

Climate Change Sub-Group  
12 July 2023

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CLIMATE CHANGE SUB-GROUP held on Wednesday 12 July 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 F. Thomson

ALSO Councillor P. Zukowskyj (Leader of the Council and Executive  
PRESENT: Member, Climate Change)

OFFICIALS Assistant Director (Regeneration and Economic Development) (G. Sampson)  
PRESENT: Service Manager (Asset Management, Building Repairs and Climate  
Change) (M. Croft)  
Economic Development Officer (L. Devayya)  
Climate Change Officer (K. Murphy)  
Landscape & Ecology Manager (O. Waring)  
Democratic Services Assistant (V. Mistry)

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1. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

The following substitution of a Committee Member had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules:

Councillor F. Thomson for Councillor J. Lake

2. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J. Lake.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2023 were approved as a correct record by the Chair.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillors F. Thomson and P. Zukowskyj both declared non-pecuniary interests in items on the agenda as appropriate by virtue of being Members of Hertfordshire County Council.

Councillor P. Zukowskyj also declared a non-pecuniary interest in being a member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP).

5. WENTA'S ACTION ZERO PROGRAMME

Report of the Executive Director (Place) on Wenta's Action Zero Programme.

Over 99% of the Welwyn Hatfield business community is an SME. They therefore have a crucial role to play in tackling climate change. However, many of the businesses just do not know where to start.

WENTA is a not-for-profit social enterprise that exists to make it easier and greener to start and run a successful business and their actions zero programme will support and guide the boroughs SMEs to understand what actions they need to take to reduce their carbon emissions.

The programme has already been successfully delivered in Hertsmere Council, Stevenage Borough Council and Watford Borough Council.

The project would deliver the Zero Gold programme to up to 100 SMEs at the cost of the Zero Silver Package, which provides a saving of about £1,800. Invoices will be received monthly, ensuring that payment is only required for the number of businesses that subscribe to the programme. The Zero Gold package is made up of webinars and e-learning content including carbon foot printing and target setting and planning and they will also have access to an experienced Net Zero business adviser.

The project fits really nicely with the approved climate change strategy, which commits to working with and supporting, encouraging and engaging businesses in initiatives to reduce carbon emissions.

The council will receive from WENTA a quarterly report on the number of sign-ups, and share business post code date of sign-up, age of business and provide case studies on those businesses who have made significant progress. Updates will be given to members at the meetings.

The following points were noted:

- Members thought it seems quite a useful and assistive direction for SMEs to go into and support them in building their business.
- The Executive Member for Climate Change asked what is the total reserve, so that members had an idea of the scale of the commitment. Officers stated £150,000 was allocated quite a few years ago, and have about £65,000 left in reserves.
- The Executive Member for Climate Change asked is there a path for SMEs from the achievement of the programme to achieve something like ISO 14,001? One of the things that seems to be missing is that, whilst there is action that the Council can ask SMEs to undertake to achieve net zero, there are other environmental gains that might go alongside that and actually the development of SMEs towards a full blown lifecycle assessment of products they are producing and an environmental management certification like a ISO 14,001 might be something that is

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quite attractive for SMEs to consider and engage with and draw them in. Officers stated at the end of the one year long programme, there is a gold plus standard that WENTA have and businesses could sign up to that at their own expense. It is around £150. The council can point them in the right direction to something else they should have a look at e.g. newsletters, or webinars.

