NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

MEETING HELD AS A REMOTE MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 6TH DECEMBER, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Steve Jarvis (Chair), Amy Allen, Gerald Morris, Michael Muir and Louise Peace.*

In Attendance: *Georgina Chapman (Policy & Strategy Team Leader), Ellie Hollingsworth (Policy & Strategy Trainee) and James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately* 4 *members of the public, including registered speakers.*

82 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 47 seconds

No apologies for absence were received.

Councillors Cathy Brownjohn, Dominic Griffiths, Chris Hinchliff and David Levett were absent.

83 MINUTES - 27 SEPTEMBER 2023

Audio Recording – 3 minutes 01 seconds

Councillor Steve Jarvis, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 27 September 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

84 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 21 seconds

(1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded.

(2) 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.

(3) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared a Climate Emergency. This was a serious decision and means that, as this was an emergency, all of us, Officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.

85 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 00 seconds

There was no other business notified.

86 INFORMATION NOTE: WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023/24

Audio recording – 4 minutes 04 seconds

The Policy and Strategy Team Leader presented the Information Note entitled 'Work Programme for 2023/24' and the appendices, and advised that:

- This meeting would focus on waste, as part of the programme agreed at the first meeting of the Civic Year.
- The Herts Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) had its annual event on 7 November, with North Herts leading on the biodiversity programme.
- Feedback was provided at this event, and this was being reviewed and incorporated into current work.
- The event had been featured on Channel 4 News.
- The second round of the Solar Together scheme had now closed, with 872 people registered. At Monday 4 December, 856 people had applied and 175 had accepted an offer, with the majority of these adding battery storage.
- 41 people had applied for battery storage alone, with 8 people accepting the offer.
- The most common reasons for declining the offer were cost and personal situation of the applicants.
- The average cost of this round was 34% cheaper than market price, which was an improvement on the previous scheme.
- Through the HCCSP, the team were drafting a climate related risk log to identify climate risks to services and the district as a whole. This would be brought together along with equivalent logs from all Councils in Hertfordshire, to identify mitigative actions that could be taken across the county.
- A second round of Home Upgrade Grants had been made available to retrofit properties for those living in fuel poverty.
- There had been three heat decarbonisation plans drafted and submitted as part of the Public Sector Decarbonisation scheme, which were for leisure sites, and a decision was due on these by mid-March 2024.
- The team had continued to monitor the Climate Hive engagement page and had attended events across the district, including the Baldock Ecofest.
- The Community Investment Fund was available to support community groups to build capacity, and climate projects could be included in this.
- On the Action Tracker, completed actions had been removed, a couple of actions alongside other teams were on hold until the Waste Awareness Officer had been appointed and were looking into work around car idling with the HCCSP.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Councillor Louise Peace

In response to questions, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader advised that:

- There had been little change to actions on the Action Tracker since the last meeting, other than the removal of completed actions. Those remaining may take longer to address.
- A clearer idea of when an action had been completed was needed.
- Action on enforcement to prevent idling was being delayed due to resourcing issues.

- There was no further update on the Council action to reduce single use plastic or other items.

In response to questions, Councillor Steve Jarvis advised that:

- The next meeting of the Cabinet Panel was to review achievements from the Civic Year and the review of the Action Tracker could form part of this.
- NHDC could work with the County Council to promote action on idling around schools.

Diane Ketcher advised that she had been in discussions with the Letchworth BID regarding the introduction of a reusable cup scheme across cafes in Letchworth, which would reduce single use waste and offer a discount on products when using the reusable cup.

87 PRESENTATIONS

Audio recording – 17 minutes 36 seconds

The Chair invited Cllr Amy Allen, Executive Member for Recycling and Waste Management, to provide a presentation on waste at Christmas. Councillor Allen advised that:

- As Christmas only happens once a year, it is often not thought about until the last minute, and this impacted on the ability to practice sustainable living at this time of year.
- There was a tendency to indulge more, travel more and buy more over the Christmas period, which often led to waste. Having less at Christmas can be beneficial on both finances and carbon footprint.
- It was important to think about sending cards, especially who to send these to and whether a physical card was necessary.
- The ability to reduce waste at Christmas came from a position of privilege, as many families are having to reduce their expenditure all year round.
- Poorer families often must choose a cheaper, plastic alternative to the sustainable option, as they do not have the financial capacity to afford to live sustainably.
- Some things at Christmas cannot be controlled, but it was important to identify the areas which you can control and make changes to be slightly more sustainable.
- It was not possible to control the actions of others.

The Chair invited David Birley, Waste Aware Co-Ordinator – Herts Waste Partnership, to provide a presentation on reducing food waste. Mr Birley provided a presentation supported by slides and advised that:

- The Herts Waste Partnership existed to promote better understanding of waste, recycling and was reduction, with a specific campaign on food waste.
- The costs associated with producing packaging that ends up in the waste system were increasing and therefore this was an incentive for manufacturers and consumers to think about materials used more cautiously.
- There was a significant drop in waste generated between 2021-22 and 2022-23.
- There were three ways of managing organic waste: In Vessel Composting, Open Window Composting and Anaerobic digestion.
- Almost all organic waste material generated across Herts are processed within Herts, or just outside, and all three methods were available within the North Herts District.
- Of the 49% of residual waste collected in Herts, 56% was non-recyclable with the other 44% being split between dry recyclables (14%) and recyclable organic waste (30%).
- There were two types of food waste. Edible waste which had been brought for consumption but had not been eaten and unavoidable food waste such as peel, skin and cores.

