

# Environment and Green Investment Committee

Date: 19 January 2023

Time: 10.00am – 12.15pm

Venue: New Shire Hall

Present: Councillors L Dupré (Chair), N Gay (Vice Chair), D Ambrose Smith (substituting for S Tierney), A Bradnam, S Corney, P Coutts, S Ferguson, I Gardener, J Gowing, R Hathorn, B Milnes, C Rae, K Reynolds (substituting for Cllr J King) and M Smith

## 113. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were presented on behalf of Councillors J King and S Tierney, with Councillors K Reynolds and D Ambrose Smith substituting respectively.

## 114. Public minutes of the Environment and Green Investment Committee meeting held 1 December 2022 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2022 were agreed as a correct record and the action log was noted.

## 115. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

## 116. Enabling Net Zero Phase One Programme Update

The Committee received a progress report on the implementation and impact of the Enabling Net Zero Phase 1 Programme.

Members were reminded that the Council's Climate Change and Environment Strategy (CCES) and Action Plan was updated and approved at the Full Council meeting in February 2022, along with a £14M Just Transition Fund to support key Council priorities, including Climate Change. The business case and programme for the £2.175M Enabling Net Zero Programme were subsequently approved by the Environment and Green Investment Committee in July 2022. The focus of the first phase was to mobilise and upskill the whole organisation and all services to deliver the Council's Climate and Net Zero ambitions at scale, and to enable subsequent phases to be developed. The areas of the Council's operations, such as Highways, which form a large part of the Council's emissions, were prioritised in this phase of the Programme.

Three new projects that had been implemented:

- (i) Locally Determined Contributions, in collaboration with partners including the University of Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire District Council, which looked at how local authorities could work within the national framework on nationally determined contributions;
- (ii) ensure that there was good governance from the County Council in relation to the requirements coming through the NHS Green Plan;
- (iii) preparing for Phases 2 and 3 by identifying how the transition to Net Zero would be financed, particularly with regard to transport and energy infrastructures.

The Committee noted that paragraph 2.1.1 of the report detailed a request to update a delegation in relation to loans and schools, arising from changes to roles and Committees, and this was set out in recommendation (c). Members also noted the work that had been undertaken against each of the eight work packages.

Arising from the report:

- A Member asked about the decarbonisation plan for Council buildings, and how soon there might be a net reduction in utility bills as a result of that decarbonisation plan, providing a positive economic benefit, in addition to the environmental benefits. Officers explained that they were expecting to see reductions to utility bills, as well as a transition from fossil fuels to sustainable energy sources. However, given the current volatility in terms of energy pricing for both gas and electricity, it was difficult to predict when these reductions would come through;
- A Member observed that to date, only sixteen Members had undertaken the Carbon Literacy training, and he urged all Members to undertake the training, and to encourage their colleagues to do the same. Officers advised that they were looking at different ways of scheduling the training to better suit Members' commitments, including identifying dates suitable for groups of Members being trained together. The training was available both virtually and in person;
- A Member asked about retrofitting domestic buildings, and about publicising such initiatives and incentives that were available to the public. Whilst noting that Solar Together was available, she stressed that residents needed to be supported so that they could make informed decisions. 1 in 5 buildings were built before 1919, and it was often difficult to retrofit. Officers advised that a new Communications Manager had been appointed to focus on climate change issues, and she would be identifying opportunities to upscale the promotion of key projects. In collaboration with local authority partners, government funding had been secured to retrofit homes, and to set up procurement processes to support residents who were not in vulnerable categories who wanted to make changes to their properties. Officers agreed to circulate details of Cambridgeshire Retrofit;

- In response to a query about EV chargers, it was noted that the Highways and Transport Committee was being kept informed about progress, and it may be that wider Member communications were required, including an update on where decisions were being made and likely installation dates. Officers advised that the St Ives Park & Ride solar/EV charging scheme had nearly completed, and Babraham Park & Ride solar/EV charging should complete in 2023. It was noted that the Council's Climate Crisis Strategy Manager was working with Council and CPCA colleagues on the CPCA's EV Charging Strategy. This would hopefully set the context of what needed to be done, and where. A briefing note had been circulated to Highways and Transport Committee Members on those issues.

