

Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in the Conference Room, Riverside, on **Thursday, 22 February 2024 at 6.30pm**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor Dan Clery, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Mark Jepson, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Stephen Molyneux, Councillor Sarah Plummer, Councillor Ed Thompson

Officers present: Sarah Davis (Democratic Services Officer), Jeanette Hollingsworth (Environmental Protection Manager), Nick Khan (Strategic Director), Paul Mackie (Lead Officer - Environment and Climate Change), Agnes Ogundiran (Conservative Political Group Support Officer) and Fiona Quinn (Head of Environmental Services and Port Health).

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bennett, Folley, Grey and Noble. Councillor Green attended as Councillor Folley's substitute. Councillor Reeves attended as the substitute for Councillor Noble who, as the Assistant Cabinet Member for the Environment, was not able to scrutinise anything within her portfolio.

2 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3 Minutes

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters Arising Update Sheet

The Committee received the matters arising update sheet from the meeting of the 16 November 2023 and the Chair reminded them that these were for noting only.

5 Review of East Suffolk Council's Environmental Strategy

The Committee received report ES/1860 of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment who explained that they were not quite a year into the new

administration and her being appointed as Cabinet Member so it had been quite fast paced. She added that the Environmental Task Group was bedding in quite well with a wide ranging Work Programme until December and the Greenprint Forum was forging ahead with various activities.

The Cabinet Member was reminded that this part of the meeting related to the report on the agenda regarding the Council's Environmental Strategy rather than her Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session which came later on in the meeting.

The Strategic Director clarified that the report set out the details of the strategy and how it would be delivered. He added that this was the first time the Council had a specific Environmental themed strategy which, coupled with the eight ambitions under the Environmental Theme of Our Direction 2028, was really positive.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and Strategic Director and invited questions from the Committee who received the following responses:

- Achieving net zero by 2030 was an ambitious target but one of the biggest contributors were leisure centres and it was hoped that government funding would be secured to decarbonise them. It was also hoped to formulate a Tree Policy which included planting on suitable Council owned land and forging partnerships with other landowners eg Flagship. The Council's Annual Green House Gas report showed that the target for achieving net zero was heading in the right direction with the decarbonisation of the leisure centres, the move to vegetable oil fuel for the fleets and working with the Housing Team. It was clarified that the housing stock did not sit within the carbonisation target so it was important to understand what was in scope. The point was made that, whilst several successful bids for funding had been made, the Council was dependent on external funding to achieve its ambitions. Reference was made to a live dashboard available on the Council's website which showed the Council was making good progress and was ranked 12th in the country for what it wanted to achieve.
- The ambition was to have a central point at the end of each road for refuse similar to other countries rather than having huge refuse trucks going up and down picking up outside each house. The Council was looking at its supply chains, however, the Cabinet Member stated that she was not aware how the carbon footprint of manufacturing the new electric vehicles for the fleet would be able to be offset.
- A tranche of pilot areas were being planned for the recycling of small electrical items.
- Reference was made to paragraph 2.1 of the report which stated that the Council's total of carbon emissions was only about 1% of those for the whole of East Suffolk and the Cabinet Member acknowledged that it was a good point that the Council still needed to lead by example to influence those who generated the other 99%.

Councillor Molyneux arrived at 6.50pm.

- The Cabinet Member stated that she did not know why several environmental themes of the previous Strategic Plan had not been included in the Our Direction 2028 Strategic Plan. The Strategic Director pointed out that there were going to be

differences between the new Plan and the previous administration's ambitions, however, just because it was not specified in the new Plan, a lot of work for example "leading by example" was still happening and the Council was still ambitious and hoped to achieve the top 10 of the country's league tables, even though the emphasis of the new administration might be different.

- The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the Biodiversity and Ecology motion passed at Full Council the previous night should have been done earlier and an action plan would be drawn up to achieve it across the district, in consultation with residents and parishes. Although there was no timetable for the action plan yet, the Cabinet Member stated that she now had a brilliant Assistant who would be able to help move this forward. A budget had also been allocated and, whilst it was still being decided exactly what it would be used for, the Cabinet Member hoped that great initiatives such as Farm to Fork, the Saxmundham Fridge and the provision of more allotments could be rolled out as food resilience was going to be key for communities moving forward. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that Officer capacity was an issue but they were currently looking at having interns and apprentices to help communities run initiatives.
- Following concern being expressed at how well she understood the strategic direction and the budget available, the Cabinet Member confirmed that she had been briefed for the meeting and she thought she was prepared, however, she acknowledged she had perhaps misunderstood what the Committee wanted from her. She added that she was regularly briefed by the Operations Team on waste management issues and she thought she had a good handle on the changes coming in relating to food waste and electrical items for example they were currently sourcing extra caddies that would be attached to the bins.
- The carbon emissions for domestic properties sat under County's remit as the Government deemed them not to be in district councils' scope, however, that did not mean this Council should not do anything and the Housing Team was leading on retrofitting properties including looking at what actions were required to meet the EPC C requirement by 2030 but this would require external funding as the costs were huge.
- Although some leisure centres had already been refurbished, they would still need retrofitting and insulation issues dealt with.
- There was a reputational risk of not meeting the carbon net zero target.
- Potential allotment land across the whole district needed to be scoped but the Cabinet Member acknowledged that it was difficult to obtain land for this purpose.
- The eight priorities under the theme were currently being scoped and an action plan and KPIs would be created to measure progress, although some were already happening as work had started under the previous administration. Informal discussions were also taking place with partners such as Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Flagship, however, it was acknowledged that perhaps more formal dialogue was needed to see where we could work together to deliver the themes and work out if there were any gaps.
- The Cabinet Member stated that, in relation to public transport, the Council had a Joint Transport Planning - inter Parish/District Council meeting with regard to traffic, particularly around Bentwaters but, as we were not the Highways Authority, it was difficult, although there were some small on demand services such as Katch and the Council had its own Walking and Cycling Strategy. The Strategic Director stated that there were a number of opportunities and the

