

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

MEETING HELD IN THE REMOTE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Amy Allen and Councillor Steve Jarvis (Chair), (Vice-Chair), Carol Stanier, Chris Hinchliff, George Davies, Gerald Morris and Val Bryant*

In Attendance: *Reuben Ayavoo (Policy and Community Manager), Georgina Chapman (Policy Officer), Caelan Ballard (Committee Clerk), Frank Harrison (Environmental Health Manager), Matthew Clark (Clean Air Programme Manager), Roger Pitman (Air Quality Consultant)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 5 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

55 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 56 seconds

Apologies for absence were received by Councillor Michael Muir and Councillor Juan Cowell.

56 MINUTES - 19 OCTOBER 2022

Audio recording – 3 minutes 5 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen proposed and Councillor Steve Jarvis seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 19 October 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

57 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 41 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded as well as filmed;
- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

58 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 28 seconds

There was no other business notified.

59 **CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT - INFORMATION NOTE**

Audio recording – 4 minutes 42 seconds

The Chair invited Georgina Chapman, Policy Officer, to present.

Ms Chapman thanked the Chair, gave a presentation and advised:

- The Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) is made up of ten districts, Hertfordshire County Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- HCCSP had asked the Council to review the four action plans for Water, Biodiversity, Carbon Reduction and Transport and to present the updated version of the plans.
- This update would include updated contacts, archived actions and delivered actions. All of the targets will be updates using the SMART format.
- The Council had also reviewed the Climate Strategy Plans of other Local Authorities to see how we can partner with local community action groups.
- NHDC was leading in the biodiversity sub-group. We have created a new plan of action and meetings would reconvene on Wednesday 18 January 2023.
- North Hertfordshire's Solar Together bulk scheme had now ended. As a district, there had been 2,262 expressions of interest, which was one of the highest rates in the area.
- Out of those expressions of interest, 410 people had accepted offers and installations had started.
- All installations would be completed by April 2023, and weekly updates covering installation and issues would be received.
- 107 people who already had solar panels installed expressed interest in battery storage. Eighteen of those also accepted their offer.
- As a county, Hertfordshire had 10% more expressive interest than was expected which totalled around 13,000 expressions of interest.
- The Council was awaiting data from iChoosr, the company running this scheme with Local Authorities. This data would illustrate the locations of interest and acceptance within the District.
- The Heritage Foundation had an additional application process for any residents interested in Solar Panels.
- The Behaviour Change subgroup was continuing its work and are due to take a paper to HCCSP.
- The Adaptation subgroup is continuing to identify Climate risks across different areas in the County whilst working with relevant Councils.
- The Council has looked to produce a summary of the Council's Carbon Emission reports completed over the last couple of years. This will give the Council a baseline of Carbon Emissions. This summary would give a baseline for carbon emissions in an accessible format with current Carbon-saving figures. This would be presented to the Cabinet Panel on completion.
- Some items on the Action Tracker were on hold due to the COVID pandemic. This would be reviewed at the start of the Civic Year in May, in collaboration with other Cabinet Panels to find the best way forward.

In response to a question from Councillor Chris Hinchcliff, the Policy Officer advised that:

- iChoosr had collected data as to why some residents rejected their Solar Panel offers.
- Overall, cost was the largest factor affecting participation in the Scheme.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the information report.

60 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio Recording- 13 minutes 30 seconds

The Chair invited Matthew Clark, Clean Air Programme Manager, to give a presentation.

Mr Clark thanked the Chair and gave a presentation, with slides and advised:

- Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) had a commitment to clean air. There were currently 22 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAS) in Hertfordshire, which are areas likely to exceed legal pollution levels.
- In Hertfordshire, Nitrogen Dioxide levels exceeded the legal limit by 40%. Vehicle use was the biggest contributor to this.
- Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM2.5) exceeded the legal limit of 10µg in some areas of Hertfordshire.
- PM2.5 levels had significant and long-term impacts on health and exposure had been linked to certain cognitive impairments such as Dementia, skin conditions, lower sperm quality and was also known to both cause and exacerbate respiratory illnesses such as Asthma and COPD.
- Off the back of The Environment Act 2021, the UK Government had set a target of 10µg of PM2.5 as an annual average by 2040.
- Transport accounted for over 70% of PM2.5 in Hertfordshire with construction, manufacturing and domestic burning also contributing.
- HCC were currently running a part DEFRA funded communications campaign, called 'Lets Clear the Air'.
- The campaign included new graphics being added to buses in Hertfordshire to combat Car Idling, as well as posters to discourage Fuel Burning. Information the public of a free Air Pollutant Alert service run by HCC was also added.
- HCC was also in the final development stages of producing a county-wide Air Quality Model. The Model will give Nitrogen Dioxide, Particulate, and Carbon emission predictions across Hertfordshire, and would provide a baseline for pollutants across the county. The model would also give residents a clear view of what air quality would look like in 15 years if no action is taken.
- This Air Quality Model would be available for all districts and boroughs in Hertfordshire.
- HCC had also produced a comprehensive Air Quality Action Prioritization map of the North Hertfordshire District. This map would be of use to groups such as the County Council's Targeted Highway Urban Tree Planting team.
- HCC continued to act against air pollution through measures such as considering such as cleaner air action, air purification trials and AGMA management schemes.
- In addition to this, the Countryside and Rights of Way had approved and prioritised the planning of a new active-travel off-road route for the Highfield school in Letchworth. The route would reduce the exposure children have to air pollution from the main road.
- Further information can be found on 'Let's clear the air' webpages.