The Chair concluded by noting that there were many significant items in this positive report, including the move towards Carbon budgeting and Local Area Energy Planning.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) note the progress implementing the Enabling Net Zero, Phase One, Programme approved in July 2022;
- b) note and support the programme changes as set out in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.3;
- c) update the delegations for green investment and loan approvals for schools as set out in paragraph 2.1.1.

## 117. Corporate Performance Report

The Committee received an update on the selected Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which had been agreed at Committee in September 2022. The KPIs presented covered the period up until the end of September 2022.

Arising from the report:

- A Member queried Indicator 24: Percentage of premises in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough with access to at least superfast broadband. Specifically, she asked what had happened to increase the target line dramatically in 2020? Another Member queried the target on the same Indicator, which was 2-3 years behind schedule. Officers advised that the increase could be due to reprofiling due to the pandemic, but she would circulate a note to Members confirming the reasons for the increase, and why the target had not yet been met. **Action required.**
- A Member queried Indicator 25: the percentage take-up of new fibre broadband services delivered by the Connecting Cambridgeshire superfast broadband roll-out programme, which indicated a decline recently. She asked whether this was due to the cost of living crisis or a change to the way take-up was measured. It was confirmed this would be covered in the briefing note.
- A Member queried the reason for the sharp increase in fugitive refrigerant gases in 2021-22, compared to the two previous years. Officers believed that this was probably due to more information being available on fugitive refrigerant gases, but agreed to

circulate a briefing note on this issue, and information on what could be done to reduce this figure. Action required.

- A Member was pleased to note that the volumes of waste was gradually reducing (Indicator 223: Waste per Head (12 month rolling average));
- A Member asked why on Indicator 150a: Cambridgeshire recycling, reuse, composting and recovery rate (12 month rolling total), levels of recycling, reuse and composting were all declining? It was confirmed that the direction for improvement was a positive, and this would be made clearer in future reports. One Member observed that if the total volume of waste collected was declining, less would be recycled, composted, etc. Another Member confirmed that the South Cambridgeshire District Council green waste collection had reduced, but these variances were relatively small;
- A Member commented that fundamentally, much of the 'improvement' in recycling related to transporting heavy garden waste around county, which was not ideal;
- A Member queried Indicator 226: Council's carbon footprint, Scope 3 (tonnes CO2e per year). The Member asked if the fall in 2020-21 and 2021-22 related to buildings not commissioned or built due to the pandemic? Officers advised that this related to the Scope 3 construction materials for new schools in the pandemic, and this was expected to recover. It was confirmed that this indicator also covered the construction of highways by contractors, which had also decreased during the pandemic period.

It was unanimously resolved to:

note and comment on performance information and take action as necessary.

## 118. Little Thetford School - Low Carbon Heating Project

The committee received a report seeking capital funding for a low carbon heating installation at Little Thetford CofE Primary School.

Members noted that the report had been accepted by the Chair for the following reasons for urgency and lateness:

Reasons for Lateness – this matter was considered by the Green Investment & Utilities Advisory Group on 11<sup>th</sup> January, and Members of that Advisory Group felt that it required a Committee decision, as it was potentially a deviation from Council policy. The agenda for the Committee needed to be published on 11<sup>th</sup> January, and the report had to be drafted and agreed prior to circulation.

Reasons for Urgency – Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) grant funding needs to be spent by 31st March 2023, and to achieve this the school would need to be in contract for the works by the end of January.

Introducing the report, officers reminded Members that in July 2021, the Committee had agreed a funding model for low carbon heating projects, specifically for Maintained schools. This funding model included Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) grant funding, plus any loan required, capital contributions from the Environment Fund along with contributions from the Education Capital's School Condition allowance budget.

