

Present: Councillor Judith Skinner (Chairman), Councillor Judy Welbourn (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Tom Ashton, Alison Austin, Katie Chalmers, Paul Goodale and Yvonne Stevens

Portfolio Holder Councillor Paul Skinner.

In attendance:

Officers –

Assistant Director - Regulatory, Climate Change and Environment Manager, Insights & Transformation Manager and Democratic Services Officer

18 APOLOGIES

Apologies were tabled by Councillor Peter Bedford with Councillor Stephen Woodliffe substituting, Apologies for absence were also tabled by Councillor Anton Dani no substitute member in attendance.

19 MINUTES

With the agreement of the committee the Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting.

20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were tabled.

21 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were tabled.

22 CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

The Climate Change and Environment Manager presented the report supported by Portfolio Holder Councillor Paul Skinner.

Members were advised that the strategy was the next stage in the Climate Change programme moving beyond the confines of the Boroughs own carbon footprint to look at wider issues in the local communities. The strategy looked to drive down carbon emissions and ensure a more sustainable way of working. It would also deliver benefits to health and wellbeing and offer opportunities around training, local skills and in general around a number of social value aspects.

The Strategy would present a strong message both locally and nationally that the three authorities are taking a lead in establishing a collaborative approach with partners and stakeholders. Whilst the three authorities are at differing stages with differing commitments in terms of their own carbon aspirations, overall they would be working strategically as a whole. Co-ordination would be key as the Council could not address many issues in isolation but it was in a good position to lead by example.

Furthermore, by establishing the document it would prove the strategic need for the authorities in securing future external funding.

The consultation process would be lengthy and key areas had already been identified based on existing data from the Department for Business, Energy and Industry and from local knowledge.

The initial working group agreed that a key point in establishing the strategy would be to convene a Climate Change Assembly and steps on how to establish one were underway with consideration of existing networks to provide a steer on the best way forward. The vision was that local authorities would provide support to a Climate Action Network but it would have its' own Chairman and once it was established and it adopted the document, one task would be to look at establishing the delivery plan.

Boston Cabinet had already approved the document for consultation with and East Lindsey District Council set to approve it, at its forthcoming Executive meeting. The launch date for consultation across the two Councils' would be on 10th November 2021 to enable capture of all the activity from COP26 for inclusion in the process. The consultation would run through to the middle of December 2021 with all stakeholders invited to attend a workshop in either Boston or Louth. Moving forward, once the document included all the feedback from the consultation, Cabinet and the Executive would receive the final document prior to seeking adoption by Full Council in Spring 2022.

Work with South Holland District Council was at an early stage, however their Scrutiny and Executive would receive a report prior to the end of the year and with their consultation scheduled for early 2022, Officers were confident of alignment of the final strategy across the three authorities.

Significant committee deliberation followed which included the following:

In response to a question querying the lack of reference to new build developments and the standard of products required for installation, the Climate Change and Environment Manager advised that the subject sat within the build environment section of the draft strategy. Members needed to be mindful of what was set in policy, with anything in the strategy needing to align with the existing planning policy, together with a new Environment Bill scheduled for Royal Assent along with a new Planning Bill, both of which would result in significant change. Officers recognised that due to the changes of policy that would eventually be implemented, ongoing new builds with existing fittings could require retro fitting once the new policies were in place. The Council had employed a Sustainability Development Officer who was identifying gaps in policy and was working alongside Officers in Boston.

The Portfolio Holder advised that there was no fixed direction on how to build a house and a Member stated that many existing houses within Boston were sited in an unsuitable position to benefit from solar panels and suggested that moving forward, developers needed to look at the design and elevation of estate developments to maximise collection of power.

A further Member of the committee stated that emerging technology would be essential in ensuring that the building of future homes contributed to carbon aspirations. He further noted that he was confident that building regulations would eventually align with policy but also voiced concern at the low land values and their viability and impact on the residual land available. Homes would become more expensive to build and future decisions on developments would require consideration of the need for section 106 agreements against the need for the homes.

