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Climate Biodiversity Cabinet Panel
10 July 2024

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CLIMATE BIODIVERSITY CABINET PANEL held on Wednesday 10 July 2024 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE

PRESENT: Councillors H.Goldwater (Chair)
J.Weston (Vice-Chairman)

R.Lass, L.Crofton, R.Grewal, G.Moore and B.Fitzsimon

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor M.Holloway, Leader of the Council, Executive Member for Climate Change

OFFICIALS PRESENT: S.McDaid, Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change)
K.Murphy, Climate Change Officer
R.Misir, Senior Democratic Services Officer
O.Waring, Landscape and Ecology Manager
T.Vincent, Environmental Health Technical Officer
A Harper, Procurement Manager
E.Walker, Assistant Director (Public Realm)

At the start of the meeting the Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change) welcomed participants to the first meeting of the Climate Biodiversity Cabinet Panel (CBCP) which had taken over from the Climate Change Sub-Group to demonstrate the Council's commitment to tackling climate change and biodiversity. CBCP had cross-party representation and operated in line with the Constitution. Its terms of reference were:

- To receive information to assist Members in understanding the effects of climate change and the Council's role in adaption to and mitigation from those effects
- To work on the development of strategies, policies and action plan relating to climate change and biodiversity make recommendations to Cabinet in relation to the adoption of such strategies, policies, and plans
- To monitor the progress of the Climate Change Action Plan with the aim of reducing the Council's carbon emissions, with a target for net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. Leading by example to encourage and engage residents, communities, businesses and other partners to reduce carbon emissions with the aim to be Net Zero as a borough by 2050
- To consider the work of other Hertfordshire-wide Climate Change Groups such as Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP)

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- To set and recommend to Cabinet the criteria for grants to be awarded to local organisations to improve their carbon footprint.

1. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S Thusu, for whom Councillor B Fitzsimon attended as a substitute.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the Climate Change Sub-Group meeting held on 6 March 2024 were approved as a correct record.

3. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 14

There were no items of urgent business.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND PETITIONS

There were no public questions or petitions.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW - PROGRESS TO DATE

The Climate Change Officer introduced the report and took the meeting through a presentation (included in the agenda pack) which provided an overview of progress in respect of Welwyn Hatfield's climate agenda.

A member asked whether the target for Welwyn Hatfield to be a net zero Council by 2030 included all Council-owned properties. Officers advised that leisure centres were included in Scope 3 ('other direct emissions'). Communal areas of social homes were also included; mains gas came under Scope 1 (direct emissions) and electricity came under Scope 2 (indirect emissions).

A member asked about the annual compost giveaway. Officers explained it was waste collected from around the borough and could be collected from Tewin Depot on a specific date; the event was publicised on social media and the Council's website.

The work behind the Great Big Green Week was commended.

A member asked how the Council compared to neighbouring local authorities in terms of waste and the Climate Officer undertook to share a document that provided a comparison across Hertfordshire (post-meeting note: this was circulated to members the day after the meeting). Asked whether the Council

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could further promote the positive work on tackling climate change to the public, officers said work involving councillors was in the pipeline.

Climate Biodiversity Cabinet Panel (CBCP) noted the internal governance and progress made in relation to the Council's climate change aspirations.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE REPORT

The Climate Change Officer introduced this item which outlined progress being made against the Council's corporate priority on Action on Climate, and took the meeting through key updates relating to projects and actions within the Climate Action Plan as set out in section 3 of the report.

CBCP noted the progress of specific projects/ actions within the Climate Plan, which was the main tool used to monitor the Council's pathway to net zero as an organisation (2030) and as a borough (2050) and noted the wider co-benefits of such actions.

8. AIR QUALITY STRATEGY 2024

The Environmental Protection Officer introduced the report and shared a presentation which is attached to these minutes. The Annual Status report and air quality strategy ran side by side. The former looked at current air quality levels which the Council had to monitor and report to DEFRA and those air quality levels were assessed against limit values in the Environment Act 1995; if they were breached then an Air Quality Action Area would need to be declared. The Environmental Health team regularly monitored levels across the borough for both particulate matter (PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide so that improvements could be made to reduce them. The Annual Status report included actions and the strategy developed those actions. Welwyn Hatfield did not have any Air Quality Action Areas. The latest Annual Status report was currently being reviewed by the senior management team. 2020 monitoring data showed that Welwyn Hatfield was already meeting its target for 2040; nevertheless the Council sought to continue to make improvements.

A significant potential improvement would be a smoke control area either covering the whole of the borough or specific areas; this would not cover bonfires in residents' gardens but would look at issues such as smoke from people's chimneys ie the use of open fires and wood burning stoves etc. This would require resources for evaluation, implementation (including grants for expenditure incurred in the adaptation of fireplaces in old homes) and enforcement. The current energy crisis meant some people were burning wood and other items as they were unable to afford heating using gas or electricity and so enforcement would need to be carefully considered.

Next steps were the review and approval of the air quality strategy, implementation of proposed air quality reduction measures, and working with the Herts and Beds Air Quality Network and collaborating with Hertfordshire County

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Council: Welwyn Hatfield was the first of these local authorities to have completed its air quality strategy which would be shared with them.

A member reflected on increased traffic levels caused by delivery firms. Officers advised that air quality monitoring was effectively an annual process. The Council had two automatic air quality analysers which were expensive and which it had secured funding for; installing them was difficult so it also used 51 diffusion tubes to monitor other locations. While delivery drivers would have an impact on traffic, it was difficult to quantify this as air quality monitoring was for a yearly average.