Little Thetford CofE Primary School was one of the current batch of eight schools being considered as part of this programme. The school was currently a Maintained school, however, it had been confirmed that they would be academised with effect from September 2023, immediately after completion of the proposed scheme. The Committee's steer was required to determine whether a contribution from the Environment Fund, of between £103,000 and £163,000, should be allocated to this project, given the imminent academisation of this School. The detailed breakdown of the funding required for this project, plus the likely CO<sub>2</sub> savings over the lifetime of the project were outlined.

Members noted comments from Local Member Councillor Dan Schumann in support of the report recommendations (appended at Appendix 1).

Arising from the report:

- A Member asked if officers had spoken to the School about the Academy making a financial contribution towards the heating project? Officers confirmed that that they had been in contact with the Academy Trust who had indicated that they could make a small contribution, but they had not committed to a figure. It was also confirmed that the Academy Trust was supportive of the project and the proposed scheme;
- A Member observed that if nothing was done, and the Academy Trust took over, the School would have functioning oil boilers. However, officers highlighted the government commitment to academising schools, and also the government's strategy of phasing out boilers within the decade. The question was whether Members wanted to pull back from the Council's ambition to decarbonise schools, or continue with intention to provide package, despite knowing the school building would no longer belong to the County Council;
- A Member commented that every effort should be made to maximise the contribution from the Academy Trust;
- A Member noted that the work to the boiler was urgent, and that the Committee's decision in respect of Little Thetford would not be assumed to set a precedent for how similar cases should be dealt with in future;
- A Member commented that the amount of officer resource already spent on this project should not be overlooked;
- In response to a Member question, it was noted that for most schools that were academised, the school building was transferred to the relevant Academy Trust on a 125 year lease;

The Chair commented that as a general point, given that academisation was the direction of travel for the current government, the approach to decarbonising schools may need to be reviewed, if there was a risk of the ownership of every school being transferred. Currently the policy was simply to support and advise Academy Trusts, not to fund them to do so. The Chair shared the frustration expressed by Members over this project, and noted that all Members were giving a clear steer to officers that the Academy Trust should be encouraged to maximise their contribution.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Confirm that Environment Fund capital funding can be provided for the Little Thetford CofE Primary School low carbon heating project to decarbonise the school's heating prior to the site being handed over to the Diocese of Ely Multi Academy Trust.

#### 119. Environment & Green Investment Committee Agenda Plan and Training Plan and Appointments to Outside Bodies and Internal Advisory Groups and Panels

The Committee reviewed the Committee Agenda Plan.

It was resolved to:

- a) note the agenda plan.

#### 120. Exclusion of Press and Public

It was resolved unanimously that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the agenda contains exempt information under Paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information), and information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

#### 121. Waste PFI Technical, Risk and Service Update

The Committee received an update on the Waste PFI contract and the waste processing facilities at Waterbeach Waste Management Park.

It was unanimously resolved to approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

Comments from Local Member Councillor Dan Schumann:

As local member I am writing to express my full support for the Little Thetford CofE Primary School low carbon heating project to decarbonise the school's heating.

The Council's Climate Change & Environment Strategy sets an objective to achieve Net Zero for the county as a whole by 2045. Achieving the Council's target of net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045 will require fully decarbonising heating in buildings. Capital funding the Little Thetford low carbon heating project would make a positive contribution to this objective, it will also raise awareness amongst parents and school neighbours of practical steps to address the challenge of climate change and provide an opportunity for the children at the school to learn about practical steps to address the climate challenge. Also, the condition report for Little Thetford Primary School identifies the existing oil tank bund as requiring urgent replacement and the oil tank is 25 years old, so this is the perfect time for action.

I am aware that the school will cease to be 'maintained' shortly and be academized; which raises the question of whether the Environment Fund capital contribution should still be made available for this project. However, I believe that not proceeding with the project would be perceived as the Council transferring a decarbonisation liability to a third party and would mean that the £96,530 PSDS grant funding would be lost, increasing the net cost of decarbonising the site's heating when this does occur, which would be counterproductive and a wasted opportunity for the county and the environment.

If capital funding is not provided the project will not proceed and PSDS grant funding must be spent by 31st March 2023, so to achieve this the school would need to be in contract for the works by the end of January. Therefore, I urge the committee to support this excellent project.