Referencing the Boston Alternative Energy Facility (BAF) a Member stated they had concerns on the CO₂ emissions from the chimney on the plant whilst another Member asked if the site would actually provide a nett gain on such emissions and further questioned the position in respect of the Biomass Power Station

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the BAF project would have 3 lines with 2 capturing carbon. There were not too many facilities producing carbon capture efficiently and with the recent lack of supply of CO₂ the site would provide a good source for the food valley.

The Assistant Director – Regulatory (*and Lead Officer for the Committee*) confirmed that emission standards were very stringent and the application for BAF was with the National Planning Inspector. If granted, the Environment Agency would manage the site and the Council had little influence on the project, as it was only a stakeholder.

The Biomass Power Station would generate much needed power for the area with the existing network capacity being insufficient. It would take our local waste, which in turn would help reduce transportation of the waste to the existing site. Moving forward with the changes to electric vehicles and powering homes, further reducing its carbon footprint by utilisation of local facilities.

Seeking clarification on points within the strategy a Member sought clarification on the diagram on page 31 where one stream appeared to be missing and on the wording within page 22 relating to the preparation of the 3 districts, asking if it was generic wording as clearly the three districts had individual needs. The Climate Change and Environment Manager agreed that a stream was missing and that the wording used was generic.

The Member further voiced concern at the practicality of converting all properties to take air pump heating but was reassured that hybrid systems would be available for use with conventional tanks alongside the electric boilers.

Stating he felt the need for greater inclusion of children in taking climate change forward, a Member stated that it would be they, who would create the technology required. It was vital that they understood the current challenges to allow them to produce the technology required. Members agreed the need for the inclusion of all children from early years in the education of recycling and climate change. Furthermore, Members' acknowledged the importance of their own roles in both warning and encouraging the public and in recognising that the whole success of changes was dependant on technology not yet produced.

Whilst not wishing to diminish the report and stating he fully supported the concept, a Member voiced concern at the lack of any reference to hydropower and green industries within the draft strategy with the borough having both river and seawater running through it. The town had three possible sites for turbines at the Black Sluice, the North Forty Foot and alongside the barrier to provide direct power. Furthermore, the Member stated the biggest challenge Boston faced was that of rising sea levels. Whatever level of green energies emerged and however much homes became green would all be irrelevant, if the Borough could not protect itself from the sea due to rising tides. All the efforts made to combat climate change would be pointless. A further Member agreed the comments stating the river and the sea had the potential to be an eastern powerhouse of green electricity, however they voiced concern at the proposal of wind-pumps. Noting the concerns on flooding, a Member asked how the increase in droughts each year could be overcome, referencing farmers who already took water from dykes.

The Member suggested encouragement of additional water catchment areas in the borough.

The Assistant Director – Regulatory advised that Lincolnshire County Council who were a key stakeholder in the network, had recently launched their own strategy. They would work alongside the districts, flood risk was within their strategy, but mitigation and adaptation of flood risk was an area requiring further address to include adaptation of homes in flood risk areas to be liveable.

The Portfolio Holder agreed that water is a resource and treated as such with the possibility of the development a large reservoir in the south of the county with water taken from the river Witham.

Members discussed the prioritisation within the strategy of the change to electric vehicles and the charging of them. They noted that Lincolnshire County Council would be part of the solution in addressing the issue. Concern noted the need for fast charging points and the shortage of electricity in the area resulting in the grid restricting the locations to site them. Additional concern noted the issue of homes with no off-street parking charging their vehicles. Certain areas were looking at running cables to the vehicles and others at burying cables within the footpaths.

Voicing concern at the ongoing production of coal and its shipment around the world by nations including Australia, India and China and America, a Member stated that he applauded the intent of the strategy, and that of the people intent on addressing the issues. However, he stressed that the outcome of any change to stop climate change lay elsewhere with the final responsibility for the significant impact required, relying on those countries who continued to build fossil-fuelled power stations and those countries who continued to mine and transport the fuels. Despite the best efforts of the rest of the world, those Countries would dictate the outcome.