- The impact of edible food waste was that Councils would need to collect this, which would increase the cost to the residents. There was also an environmental impact of this kind of food waste, which contributed to climate change and biodiversity issues.
- Councils collected more edible food waste than unavoidable waste.
- It was important to identify what types of edible foods were being wasted so that a campaign can be organised to address this.
- The cost of living crisis had caused people to reduce their food waste either through necessity or a realisation that whilst some were wasting food, others could not afford to eat.
- There were several UN programmes to address food waste, which had prompted the #WorthSaving campaign in Herts.
- The Herts Waste Partnership (HWP) had developed a simple programme to follow, to encourage people to plan, shop, store and eat properly and linked to other apps and schemes already in existence.
- A pilot took place in Three Rivers which consisted of online content, printed materials, advertising on refuse vehicles and attendance at in person events.
- Over summer 2023, the HWP reached 178,000 people through the above methods.
- The campaign materials were reviewed and revised throughout to ensure effectiveness.

The following Members and members of the public took part in the discussion and asked questions:

- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Diane Ketcher
- John Webb

The following points were raised as part of the discussion:

- Whilst plastic bags from supermarkets had been reduced, they were still available and being used by customers, but the practice should be stopped, and alternatives found.
- Whether a real Christmas tree was more environmentally friendly than a plastic, reusable tree, as real trees were usually grown in the UK on land not suitable for farming or agriculture.
- Reduction of food waste was most effective action to be taken.

In response to questions and discussion points, Councillor Allen advised that:

- There would be bin collections on all days over the Christmas period, except for Christmas Day and Boxing Day, and leaflets had been circulated this week advising of changes to collection dates.
- Food collection would remain weekly over this period, with possible changes to collection days.
- Garden waste bins would not be collected, as there was usually little to collect at this time of year.
- It was important to think about the food people will eat over Christmas and be responsible when deciding. Often tradition leads to people overindulging at this time of year.

In response to questions and discussion points, Mr Birley advised that:

- Up until around 5 years ago, food waste processed through Anaerobic digestion (AD) would produce electricity due to financial incentives available.
- Newer AD plants produced gas that was supplied to the gas grid.
- At the point edible food makes it to AD stage, the damage had been done environmentally, as it was important to use less land for food production and repurpose this land for other means.

- Inedible food waste would need to go to AD, but it was the edible waste that needed to be addressed.
- Processing of North Herts food waste at the Bygrave plant would make most sense in terms of food miles, or the site in St Albans.
- AD had a role to play, but it was important that it was used for what it was designed for.
- It was important to use leftovers effectively, as well as to plan ahead to reduce waste.

Following these discussions, the Chair invited Councillor Allen to provide a short update on the soft plastic recycling trial taking place in Knebworth. Councill Allen advised that:

- The trial was underway in 2000 householding in Knebworth.
- The first collection saw 391 bags of soft plastics collected, this increased by 56% by the second collection.
- The short lead time on the project was likely the reason for the lower first collection rate, as residents were not aware of the scheme.
- Crews were getting feedback from residents on the ground.
- The point of this trial was to identify any issues to be addressed, before rolling out across the district in 2025.

88 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 85 minutes 23 seconds

The Chair invited Robert Sprigge, Knebworth Environmental Group, to provide feedback on the soft plastic recycling trial. Mr Sprigge thanked that Chair and provided the following points, that:

- Collection bags and explanatory leaflets had been left by the kerb and these could have easily blown away. People may have received the bags without knowing what they were for.
- The uptake on his road had been good and cannot think that previously everyone would have been saving this plastic to recycle at a collection point.
- It appeared very easy for refuse workers to handle and manage collections.
- It was said on a Facebook page that it was all combined with residual waste.
- The feedback from the Knebworth Environmental Group had been positive, with the overwhelming view that it was easier than currently.
- Some questions remained around whether making collection of soft plastics easier would encourage their use more widely rather than reducing.
- There were also questions about whether the plastic bags used for the trial would be replaced when rolled out further, and why there was a disparity between what was collected at kerbside and what could be deposited at supermarkets.

In response to the points raised, Councillor Allen advised that:

- A lot of residual waste was sorted through to reduce, as far as possible, what was sent to landfill.
- Knebworth was the only place in North Herts participating in the trial at the moment.
- The leaflets and bags had been delivered by crews on their normal rounds and therefore kerbside was the most suitable place to leave the collection bags and leaflets.
- It was important to know what was in the bag and that the correct things were being collected.
- There was usually a central bin which would collect in multiple loads to deposit into the waste vehicle at once.
- Plastics would also be needed for some things and government was mandating the reduction of this, but this scheme for now prevented items going to landfill.

- This scheme could not accept all plastics, as under the TerraCycle scheme, and was only for soft plastics currently. However, this could widen further, once what is manageable and easy for residents is better understood.

The meeting closed at 9.12 pm

Chair