

Environment and Green Investment Committee Minutes

Date: 18 January 2024

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors Lorna Dupré (Chair), Nick Gay (Vice-Chair), Anna Bradnam, Steve Corney, Piers Coutts, Ian Gardener, John Gowing, Ros Hathorn, Brian Milnes, Catherine Rae, Tom Sanderson, Philippa Slatter and Mandy Smith

177. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stephen Ferguson (substituted by Councillor Sanderson), Councillor Jonas King, and Councillor Peter McDonald (substituted by Councillor Slatter).

There were no declarations of interest.

178. Minutes – 12 October 2023

The minutes of the meetings held on 12 October 2023 and 30 November 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Committee noted the Minutes Action Log.

179. Petitions and Public Questions

No public questions or petitions were received.

180. Business and Financial Plan 2024-2029

The Committee received a report summarising the business and financial planning proposals for 2024-29 which fell within its areas of responsibility. This included proposals relating to investment from Just Transition Fund to further support the Climate Change and Environment Programme, a reprofiling of major energy projects, investment to enable the Council to undertake a statutory review of the Minerals and Waste Development Plan, investment to support the Archaeological service, the delivery of energy projects and to enable the continuation of the Connecting Cambridgeshire project. The report also provided information relating to waste management.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Paid tribute to the work of officers in the progress made in the decarbonisation of the Council's assets, noting the forward-thinking approaches and vision that had been employed over many years since 2015, and highlighting the importance of Members' support for innovative projects.
- Expressed concerns about investing in the decarbonisation of buildings that the Council then disposed of, noting the risk of some schools becoming academies after such work had been undertaken, although it was acknowledged that this still represented progress towards achieving Net Zero in county by 2045. Members were assured that the rationalisation of the Council's assets, itself achieving a level of decarbonisation simply by reducing the size of the Council's estate, considered the carbon footprint of the buildings as well as their long-term viability, alongside other factors, before identifying where investment should be made. It was confirmed that the rationalisation programme and the environment programme were closely linked in this regard, and assurance on this would be provided to the Assets and Procurement Committee, which had oversight of the asset rationalisation proposals.
- Queried the potential additional revenue that could be raised as a result of the review of services at the Council's household recycling centres. It was clarified that the relatively small, proposed increase of £10k was for the 2025/26 financial year and related to a potential increase in the charges for trade waste at household recycling centres, although the committee was assured that a consultation would be carried out before any firm proposals were developed or made. Members emphasised the importance of maintaining a high quality and easy to access system for recycling and waste disposal, highlighting the need to work with neighbouring authorities to achieve this.
- Drew attention to recent flooding issues and suggested that additional resources could be considered for emergency planning and resilience to enable an efficient and effective response, particularly given the small size of the Emergency Planning team which had to work with a large number of partners and increasing levels of extreme weather events. Members highlighted the importance of regularly clearing gullies to reduce high levels of water, as well as reviewing the effectiveness of responses to emergencies once they had finished. Attention was also drawn to problems caused by drivers ignoring road closure signs during flooding and it was suggested that more education and signage could be beneficial to reduce this. Members were informed that the budget proposal included resources to establish an evidence base of climate impact for the region to enable strategic long-term planning, and it was also noted that it proposed investment in highways, part of which was for drainage, cutting, ditch management and other such issues.
- Noted the high cost of grid connections to the distribution network, and queried whether the Council could support efforts to reduce grid connection costs. Members were informed that the distribution network in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, as well as much of the country, was operating at capacity and new connections were either significantly delayed and/or required the payment of significant upgrade costs. A lot of work was being undertaken on the national level to unlock the problem. It was noted that Ofgem and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero had

recently published documents on speeding up grid connections to the distribution and transmission networks, and it was agreed to provide Members with a briefing note once the measures they were proposing were understood and how this could benefit connecting energy projects. **Action required**

- Observed that the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme was working with progressively more difficult properties that were more expensive to connect.
- Requested an update on the next steps for the major energy projects. Members were informed that, as a large organisation with significant assets, the Council was establishing its role in participating in and supporting the process of achieving Net Zero in Cambridgeshire. Following a period of identifying and trialling approaches, Local Area Energy Planning was now under development with partners, including the Combined Authority, district and city councils, and UK Power Networks. Looking to the future, the scope of the next pipeline of energy projects and work was under development and would be presented to the committee. This included reviewing the existing set of projects to assess and identify how they could be further commercialised to develop additional income streams and create even greater returns, while another area of focus would be supporting businesses and communities to benefit from the energy system changes.
- Expressed concern at the scale of change needed to transition the distribution network to two way flow allowing users to provide energy back into the electricity grid. Members were informed that the Council was working with UK Power Networks to develop and populate a digital map of all the energy infrastructure across Cambridgeshire, to identify future infrastructure requirements and how households and businesses needed to engage in the changes to achieve Net Zero by 2045.

