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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

MEETING HELD AS A REMOTE MEETING VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 17TH JULY, 2024 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Joe Graziano, Dominic Griffiths, Bryony May and Claire Strong.*

In Attendance: *Georgina Chapman (Policy & Strategy Team Leader), Ellie Hollingsworth (Policy & Strategy Trainee), Caroline Jenkins (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lees (Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager) and James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 6 members of the public, including speakers.*

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 42 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tina Bhartwas.

Councillor Lisa Nash was absent.

2 MINUTES - 20 MARCH 2024

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 12 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20 March 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 59 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be 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 both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean 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.
- (4) The Chair advised of a change to the published agenda order and Agenda Item 5 would follow Agenda Item 7 and Agenda Item 8 would follow Agenda Item 9.

4 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business notified.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 109 minutes 03 seconds

The Chair invited Sue Lines to address the Panel, and Ms Lines advised that:

- There were missed opportunities to involve groups and residents in the process to address climate and sustainability issues.
- Previously roadshows had taken place to engage regular people with actions ongoing and changes they could make.
- It would be helpful to know what was being done to help ordinary people who did not have the funds to participate in some of the able-to-pay schemes that the Council had run, such as Solar Together.

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

- Support for lower income families to retrofit homes has centred around funding available from central government, as the Council does not have the budget to support this.
- There were several current schemes being run which would support lower income families to make their homes more energy efficient and the Panel would be kept updated on these accordingly.

6 INFORMATION NOTE: WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

Audio recording – 4 minutes 59 seconds

The Policy and Strategy Team Leader presented the Information Note entitled 'Work Programme Suggestions for 2024/25' and advised that that:

- The Panel was established in 2019 with an aim to set a Work Programme which would encourage discussion with the public, who could share ideas with Officers and the Panel could refer these on for consideration.
- There were several projects which the Council had ongoing, alongside the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) and these would be discussed throughout the meeting.
- The North Herts Prosperity Fund, part of the Shared Prosperity Fund, had been established and agreed at Cabinet earlier in 2024, with £210,000 to support parish and community projects. Criteria had now been developed for applications to this fund and was now open for applications through to 1 September 2024.
- An allocation of funding had been made separately for unparished areas, such as town centres.

The following Members and members of the public asked questions:

- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Bryony May
- Diane Ketcher

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

- A discussion had taken place on the future of the Solar Together scheme, and it was proposed that the Council would not take part in the next round in autumn as the uptake for the second round was lower than the first. It was hoped that a cooling off period would increase interest in uptake of the scheme.
- The Home Upgrade Grant applied to the income of a household. A request had been made to increase the level of household income at which residents would be able to access the scheme to £39,000, but this was refused as it was made part way through the scheme.
- Information provided verbally was covered in the reports pack from the meeting and further information would be provided in presentations throughout the meeting, with slides circulated afterwards.
- Discussions had been held between Officers regarding the roll out of the EcoFlex scheme and the resources required to support this, as well as what documentation was required. It was expected that this would move forward over the next few weeks.
- Organisations who had already received funding from the Council for other projects would likely still be able to apply for further funds from the North Herts Prosperity Fund, but this would be confirmed, and the full criteria circulated to Members.
- The application period was normal for this type of scheme and the application was straightforward, with broad criteria which groups could meet.
- Funds allocated must be spent by the groups by March 2025.
- The Community / Partnerships team would monitor applications and, should it be required, the deadline could be extended. However, there had already been applications received, and further discussions with potential applicants, and so it was unlikely the scheme would be undersubscribed.
- It would need to be explored whether BIDs could make applications to the Prosperity Fund scheme.

The Chair advised that Morrisons also had funding available for registered charities for up to £10,000 to support community schemes.

7 INTRODUCTION TO CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY WORK AT THE COUNCIL

Audio recording – 26 minutes 18 seconds

The Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader and the Policy and Strategy Trainee provided a presentation to introduce Members to the climate and sustainability work ongoing at the Council.

The Policy and Strategy Trainee advised that:

- The Council had declared both a Climate and Ecological Emergency and set out actions which needed to be taken to address these.
- There was a commitment to place environmental responsibilities at the centre of policymaking at the Council, and this meeting would focus on this area, rather than financial sustainability.

In response to a question from Mr Roger Lovegrove, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader advised that the Sustainability SPD was not specifically on the agenda, but that a work scoping item was, and the SPD could be discussed as part of that.

The Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manger advised that:

- His role was to pick up some actions contained within the tracker and ensure that these were worked on, and implemented, where possible.