The following Members and members of the public asked questions:

- Roger Lovegrove
- John Webb
- Gilly Chegwyn
- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Councillor Steve Jarvis

In response to the questions, Mr Clark advised:

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- The PM2.5 pollution guideline limit was currently set at 2.5 microns and below. As of 2021, the legal limit in the UK for PM2.5 pollution was 10µg per cubic meter, which must be achieved by 2040. There was no safe level for particulate pollution.
- PM2.5 pollution does not act in the same way as other air pollutants. The further you get from PM2.5 sources, dilution occurs.
- There was research that showed that car tyres release 4kg of particulate matter. Electric Vehicles are heavier than internal combustion engine vehicles and were likely to release more particulate matter.
- It was difficult to enforce an anti-idling policy for all buses in Hertfordshire, but the current campaigning was helping to raise this agenda.
- It was unsure whether the public will be able to use the new off-road route between Hitchin and Highfield.
- Much of the air pollution in North Hertfordshire was not caused by air traffic from the local Luton Airport, but rather because of road traffic.
- The role of Clean Air Programme Manager was quite unique within a County Council at a two-tier level authority, and the pay check is funded by the Sustainable Hertfordshire Team and by the Public Health team. It was likely that there are similar roles in other County Councils, as well as Clean Air specialists.
- In cities like London, there is still a significant amount of Domestic Solid Fuel Burning. Needless burning needs to be reduced, particularly by those who burn needlessly.

The Chair thanked Mr Clark for his presentation.

The Chair invited Roger Pitman, Air Quality Consultant, to give a presentation.

Mr Pitman thanked the Chair, gave a presentation and advised:

- Annual Status Reports (ASR) were a requirement as part of the Environment Act 2021. The report focus on areas where air pollution is particularly significant. Main roads were the greatest source of air pollution in most Local Authorities.
- Historically the amount of air pollution in North Hertfordshire had shown up as 'Poor' in a couple of areas within Hitchin . There were several declared Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's) in Hitchin, such as Stevenage Road and Payne's Park. These both had excessive amounts of Nitrogen Dioxide.
- Air quality had improved significantly in these areas. Due to this these areas could be put forward to have their AQMA status revoked.
- Another key aspect of the ASR was the Air Quality Action Plan.
- The Climate Emergency had 3 priorities: Taking Action, an assessment into North Hertfordshire's Carbon emissions and a 'Road Map to Net Zero'.
- 'Taking Action' included actions such as: switching to green energy and electric vehicles, providing new cycling facilities and tree planting.
- Further actions to be implemented included zero-emission council vehicles, working from home models for staff and providing a better cycling route network around the district. Residents could be encouraged to change their own behaviours through the Council.
- Overall, measures to reduce Climate Change were usually in tandem with measures to improve Air Quality.
- There had been an introduction of a new measure in Hitchin called the Eco Stars scheme. It is centred on freight and delivery management and engages with businesses in the industrial estate to promote low-emission transport. As this measure had a reasonable uptake, this could be extended over Hitchin.

The following Members and members of the public asked questions:

- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Roger Lovegrove

In response to the questions, Mr. Pitman advised:

- Schools and residential areas surrounding Payne's Park and Stevenage Road in addition to an inadequate level of air quality was a significant factor these areas becoming AQMAs. There can be further measures where possible and practical to reduce further transport to and from schools, but they also must reflect the road network and the geography of the area. Further measures could be implemented to reduce further transport, but road network and geography of area must be considered.
- The improvement of vehicle performance and vehicle emissions had been factored into the improvement of air quality within these AQMAs. In the last 10 years there had been a 40% decrease in Nitrogen Dioxide emissions, which proved how much the air quality has improved in recent years,
- Reducing the Particulate Matter in the air remained a priority due to the severe health implications it brings. PM2.5 was harder to reduce as an air pollutant because it was mostly caused by private vehicles and solid fuel burners.
- People would be most exposed to air pollution in larger urban areas so traffic management was a priority. Implementing low-traffic neighbourhoods and clean-air zones would be feasible in some town centres.

Frank Harrison, Environmental Health Manager, further advised:

- The Council were at the beginning of implementing local pollution measures, and were in a position to work with HCC, other Local Authorities and Councillors.
- Most measures revolve around raising awareness but there is a limit to how much we can influence residents.
- Electric Vehicles emit less Nitrogen Dioxide but are expensive. Particulate Matter is still released from Electric Vehicles through general wear, which could increase levels in the air.
- Until larger scale pollution reduction measures are in place, the fight against air pollution would focus on small changes that everyone could make. This would result in a collective reduction in air pollution.

The meeting closed at 9.01 pm

Chair