and instal solar panels at Campus East, Campus West and Hatfield Swim Centre; installation costs for the swim centre had now significantly increased, could not now be met via capital funding and it was intended to potentially rebid for a government grant for this work. He asked if this would be reflected in the action plan. Officers clarified that this was about the leisure centre rather than the swim centre (which had had a 76% reduction in carbon since the installation) and advised that match funding in respect of the scheme meant that the higher the energy efficiency savings that would be achieved, the less public sector authorities bidding for money needed to put in. The leisure centre would therefore result in very significant costs meaning it was not worthwhile for the Council to bid for funding in this respect.
- Officers advised they were looking to carry out reviews of all the Council's operational buildings to see where efficiencies could be found.

21. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, IS OF SUFFICIENT URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

22. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Meeting ended at Time Not Specified