The Executive Director of Place and Sustainability summarised the debate to be reported to the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee at its meeting on 30 January 2024 as follows:

- The Committee noted the excellent work to date on delivering the Council's Net Zero carbon ambitions. Clarity was sought on ensuring that the Council's proposals around office rationalisation and investment would account for this ambition. It was confirmed that it would and officers would update, via the Assets and Procurement Committee, but ask they note any issues and forward to this Committee.
- Clarity was also sought on the position of Household Recycling Centre fees and charges. Officers clarified it was a 2025/26 proposal and they would be looking at potential fees and charges for trade waste, but confirmed the first step was to review and if there were any firm proposals, these would be taken forward, including consultation as part of that process.
- It was also recommended that the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee at its meeting on 30 January 2024 look further at the investment in Emergency Planning and the need for more prioritisation of funds for continued improvements in forward planning and response capacity. Officers did note that there was other investment in other proposals within the remit of the Highways and Transport Committee, including drainage and gullies within the £3m Highways and

footways investment, as well as the Just Transition Fund proposal for developing the evidence base for climate risk and impacts on the Council's services. This would include flood risk, drought, overheating for example and will complement and inform service planning and emergency planning support.

- It was noted in clarity the progress with the delivery of the Council's energy projects, including the development of a Local Area Energy Plan, which would be brought back to this Committee.
- Tributes were made towards Connecting Cambridgeshire and the Energy Projects foresight, and Members welcomed the continued prioritised investment.

The Chair sought confirmation from Committee members that this was an accurate summary of the debate, and there was no dissent.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Consider and scrutinise the proposals relevant to this Committee within the Business and Financial plan put forward by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee, 19 December 2023;
- b) Recommend changes and /or actions for consideration by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee at its meeting on 30 January 2024 to enable a budget to be proposed to Full Council on 13 February 2024; and
- c) Receive the fees and charges schedule for this Committee included at appendix 2.

181. Annual Carbon Footprint Report 2022-23

The Committee received a report on the Council's annual carbon footprint, which outlined the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions from the Council's activities in the 2022/23 financial year and the Council's progress against its carbon targets.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Considered the carbon footprint impact of changes in home working trends during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, noting that home working reduced the level of commuting but also increased the number of buildings being heated during cold periods. It was clarified that the home working figures in the report were based on data from a travel survey of Council staff, rather than the wider workforce, and the Committee was informed that sustainable travel guidance was being prepared for staff to provide support in further reducing the impact of travel either to or for work.
- Expressed concern about the high cost of electric vehicle acquisition and maintenance and queried whether the Council had developed a policy on the use of electric vehicles. It was emphasised that most of the Council's transport emissions were in Scope 3, which included vehicles used for the delivery of its services that were not owned or controlled by the Council. Members were informed that work was

ongoing to install electric vehicle (EV) charging points at Council buildings, while a broader EV charging infrastructure strategy was being developed in partnership with the Combined Authority and district / city councils.

- Expressed concern about the hotspots of lower air quality in areas of higher traffic congestion across the county and requested an update on the progress of moving the Council's fleet to hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) as an interim measure before it became fully electric. It was confirmed that a full review of the Council's fleet, including vehicles commissioned through contracts, was about to be undertaken, which would result in proposals for further reducing carbon emissions.
- Noted that methane could serve as a source of hydrogen for fuel and queried whether the Council had considered using methane produced by landfill for this purpose. It was agreed to provide Members with a briefing note on the matter.

Action required

- Highlighted the significant carbon footprint of home to school transport, particularly through minibuses that were used for other purposes during the day and suggested that the Council could support such providers in accessing funding to change to electric vehicles, noting that some district and city councils proactively encouraged the use of low emissions vehicles in their private hire fleets.
- Noted that agricultural emissions had not been included in the report and queried whether they would be reintroduced in the future. Members were informed that as it was very difficult to accurately calculate the carbon footprint from land use and land use change due to the lack of data and complexity in gathering it, it had not been possible to include such figures. However, work was being undertaken to address this, including an ongoing piece of consultancy work looking at the Council's rural estate, and it was hoped that future reports would include information on agricultural emissions. It was noted that countywide agricultural emissions were easier to assess because of how the figures were extrapolated from national figures.
- Observed significant differences in levels of emissions in the different districts and sectors across the county, subject to the local industry, transport infrastructure and geography, among other factors, but emphasised that transport emissions were the main issue that the Council needed to confront. It was clarified that emissions were generally more concentrated in urban areas due to population density, leading to smaller carbon footprints per person.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the annual carbon footprint report, attached at Appendix 1 to this report, as a record of the Council's known greenhouse gas emissions for the financial year 2022-23.

182. Corporate Performance Report (Quarter 2- 2023-24)

The Committee received a report providing an update on the performance of services within its remit over Quarter 2 of the 2023/24 financial year.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Suggested that it would be helpful to be provided with a breakdown of the individual recycling, reuse, composting and recovery rates, rather than just the combined rate that was demonstrated in Performance Indicator 150b, and it was agreed to provide Members with a breakdown. **Action required**
- Clarified that the recent increase in household waste generated per head, as demonstrated in Performance Indicator 223, was largely due to increased green waste tonnages in comparison to the drought in Summer 2022, and that the general downwards trend was expected to continue.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note and comment on the performance information provided and highlight any areas for action required.

183. Environment and Green Investment Committee Agenda Plan and Appointments

The Committee noted its agenda plan.

Chair
14 March 2024