Referencing previous comments in respect of rising sea levels the Member further voiced strong concern at rate of the ice cap melting in Greenland, which would cause a catastrophe should it break off. He stated that there appeared to be no plan for such an event occurring which for Boston had to be a priority, due to its proximity to the sea. Despite previous warnings of the loss of land locally, to the sea, Boston now stood in a very dangerous position due to those in power ignoring the warning. Noting the graph within the report, the Member said that although Boston had a budget of 3 mega-tonnes of gases that would exhaust in 9 years, it could stay within its carbon budget by reducing emissions by 8.2%. However, the Member felt the levels needed to fall more as current levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere were at their highest in 800,000 years.

Referencing the loss of the National Bus service between London and Mablethorpe and the reduction in local bus service timetables due to a shortage of drivers, a Member questioned the need for liaison with the bus companies. The operators needed to come forward with their plans, in respect with climate change and the declining numbers of drivers causing the loss of service.

The Portfolio Holder agreed the concerns and advised committee that Boston had been identified as an ideal place to run a pilot scheme for electric buses, which would reduce the current level of fumes in both Narrow Bargate and on the Town Bridge significantly. The issue of drivers re-locating to other areas of employment was driven by market forces and was nationwide. Vehicle technology was evolving and would change significantly over time.

The Assistant Director – Regulatory advised committee of 2 surveys recently published by Lincolnshire County Council into which Members could have input.

The first was the Lincolnshire Transport Plan and provided an overarching strategy of transport in the county.

The second being the Bus Service Improvement Plan looking at public transport across the county including routes / infrastructure / bus depots and fares and ticketing and was the platform for Members to comment and suggest on. All Members has the opportunity to influence both documents via their respective surveys.

The final subject under discussion referenced social housing landlords, both private and public sector, being compliant to energy ratings. Members noted that the standard of a significant number of social housing in Boston was not what it should be resulting in tenants living in fuel poverty in decaying and unfit properties.

The Climate Change and Environment Manager advised that such properties were currently required to conform to E rating to secure their certificate. Nationally there was a push to increase that level to a C rating in an attempt to raise the standard of rental properties. However, there were issues in respect of enforcement of such a change. East Lindsey District Council had been successful in securing funding in 2020 that enabled a pilot to be undertaken allowing enforcement of the regulations and ensuring that the landlords were compliant. Their outcome had provided much needed information moving forward. Housing Standards at Boston had applied for funding but not been successful and Officers were still looking at options, but South Holland District Council had been successful in securing similar funding to allow similar activity. As such, the alliance had two out of three authorities already taking action. Officers were aware of the situation at Boston and would attend the Landlords at their forum in December in an attempt to engage further with them.

Members suggested inviting landlords to a meeting to report on how they plan to make existing properties compliant with climate change activity.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked the Officer for such a comprehensive report and for her enabling the Chairman to attend the Carbon Trust meeting where Boston Borough evidenced how active it had been to date in reducing its carbon footprint. Committee had deliberated the report in detail, in general agreeing the collaborative approach undertaken with partners and stakeholders as the best way forward. They further recognised the importance of the inclusion of children throughout the process and the children's role in years to come. Members also understood their role in encouraging and supporting efforts to reduce emissions and fully acknowledged the dependency of everyone, on the as-yet un-developed technology, which needed to be produced to address the overall issues.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Environment and Performance Committee support the Cabinet's agreement to commence consultation of the draft Strategy.

To Do:

KR: To issue and invitation to the landlords forum to seek their attendance to report on how they plan to adapt existing properties to comply with climate change

23 MEMBER WORKING GROUP FLY TIPPING

Councillor Judy Welbourn advised that there had been no further meetings of the working group since the last meeting of the committee. The Portfolio Holder had held a successful public meeting at which the Enforcement Officers had Council Officers' admirably answered a number of difficult questions. Councillor Welbourn advised she would speak with the officer for the working group to ascertain if further meetings were required or if the group would conclude its activity and return a report through the parent committee.

24 WORK PROGRAMME INCLUDING QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORTING.

The Transformation and Governance Manager presented the newly formatted Quarter 1 monitoring report and confirmed that the report aligned with the directorate across the alliance. The new report did not split the data by scrutiny committee remit and each committee would receive the same report. It would enable each committee to refer items to the other committee should they wish. The performance monitoring was colour coded red, amber and green and an overview of each 'outside of agreed tolerance' area followed to highlight the red markers in each directorate.