- Most actions at the Council are driven by the Climate Change Strategy, which had three main focusses, taking action on the Council emissions, enabling actions to support residents and communicating and engaging others.
- An Officer group had been established to ensure cross-Council representation, feed into strategic work and to identify gaps in current policies.
- This group included representation from key areas, such as Property Services, Planning, Enterprise and Community/Partnerships.
- A major source of emissions from the Council was the leisure centres in the district and several actions had been taken to address this.
- Any changes in nation planning policy would be reflected in the SPD when adopted.
- Changes had been made to the fleet at the Council and this was now predominantly electric vehicles, with infrastructure also installed to support this.
- The Green Spaces team, along with contractors, had been implementing policies across the district, including the introduction of bee corridors.
- The Solar for Business pilot scheme had been introduced and it was hoped that 5 businesses would sign up to this initially.

The Policy and Strategy Trainee advised that:

- The North Herts Climate Hive was established in March 2023, and was a platform to update residents and Officers of ongoing relevant actions, funding streams and sustainability tips.
- Monthly briefings were provided to the Executive Member, and this was shared through the Members Information Service (MIS) and at the Staff Consultation Forum (SCF).
- Further internal updates were provided through the Hub, new starter inductions and as sessions delivered as part of ongoing Officer development.
- That Council had been successful this year with a £7.7million bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) to decarbonise the leisure centres in the district. This scheme would include replacing existing boilers with air source heat pumps, retrofit energy efficiencies measures and installation of solar panels. The project was expected to be completed by March 2026.
- A review of the Climate Strategy was started following the all-out elections in May 2024 and the new 4-year administration, to encompass other areas including ecological and biodiversity concerns.

The Policy and Strategy Team Leader advised that:

- There were three arms relating to biodiversity, biodiversity duty, biodiversity net gain (BNG) and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), all of which were required by the Environment Act 2021.
- Since January 2024, the Council had been required to consider what can be done to enhance biodiversity, not just conserve it.
- The Council was now required to publish objectives, policies and actions around this, and regular reviews are required, with the first review due in 2026.
- BNG requires developers to leave the environment in a better state than before development and needed to make a 10% net gain and applied to major developments from February 2024 and minor developments from April 2024.
- Net gains must be legally secured for 30 years.
- Some biodiversity would need to be offset off-site, as it will not be possible to develop net gain onsite, and in the worst case developers can purchase credits from national government, but these were not priced competitively to discourage this option.
- Herts County Council have established a site matching service, so that developers can review available sites for BNG.
- It would be possible for off-site BNG to be provided outside the district of the development, though the aim was to keep this as local as possible.

- The LNRS was a strategy to deal with nature recovery in a comprehensive way, looking at all aspects of nature, and was being led by County Council with support from districts and other stakeholders.
- The HCCSP was established in 2020 and comprises of the County Council, as well as all the district Councils within Hertfordshire, with an aim to drive changes across the county regarding Climate Change and Sustainability actions.
- The Hertfordshire Growth Board works with residents, communities, public sector organisations and businesses to achieve sustainable growth in the county.
- One of the new 6 missions of the Board was 'Sustainable County' and the HCCSP had a specific role in supporting this aim.

The following Members and members of the public asked questions:

- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Diane Ketcher
- Sue Lines
- Roger Lovegrove

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

- There was no current policy regarding solar panels, but clarified that SPDs could not create policy themselves, but needed to strengthen existing policy.
- Developers would need to develop agreements with Councils to support the maintenance of sites identified for BNG.
- Consultation had not yet taken place with social housing providers regarding the installation of solar panels on their stock.
- A successful bid was made by settle previously to complete retrofitting measures on their housing, but this was more focussed on reducing waste.

Councillor Joe Graziano proposed a topic for a future meeting could explore the cross boundary issues with access to household refuse sites, which were now restricted by county boundaries, with rural residents needing to travel further afield to attend a tip.

8 REVIEW OF THE ENVIRONMENT PANEL ACTION TRACKER

Audio recording – 130 minutes 00 seconds

The Policy and Strategy Team Leader led a review of the Environment Panel Action Tracker and advised that as this was a new civic year, the Policy and Strategy team would review the tracker and its presentation to make it more actionable and measurable.

Councillor Claire Strong suggested that items included which do not have direct actions should be removed altogether.

9 WORK PROGRAMME SCOPING FOR THE PANEL FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Audio recording – 119 minutes 21 seconds

The Policy and Strategy Team Leader led a discussion with the Panel regarding the Work Programme and possible topics for future meetings, which could also be provided outside of the meeting via email.

Wednesday, 17th July, 2024

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

- John Webb
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Roger Lovegrove

The following points were raised during the discussion:

- Hertfordshire had a responsibility for many of the chalk streams in the world and the protection of these and whether funding could be sourced from central government or international organisations.
- An application had been submitted for Oughtonhead by Affinity Water to build a nitrate filtration plant and extract water from the site. This needed to be monitored and any impacts on the River Hiz identified.
- Oughtonhead was one of only two locations in North Herts where fresh water can be collected from the surface.
- A review of communications to be produced to support the new waste contract would be a useful piece of work for the Panel to conduct.

The meeting closed at 9.43 pm

Chair