Council worked very closely with the County Council on several projects including the Katch and Buzzabout community transport pilots. He added that the current administration was keen to explore more opportunities to provide community transport. In relation to the Cycling and Walking Strategy it was a key ambition that involved partner organisations and had some resource to deliver it. The Council also had really good links with Transport East, however, community transport was not a district function and it was a massive issue not easily solved.

- The Council was working with the private sector on a plan to install EV chargers at viable locations across the district and it was hoped more would be known in the spring. The County Council had a large amount of funding for the "Plug in Suffolk" project which provided community charging hubs and Officers were working on a shortlist of sites across the district and a few places had shown an interest where there was limited off street parking.
- The Cabinet Member stated that it was difficult to explain how the eight priorities were being scoped as so many things were up in the air at the moment, however, it would soon become obvious what was going to work and what would not. She stressed that, whilst it was not all about money, it would depend on that and ultimately what the residents wanted. The Strategic Director stated that some priorities were more defined than others, for example the Cycling and Walking Strategy had received hundreds of responses from residents and the document helped guide developers when submitting applications to make them sustainable. He added, however, that this administration wanted to take it further hence why it was included in their priorities and a meeting was being arranged to look at the ambitions in the plan, see if anything could be delivered earlier, identify the priorities and see what could be funded, so essentially there would be a filtering exercise to identify gaps and the capacity needed to deliver with a view to sensible priorities being put forward to Cabinet.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member to sum up and she stated that there was a lot happening but stressed that everything would be pinned down and carried forward eg she was looking at water quality and availability, low carbon transport and active travel, low carbon in planning and housing, talking to farmers about sustainable agriculture, ecology and biodiversity and food resilience. She explained that the Government was being lobbied to get better deals for the Council and this portfolio in particular. She felt that the Environmental Task Group were doing great work and there were some great ideas coming from it. She concluded that perhaps everything was not as organised as it could be as a lot was in her head but there was no lack of ambition and having a budget would really help delivery.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and invited the Committee to debate and make any recommendations.

Councillor Jepson stated that, whilst he admired the Cabinet Member's honesty, he was concerned about some of her comments which led him to think that there was not a clear strategic vision for each theme or an indication of the cost. He added that, whilst the vision was great, he suggested the number of key objectives be reduced to two or three to reassure this Committee that Cabinet knew the direction they wanted to take, what they wanted to achieve and what the cost might be. Councillor Lynch agreed stating that having eight priorities was great but at this point he was not reassured that even the first would be achieved.

Councillor Gooch suggested that the Cabinet Member might want to use the Environmental Task Group to help drill down into each of the eight priorities over the next year.

Councillor Clery expressed concern about the lack of detail eg several references had been made to the development of an action plan for the eight themes and he suggested that there should be a deadline for producing the action plan which needed to show the key moments and what would be done.

Councillor Molyneux stated that it would probably be helpful for the Environmental Task Group to receive reports on the priorities to help scrutinise progress. Councillor Plummer agreed, commenting that the Task Group was gradually formulating its work programme but she stated that this scrutiny session had identified that the group really needed to pin things down more effectively.

The Chair expressed surprise at the lack of detail available at the moment on the priorities and asked for more focus and timelines so the Committee could see the direction it was all moving in.

Councillor Jepson stated that it was also unclear how effectively the Council was working with other statutory agencies eg County to deliver the aims of the Strategic Plan and suggested that this matter should be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Lynch suggested that, as a minimum, a plan was needed on how the Council was going to achieve its net zero target by 2030 and the Cabinet Member confirmed that it would be possible to produce such a plan within the next three/four months.

In response to Councillor Gooch, the Strategic Director explained that partnership working was very good especially at County level and they had met with several Town Clerks yesterday but many did not have the resources required to declare a climate emergency even though they wanted to. He added that Leiston was an exemplar and could be used as a model example.

Councillor Jepson suggested the Cabinet Member review all the eight priorities and report back to this Committee in September on three of them eg how they would be delivered, outcomes and projections of the finance implications. The Strategic Director reminded the Committee that the themes had been agreed at Full Council so they would need to go back to Full Council if there was a proposal to change them. He added that prioritisation had been part of this and he stressed that there was a plan in progress setting out the ambitions, priorities, ways to deliver, reporting etc and he would be happy to share it with this Committee. Councillor Lynch requested that KPIs be included otherwise it would be pointless. The Cabinet Member agreed that it would be possible to provide this Committee with evidence of working with statutory organisations and focus on three of the priorities detailing how the objectives would be achieved, perceived outcomes, financial implications and KPIs.