- Members were worried about the initiative as the Executive Member for Climate Change is asking questions about the initiative and did not have time to consider it themselves. Members were concerned about taking money out of the earmarked reserves and if it is the right thing to use the money on especially if there were better projects to spend the money on. Officers stated that the report has followed the correct process and it went to a Senior Leadership Team meeting and it was agreed at the meeting. Officers did not receive any queries prior to the meeting agenda being published.
- The Executive Member clarified the commitment of the funds is not the total commitment of the entirety of the funds. It is a commitment to support the subscriptions that come forward from the SME community and if you look at the Stevenage example in the paper, it quite clearly indicates that just slightly less than half of their subscriptions have been taken up and the council are being asked to commit to up to 100 subscriptions. The Council do not know how many of those subscriptions will actually be taken up, so we're not actually committing at this stage to spending the entirety of that money, we may be committing to spending half of it. It may be substantially less depending on the type of the scheme.
- Members suggested deferring the item until the next meeting in September so further information can be gathered on the project.
- Members stated Stevenage Borough Council purchased 100 subscriptions, 49 businesses have subscribed but it is not clear following the one year, how many of those have taken on their own subscriptions. There is a note saying 39% have operated their business for more than three years, but it does not say whether they signed up to WENTA following the one year so there is a slight risk. Members asked how many of the businesses that had taken up the project would be continuing with it? Officers stated that when they met with Stevenage it was a while ago and they were at the very early stages. So 50 had signed up almost immediately and not had an update since then. Just on the sustainability, it is a stand alone package, if the council receive a 100 businesses subscribing, they would have been started on their journey, they would have done webinars, would have had a whole year to access the business advisor and have an action plan. Then it is entirely up to the business whether they choose to do the Gold plus standard with WENTA or do another accreditation by themselves and they would not be a burden on the council but they would have gotten quite a lot out of the year long programme.
- Members thought it might be useful to reconnect with Stevenage Council to see how they are doing with the programme since it was started.

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- Members asked what is the actual reduction in carbon footprint of the SMEs that sign up, which presumably is information WENTA must have if they are assessing whether they are compliant with a particular standard? Officers stated they will go back to WENTA and pass on the comments and ask for that information. It may be at the end of the year the business now understands and starts to put an action plan together. The cost of each business is about £100 and it is there to get them started. Not expecting them to make massive changes but hopefully they start to understand what they have to look at such as their own business premises, suppliers and they put together an action plan.
- Members asked if there was any early indication with the SMEs the council is already providing advice to that may be interested in this scheme and going towards action points 69 of the climate change action plan around engagement specific on residents and businesses. Officers stated they think there will be lots of interest in the project but have not yet started to promote it yet to the businesses but wanted to know members were happy to take the initiative forward first before promoting it.
- The Executive Member stated the council could use this project as a signpost and give direction to nudge businesses in the right direction.
- It was noted the commitment that Stevenage made to WENTA was made on the 18 July 2022 so it is still quite a new scheme.
- The Executive Member stated the group could agree the project and review it in three months' time to see what the take-up has been, what the initial feedback of the scheme is, and evaluate whether the council want to continue it.
- Members asked if there were any other good projects the money could be used on? Officers stated there was currently no projects out there. Officers have worked closely with WENTA. Hertsmere Council and Watford Borough Council have signed up and it is going well for the authorities.
- Members wanted more information from Stevenage Council and how they are getting on with the project and wanted to know if more SMEs had signed up.
- Members asked if the project is intended to accredit the company at the end of the programme after they sign up to it. Officers stated it is not an accreditation. One of the advantages of the upgrade to the gold programme is that businesses get a gold certification from WENTA at the conclusion of the programme which they are permitted to use in advertising. One of the other advantages of the gold programme from the silver is that in addition to the e-learning and the webinars, they do get tailored one-to-one coaching, so there is that personal engagement which does help prevent the drop of rights, which if it was only an e-learning resource that could potentially be an issue.
- Members asked what connections do the council have currently with SMEs and is there a programme for contacting them and is it the first time going outside of the council? Officers stated they have fantastic engagement with SMEs. The council ran a project recently called the eastern new energy, it is a ERDF funded project and the council had a

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target to carry out 30 energy audits with local businesses. Welwyn Hatfield was one of the few delivery partners, that exceeded the target and got 33. The council had a disability conference event a few weeks ago and 110 businesses attended.

- Members agreed to defer the decision until officers receive additional information from Stevenage Borough Council on the success of their campaign and get some objective assessment of their progress. Some information about how many of the SMEs took it up and subscribed to the scheme after one year and how many completed the program, how many of them subsequently signed up to a gold award. Also ask WENTA for information on carbon reduction as well. Send it around to the group in an email, with the expectation that there will be response from the members of the group saying happy to proceed, not happy to proceed or abstain from the decision, and a majority of responses supporting it would result in commitments of funding the decision been made. The timescale for a response from members was agreed as between a week and 10 days.

RESOLVED:

- (1) Members of the Climate Change Sub-Group agreed to defer the drawing down up to £9,999 of the Climate Change earmarked reserves to support a maximum of 100 SMEs achieving gold status within the Wenta Action Zero Programme.
- (2) Members asked officers for additional information from Stevenage Borough Council on the success of their campaign and get some objective assessment of their progress. Some information about how many of the SMEs took up and subscribed to the scheme after one year and how many completed the program, how many of them subsequently signed up to a gold award. Also ask WENTA for information on carbon reduction as well.