A member asked if hotspots such as the A1(M) were looked at in detail. Officers said the two analysers were located in Hatfield in West View and the Great North Road because they used real-time data and high levels had been recorded there using diffusion tubes. The tubes were used as screening in areas where it was likely to be busy and when low results were reported, DEFRA's expectation was that they would be moved. If there were elevated levels, additional tubes would be put in place and depending on how high those were, moving an existing analyser (which had significant cost impacts at around £15,000) could be considered, or funding for a further analyser. All the results were analysed and the diffusion tubes' locations were changed regularly.

With reference to a smoke control area, a member asked if it was known how many open fires were in use. The Council did not have this data but the Environmental Protection Officer worked with Planning and so was aware when applications were made to install a flue; there were not many of these, probably because there were currently a number of applications for air source heat pumps. There was not evidence that wood burning was a significant issue although it was difficult to tell without a smoke control area, as complaining about a statutory nuisance caused by a fire odour (which was how people could complain about it now) could be daunting and meant going through a process.

A member asked if monitoring outside schools took place, as was the case in London. Officers replied that in 2020 six diffusion tubes had been placed outside three schools which remained in place and so had been included in monitoring data for the last four years. Anti-idling schemes appeared unpopular with parents who drove their children to school.

RESOLVED

CBCP:

- a) Noted and approved the Air Quality Strategy set out in Appendix A of the report; and
- b) Recommended to Cabinet the approval of the Air Quality Strategy.

9. TREE AND WOODLAND STRATEGY 2024-2029

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The Landscape and Ecology Manager introduced the report which set out the Council's approach to managing its trees and woodland and shared a presentation which is attached to these minutes.

A member asked about communications when a tree was to be felled, noting it would be helpful to explain why this was happening. Officers advised there was a list of trees to be felled on the Council website. They tried to put signage on a tree to be felled if it was prominent or major, and also notified ward councillors.

A member felt it would be helpful for this strategy and the Planning green infrastructure strategy to be linked so that woodland areas could form part of emerging wildlife corridors. Officers noted work with county-wide local nature recovery strategies would also link to this; they were also looking at canopy cover in terms of managing urban trees which were also important for wildlife and pollinators.

RESOLVED

CBCP:

- a) Approved the draft Tree and Woodland strategy and;
- b) Agreed the Executive Member for Environment approve commencement of the public consultation in accordance with their delegated authority.

10. UPDATED CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

The Climate Change Officer introduced the report which set out the rationale for publishing the updated Climate Action Plan with new actions added in relation to transport, biodiversity, waste, domestic energy and adaptation.

RESOLVED

- a) That the updated Climate Action Plan be published to the Council's website to replace the outdated one; and
- b) That the actions set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report be added to the Climate Action Plan.

11. MEMBERSHIP TO HERTFORDSHIRE CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERSHIP

The Climate Change Officer introduced the report which sought the approval of the draw down of funds from the climate reserves to pay for the Council's membership of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP). The subscription fee for the next three years was £9,735 per year and the report set out the benefits of the partnership and recent projects. In response to a member question, officers noted HCCSP had member involvement and would include Councillor Grewal; there was also an officer sustainability group, and sub-groups with focused areas on adaptation, biodiversity, behaviour change, carbon, transport and water. A member reflected on the importance of participating at a regional level as this enabled more action on climate change than could be achieved at a purely local level.

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A member asked if there was a breakdown of how the subscription fee was used; officers confirmed there was and undertook to share the report with CBCP members (post-meeting note: this was circulated to members the day after the meeting).

RESOLVED

CBCP approved the request to use money from the climate change earmarked reserve to pay for Welwyn Hatfield' Councils membership of Hertfordshire Climate and Sustainability Partnership over the next three years.

12. CREATION OF NEW TRANSITION TO NET ZERO STRATEGY

The Climate Change Officer introduced the report which set out the rationale for a new Transition to Net Zero strategy, advising that members had previously asked for a robust standalone climate change strategy document to be created. This strategy replaced the old one and was more aligned with a new corporate priority, Action on Climate. It supported all four objectives within that priority and set out an overall vision for the borough.

Members commended the strategy and thanked officers for their work on it. A member asked if there would be a launch and officers explained there would be a consultation to obtain feedback and work would then take place with the Communications team to launch it. Wildflower seed packets would be left in key areas in the borough for people to take and would have a QR code in order that the strategy could be accessed online.

RESOLVED

That the Transition to Net Zero strategy be approved and released for public consultation.

13. PROCUREMENT AND COMMERCIAL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY AND SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT APPENDIX

The Procurement Manager introduced the report. The Procurement and Commercial Improvement Strategy had been approved by Cabinet in 2021. Minor changes had been made to the strategy to bring it up to date and the appendix under consideration had been drafted to put more emphasis on the Council's climate change objectives as part of its procurement operations. The main commitments in the strategy were a minimum of 5% sustainability criteria in the tender evaluation process; promoting awareness of the Sustainable Procurement Policy among staff; drawing the Sustainable Procurement Policy and Climate Change Strategy to the attention of key suppliers and communicating that in the market place; purchasing goods / procuring services which as far as possible reflected up-to-date specifications or standards for environmental sustainability; reducing the purchase of new products by re-using, repairing or refurbishing existing products and reducing waste wherever possible; and specifying products made from recycled material or that specifications reflected best practice in terms of sustainability. The strategy also

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set out that contracts would be monitored and that larger contracts would have a requirement to report on the organisation's carbon emissions. The procurement strategy had been updated to align with corporate priorities. The strategy would be reviewed in 2025 which would include a review of the opportunities the new Procurement Act would offer.

RESOLVED

CBCP recommended to Cabinet that:

- a) The proposed changes to the Procurement and Commercial Improvement Strategy be adopted; and
- b) The addition of the Sustainable Procurement Appendix be adopted.

Meeting ended at 8.41 pm

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