Assets:

Car parking was down but the performance level was not unexpected due to the impact of Covid19.

Housing and Wellbeing:

Unfortunately, due to the introduction of a new IT system, it had not been possible to include all elements of the service in quarter one as systems for housing and homelessness were not in place. However, work was ongoing and reporting should be available for the next quarter.

Of the two measures reported, the number of properties improved through Council intervention had improved and although the rough sleeper indicator was red, the target figure of 0 was an aspirational figure and the Council did not expect to meeting each quarter.

Organisation and Corporate Support:

The alliance carried out a number of staff surveys and a key indicator was the response to the question asking how valued the staff felt. The response to that question had not meet the target, however it was the first time the question had been asked and therefore there had been no past data to reference in respect of the target setting. However, ongoing work to address the issue would assess the responses further. The Council scheduled ongoing work on both values and behaviours. The One Team Voice group enabled staff to look closely at feedback.

Operations.

Household waste was in tolerance. Due to a change in operation by LCC in respect of contaminated waste, no figures were available as the process was now by site and not by authority. Fly Tipping was excellent. However, the impact of Covid19 on the markets and changes to the markets had been severe and there was no information for the markets at this time.

Planning

The measures were very different from previously with the redaction of the extended figure having been withdrawn. Previously data without extension would have been included in the attached comment. If the national figures had been used, all categories' would be green. Officers were still considering the amended procedure for calculating these measures.

Regulation

There had been an impact of the Council's food safety inspections during lockdown with food safety work prioritised around covid recovery. Some areas of the previous work carried out remained outstanding but Officers were not concerned and the reasons given put the situation into context.

PSPS:

This was a new stream of reporting to Boston.

Benefit Claims had been unprecedented and alongside that, the staff managed the track and trace system. The comments set out clearly the action now taking place that included daily recording measures to allow staff to monitor the workload.

Committee deliberation followed which included the following:

Concern noted a change in the service provided by Centrepoint Outreach in respect of rough sleepers, with a Member stating it appeared their focus had changed to work programmes and activities. A project worker now attended each morning to ensure follow up on rough sleepers. Members agreed that an invitation be issued to Mr Phil Startin the Councils' Rough Sleeper Coordinator to attend a meeting of the Corporate and Community meeting to provide committee with an update on any changes in the operation of Centrepoint Outreach in Boston.

Referencing feedback to the survey a Member voiced concern at the response to the question relating to staff feeling valued, stating how important he felt it was that staff should feel valued and the response percentage was not acceptable. The Member stressed that staff needed to feel valued both as a person and for the work they do, and the outcome could be a criticism of not only the executive and senior managers, but of Councillors too.

Another member noted that at the Joint Scrutiny Alliance meeting the Chief Executive had felt the 62% response had been favourable bearing in mind the upheaval of the previous months with staff relocating, commuting and settling with the new alliance.

The Transformation and Governance Manager agreed the two elements to the question and confirmed that a workforce plan was in place to get underneath the questions. There had been a wide range of reasons given for feeling undervalued and not all had been work related, but Officers did need to address it and then monitor and respond on what transpires,

Further comment questioned how commercial rents had achieved a target in excess of 104%. Why was it not possible to know the situation of market stall attendance when the stallholders paid their rents direct to the markets manage on the day, and were fines still raised on the Council for contamination under the new LCC procedure?

The Transformation and Governance Manager advised she did not know if charges for contamination still applied but questioned how they would do so as the new procedure was by site and not by Authority.

Concluding the Chairman sought committee's agreement to issue an invitation to Anglian Water to attend a future meeting. The invite would be to report on their current procedure in respect of their disposal of raw sewage into rivers and the sea, It would further invite them to advise how they intend to reduce their existing carbon footprint in respect of the transportation of raw sewage across the borough, and to update on any plans they have to improve their infrastructure and increase their number of treatment plants.

Members all agreed the suggestion to invite Anglian Water and the Chairman thanked everyone in attendance for their time and input and formerly closed the meeting.

To Do:

KR. Issue an invitation to Anglian Water.

KR. Advise the Corporate and Community Committee of the committee recommendation to invite the Councils' Housing Officer to provide an update on any changes in the operation of Centrepoint Outreach in Boston.