

Present: Councillor Judith Skinner (Chairman), Councillor Judy Welbourn (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Tom Ashton, Alison Austin, Peter Bedford, Katie Chalmers, Anton Dani, Paul Goodale, Neill Hastie and Paul Skinner

In attendance:

Officers –
Monitoring Officer, Climate Change and Environment Manager and Climate Change and Environment Officer and Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were tabled for Councillors Alison Austin and Yvonne Stevens. No substitute members.

2 MINUTES

Committee agreed the minutes of the previous meeting.

3 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were tabled.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were tabled.

5 CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

The Climate Change and Environment Manager presented the report advising that since establishing Climate Change as a priority within the Corporate Strategy, Boston Borough Council has been working to address its own impact in terms of carbon emissions and commissioned the Carbon Trust to produce a Carbon Reduction Plan which was approved in January 2022. As part of that process, the Council committed to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2040 with a minimum emissions reduction of 45% by 2027 ensuring it leads by example in encouraging the Borough as a whole to undertake similar steps.

The strategy tabled was an updated version of the initial strategy following the consultation process which took place late in 2021. New overarching themes had been identified including a specific theme around the visitor economy. It had been felt that there was a real need to recognise that area due to the influx of visitors, particularly in East Lindsey but also relevant in Boston and South Holland.

Members were advised that in terms of overall responses to the consultation exercises the document had been fairly well received and there had been fairly consistent feedback especially around the Golden Threads of the strategy. The criticism that came through was around the need for it to be more strategic and there had been criticism of the lack of time frames in the document.

It had however always been the intention that the network would produce a delivery plan as one of its pieces of work which would put more concrete timeframes in place and also break down the specific projects in greater detail. What had been done was some of the headlined strategic actions that were highlighted in the report, had been moved to the back of the document and aligned with the three overarching themes and included indicative timescales and demonstrated some of the quicker wins / short term deliverables.

Committee deliberation followed which included:

On questioning a lack of regard to planning regulations within the strategy for new build homes / modifications to existing homes and enforcement of such regulations, a member was advised that until such time as the National Planning Framework was confirmed, it would be dangerous to implement any such measures as it would leave the Council open to challenge. Technologies were also continually changing. The document would be adapted in line with changes in legislation

RECOMMENDED:

That the Environment and Performance Committee recommend approval of the final version of the Climate Change Strategy to Cabinet.

6 CARBON REDUCTION ACTION PLAN

The Climate Change and Environment Officer presented an update to the report confirming two amendments to the report tabled.

The first was that the Carbon Reduction Action Plan had been renamed following the recent Cabinet briefing to avoid any unfortunate acronyms based on its original name and would hereon in be known as the Net Zero Action Plan. The second update being that plans were now in place to update the GMLP and the Action Plan would be amended to reflect that.

Following adoption of the carbon reduction plan in January 2022 and cabinet's agreement to amend the previous net zero target a net zero action plan had been developed. That action plan set out the projects required to further investigate the feasibility of the recommendations put forward by the Carbon trust and to provide a clear timescale for the delivery. Decarbonisation strategies would be developed for all operational Council buildings to inform the actions to be taken forward in relation to those buildings. A free Government funded fleet review was due to be undertaken by the Energy Saving trust which would provide a valuable insight and inform future actions in relation to the fleet and identify sites with the best potential for accommodating EV charging points. The fleet actions currently identified in the net zero action plan would be subject to change dependant on the outcomes of the review.

Officers had made significant strides towards the targets for reducing carbon emissions. Achieving net zero would be dependent on the recommended actions in the action plan alongside harnessing and maintaining reductions in emissions caused by the impact of Covid-19, particularly in relation to business and commuter travel and would be vital in establishing new ways of working being maintained. Furthermore, it would be vital to embrace new green technologies when viable.

There would of course be gaps and unknowns in terms of costs and saving of many of the proposed actions. However, officers felt that at this stage it was important that the Council set out a pathway. Officers would ensure the tool projects would all be subject to full cost benefit analysis, external funding opportunities for delivery and that member approval would be sought for the proposals as appropriate.

Member deliberation followed which included:

Whilst supporting the intent of the report, a member questioned how it would actually come about commenting that it would not be as simple as it read and that significant infrastructure would be required.

Referencing information he had received the member advised that when 3 EV points were simultaneously charging, homes and businesses within the immediate vicinity had experienced such a significant loss of power at that time, the owner of the development had to install a booster to make up the loss of power. Addressing the review of the fleet within the report and identifying suitable sites for EV points, the member expressed concern at the consumption of power by those vehicles and the enormous drain on neighbouring business.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council had received grants for additional EV points within the town but had no installed more for that very reason, stating it was a recognised problem at the current time. Referencing the fleet the Portfolio Holder stated that companies already used alternative fuels and all options would be looked into, with other solutions coming forward.

Further comments included a suggestion for a car free Sunday once a month within the town centre of Boston. The member thought it would encourage residents to walk into town and also reduce emissions for that day, however in response Members voiced concern at the lack of public transport for residents in the rural areas and also more importantly the impact on residents who could not walk or cycle. The Council could be seen as discriminating against residents.

Additional concerns noted the significant expense of replacement batteries for EV vehicles and also the time lines indicated and the obvious ease for cities to become 100% neutral as against small towns with large rural areas.

Surprise was also noted in respect of the inclusion of the indicated future of the Municipal Buildings and the lack at present of any liaison with Members about such a decision and also at the replacement of the Boston fleet. A Member further questioned the future of the Crematorium and questioned what options would be available to reduce emissions as by default the nature of the site produced high emissions.