On the proposition of Councillor Jepson, seconded by Councillor Lynch, it was:

RESOLVED

1. That, as agreed, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment create an Action Plan with details of how the objectives will be achieved, the proposed outcomes, costings and KPIs for her top three priorities within the Environmental Theme of the Strategic Plan, to be reviewed by this Committee in September 2024 and the other five to be reviewed at a later date.

2. That the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment also provide information to the meeting in September 2024 on how the Council was working effectively with partner organisations, especially statutory ones, to deliver the Environmental theme of the Strategic Plan.

The Committee adjourned at 7.55pm and reconvened at 8.05pm.

6 Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session

The Chair invited Councillor Smith-Lyte, Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment to give details of the direction of travel for the services within her portfolio eg her vision for the future and what she hoped to achieve. The Cabinet Member reported that her priorities were:

- Involving schools and statutory groups in nature, ecology and biodiversity projects such as the ESH wilding space and rolling it out to other locations in the future.
- Meeting the net zero target by 2030.
- Providing sustainable and as environmentally friendly as possible community transport solutions for residents.
- Linking walking and cycling routes to train stations and community hubs.
- Creating allotment food growing spaces.
- Use apprentices or find money for p/t staff to support projects.
- Hold more community events on carbon neutrality.
- Attend the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership which helped owners install solar panels and EV chargers.
- Attend the Suffolk Food Waste Collection Partnership.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Cabinet Member acknowledged that the loss of greenfield land to build houses was problematic but the Council was having discussions with developers re joined up cycling and walking routes, heat pumps etc. She suggested that swift boxes, hedgehog holes etc were useful and stressed the need for a requisite amount of green space to counterbalance the loss of farmland. She added that changes to the weather were making it difficult for farmers to grow and predict seasons with many leaving the industry. Poly tunnels were needed to protect produce from the rain and new homes needed the facility to harvest rainwater.

Councillor Jepson referred to the difficulty in obtaining land for use as allotments and the Cabinet Member reiterated that they were in the process of identifying potential areas of Council owned land as well as reaching out to other landowners to work with them on providing allotments. She added that they were also encouraging communities to start thinking about food self sufficiency.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged Councillor Lynch's comment that it was a challenge to change people's perception that not having the grass cut in certain places was not about neatness but about nature recovery. She added that people needed to be educated because if they understood why then they were less threatened by it. She stated that this was not just a budgetary issue but there were also difficulties in recruiting staff to ESSL who cut the grass etc. In response to Councillor Lynch's suggestion, the Cabinet Member stated that she liked the idea of encouraging villages to have the most diverse environment rather than the best appearance.

In response to Councillor Clery's query, the Cabinet Member confirmed that buying local and shopping at greengrocers rather than supermarkets was all part of the aim because less food miles usually meant less plastic. She added that she was also talking about having more of a campaign about food waste because so much was wasted and given the cost of living crisis it was interesting to see if food waste reduced.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for her attendance and stated that he looked forward to hearing from her in September as agreed. He added that, in Germany, they had pleasure gardens on the edge of towns to grow food and he suggested that could be replicated here.

7 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Committee was reminded that they had been due to carry out the Review of the Approach to Tackling Anti Social Behaviour on 21 December 2023 but unfortunately the meeting had to be cancelled due to the weather. The Chair thanked Councillor Candy, the Cabinet Member for Community Health, Officers and Suffolk Constabulary for their very comprehensive report and explained that Committee Members had met informally on 16 February 2024 to consider how to proceed with the review. Rather than rearranging the meeting and conducting the review as normal, it had been agreed that a Task and Finish Group would be set up to review the working practices for tackling Anti Social Behaviour to ensure that the Council and Suffolk Constabulary worked together effectively for the benefit of residents.

The Chair referred to the Draft Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group which had been added to CMIS prior to the meeting. In the absence of any proposals to amend the Terms of Reference, the Chair proposed that Councillors Jepson, Gooch, Molyneux, Noble and Plummer be appointed as members of the Task and Finish Group.

On the proposition of Councillor Jepson, seconded by Councillor Plummer, it was

RESOLVED

1. That the Cabinet Member for Community Health's report ES/1787 - Review of Approach to Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour, be noted.
2. That a Task and Finish Group, comprising Councillors Jepson, Gooch, Molyneux, Noble and Plummer, be set up to review the working practices between the Council and Suffolk Constabulary in tackling Anti-Social Behaviour.
3. That the Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group be approved.

The Chair then went on to explain that the Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session with Councillor Candy, Cabinet Member for Community Health, which had also been postponed from the December meeting would be rearranged.

The Committee was reminded that, at their next meeting on 21 March 2024, the main item was the Review of Partnership Working to Tackle Environmental Issues followed by a Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session with Councillor Ashton, Corporate Services portfolio holder.

The meeting ended at 8.40pm.

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Chair