## 6. GENERAL UPDATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Members received a verbal update from Officers on how the council is doing with Climate change plans.

The team have managed to appoint a Climate Change Officer. The team are excited to really push forward with the Council's climate change agenda and the team understand that there are a number of areas deemed to be priority. The team will be working with key officers, as well as portfolio holder for climate change over the coming weeks, to ensure that the council are working towards a 2030 net zero promise and in the most structured way possible.

Received the annual monitoring report for Hatfield Swim Centre, which was completed following the heating system upgrade, as part of the public sector decarbonisation scheme phase one. For the year 1 March 2022 to 28 February 2023, the overall carbon emissions from the building associated with gas and electricity, the new decarbonisation scheme in operation were 169.1 tonnes of carbon for the same period in 2019, the total carbon emission was 698.4 tonnes,

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so this reflects a 76% reduction in the building's annual carbon emissions. As part of Phase 1, the council also completed similar schemes to campus east, the main Council building and also campus West, as they finished slightly after, the council are still monitoring systems and hopefully should be able to provide an update as part of the next meeting.

The team are looking to reform the Climate Officers Group. The team will be working on the terms of reference over the coming weeks and to ensure that internal officers are conscious of their obligations to assist with meeting the Council's overall aims and objectives, this is something we should be able to update the group at the next meeting.

In regards to the Climate Emergency UK Scorecards, in March this year the council were able to respond to the scorecard comments collected by climate emergency UK imposed on all UK councils. This right of reply period closed in May and the council are expecting the results of the evaluation this coming Autumn and unfortunately there has not been a more definitive date so we will update the group if this changes.

The team will be meeting with key officers within the council to review the current action plan to make sure it is on track and to review the actions and make sure targets are being met.

The council are looking at forming some sort of Climate Alliance. Following on from the Climate Emergency UK Scorecard, it was clear that the council, as an organisation, need to prioritise engaging with residents, businesses and organisations within the borough, and with that in mind, we will be looking into forming a platform to assist with bringing this all together we are at a very early-stage discussions. Members were also given a list of the benefits of signing up to an alliance.

The following points were noted:

- Members noted the reduction in annual carbon emissions through the de-carbonisation grant and were happy that the reductions in emissions was successful.
- Members asked if the group had an update on the solo together project as residents have contacted them saying they paid the deposit, found it hard to contact someone on the project and were still waiting for the work to be done. It was noted Hertfordshire County Council had endorsed the project. Officers stated they will contact the Solo Together Project for information on progress, numbers of registrations and the uptake and will bring an update or report back to the next meeting in September.
- The Executive member stated there was very significant uptake on the project and payment of deposits were taken but there has been a disjoint in communication because what was not made particularly clear to residents was that the contractual negotiations do take quite a while and is a complex process, so whilst residents have paid their deposits some time ago, the process is still ongoing.

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- Members stated they looked at the Climate Action plan on the website. Members asked for a progress report to be added to the agenda on the actions so they can assess how the action plan is being progressed. Officers stated they were happy to look into this for the next meeting in September. It was noted that the action plan will also form part of the agenda for the Climate Officers Group.
- It was noted that previously there had been an action tracker on the agenda so that members could see what the current projects were, what was the timescale, what the council were hoping to achieve and how the council achieved it.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

7. HERTFORDSHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERSHIP (HCCSP)

Members received a verbal update from the Executive Member (Climate Change) as the Council's representative to the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP).

It was noted that a presentation was circulated to members on HCCSP from Councillor Graham McAndrew who was the previous Chair of HCCSP and Matt Partridge, Chief Executive of Stevenage Borough Council.

The presentation was about New Lead Member Induction on HCCSP. It was noted the Chair of HCCSP is now Councillor Adrian England from Dacorum Borough Council.

It was noted the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) links to the Hertfordshire Growth Board, which is chaired by Councillor Chris White from St Albans District Council.

It was noted some of the actions plan documents approved were Carbon Reduction, Biodiversity, Transport, Water and Behaviour Change.

Members hoped the new administration would continue to align Welwyn Hatfield priorities with the HCCSP.

It was noted the next HCCSP meeting is in July 2023.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the update from the Executive Member.

Meeting ended at 9.01pm