The Climate Change and Environment Officer reassured committee that there would be no replacement of the fleet until they came to the end of their life use and as technology progressed other options would become available and any non-viable options would not be taken forward. Referencing the option to move from the Municipal Building the Climate Change and Environment Officer advised that it was just an option and that short term actions would be taken to reduce emissions at the site. Noting the concern about the Crematorium, Members were advised that the Carbon Trust had provided suggestions for the coming years with options to upgrade the cavity wall insulation in the chapel and loft space, upgrade glazing and position solar panels onto the chapel roof and the possibility of combusting long term fuel to a biogas blend. Moving forward new crematoria methods could come forward. Members were reassured that the Net Zero Action Plan was a starting point and would develop significantly over the forthcoming years which would allow the Council to make informed decisions.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Environment and Performance Committee recommends adoption of the plan to Cabinet in line with the Council's commitment to reduce its carbon emissions by 45% by 2027 and to achieve net zero by 2040. This commitment is also in line with the Strategic Aim within the Corporate Strategy

7 JOINT SCRUTINY BETWEEN PARTNERSHIP COUNCILS WITH SOUTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP

The Assistant Director – Governance (Monitoring Officer) presented the report confirming it proposed that the three Council's in the partnership undertake joint scrutiny on matters of common strategic importance along with the proposed process to achieve the process. At an initial meeting between the Chairs of the Council's Scrutiny committees a list of potential topic had been considered – taken largely from the Annual delivery Plan. The Chairs had agreed that there should be no more than three or four topics per year, there needed to be clarity around who approved/implemented any recommendations with the recommendations being tracked, that there should be clarity as to whether the groups met privately or in public and that the arrangements needed to be kept as simple as possible. Further consultation had also taken place with the political group leaders and the executive with the leaders agreeing that place based scrutiny arrangements needed to be examined in order to ensure that the joint scrutiny was successful and that given there were limited resources, any joint scrutiny needed to be restricted to areas where there was a genuine need, identified benefits and anticipation of real outcomes.

The Task and Finish groups on completion of their review would present the final report and recommendations to each Council's sovereign scrutiny committee ensuring the golden thread through its' internal governance arrangement's.

Committee deliberation followed which included:

Members agreed that both scrutiny committees at Boston worked with each other and not in isolation. As a point of information the clerk advised the procedure for inviting interest from across the membership of both Scrutiny committees and confirmed an email would be issued following the meeting and the names of the interested parties would be relayed to the Lead Officer of the particular T&F Review.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Environment and Performance committee agree that:

- a) That the proposals for joint scrutiny arrangements, as set out in Appendix A, be approved;
- b) That the scope for the proposed Joint Transport Task and Finish Group, as set out in Appendix B, be approved;
- c) That the Committee appoints three members to the proposed Joint Transport Task and Finish Group; and
- d) That the Task and Finish Group be authorised to determine the detail of its remit and the required lines of enquiry and witnesses

8 MEMBER WORKING GROUP FLY TIPPING

Councillor Judith Welbourn presented the report confirming that a Member Working Group had been convened following concerns by Members in respect of the 140% increase in fly tipping incidents across the Borough during the period 2019/20 and 2020/21. It had been recognised that many such incidents were due to the closure of the Household Recycling Centre during Covid particularly in respect of large items including furniture, but there was also recognition that many residents continued to fly tip due to simply not bothering to try and dispose of the waste in the correct manner or not realising the procedures or options available to them

The outcomes as noted within the report had all been taken forward through the Portfolio Holder although they had not all had been agreed by Lincolnshire County Council.

Committee deliberation followed which included:

Whilst Members overall recognised and congratulated the work undertaken by the fly tipping team on a daily basis, in removing items as soon as possible once they had been reported, a number of concerns were tabled. One key issue was the Household Waste Recycling Centre and it being closed two days a week, but more importantly it not being able to receive certain items on the days it was open. A lack of any response from Lincolnshire County Council proved to be a constant frustration with Members feeling that they were ignoring the seriousness of the problem. Further concerns noted bins with multiple tags which still remained on the pavements when there had been advice of an amnesty to clear such bins.. A Member questioned what it anything the letting agents were doing to advise new tenants of the procedure for getting rid of their waste. The population of Boston was increasing all the time with larger households generating significant waste with many just dumping in the area of their homes. Concern also noted the impression of visitors to the town seeing black bags strewn in hedgerows and along walkways. Members also agreed that the problem was not solely within the town centre but also in the rural areas.

Councillor Welbourn responded advising that three letting agents provided leaflets that go out to each new tenant clearly advising, in six languages, the correct procedure for disposal of rubbish. The leaflets were also pictorial leaving no reason for any person not to understand them. Whilst all Countries had differing ways of disposing of litter, new residents to the town from overseas now had no reason not to understand the procedure in Boston. Ongoing problems continued in respect of un-licensed operators collecting waste and the tipping wherever they felt they could get away with it. In respect of the Household Waste Recycling Centre the Portfolio Holder had considered the purchase of additional land at the side to of the site to enable and extension and increase capacity but the idea had been rejected at Lincolnshire County Council due to costs for additional staff to man the increase of the site.

Committee noted the report agreeing that future reporting would be called to monitor the situation.

9 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman confirmed that a Task and Finish Group had been convened to look at Housing Standards across the borough and that update reporting would be provided at subsequent meetings of the committee.

The next meeting scheduled on the 10th May 2022 was awaiting confirmation of reporting.

A Member asked for a report on the promotion and future intentions for the Market and was advised that following a similar request at a previous meeting, a Member briefing was being convened in the first instance and dependant on the outcomes of that, a report would come back to the committee.

The Chairman closed the meeting thanking Members and Officers for their attendance.

The Meeting Closed at 8.40 pm