

Extract from minutes of Place Scrutiny Committee – 23 July 2020

Draft Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy for public consultation

The committee received and considered a report which set out the work undertaken by a councillor led Executive Advisory Panel (EAP), working with officers to make recommendations to Dorset Council's Cabinet on actions that would help mitigate against climate change. The EAP had overseen the development of a draft Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy which was included at Appendix A of the report. A detailed costed delivery plan was also being developed for consideration by the Cabinet in October 2020 prior to public consultation. The report highlighted engagement already undertaken with the wider public and key stakeholders and the proposals for consultation with the public on the draft strategy and delivery plan together later this year.

The Chairman noted that he had been a member of the EAP since its formation. He highlighted a concern with regard to the timescale for progressing action in this area and requested pace moving forward. In addition he noted the need for a dedicated lead councillor and officer to drive the work forward and the importance of both internal and external communications. He provided examples of areas already progressed by the council and noted how the council had also had to manage the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic over recent months.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment introduced the report and highlighted that this was a major piece of work by the council which had gone through many informed stages in order to produce the draft strategy for public consultation. He expressed his thanks to officers involved in the work.

The committee was provided with a presentation from officers, which set out the work undertaken to produce the draft strategy and details of the public consultation to be undertaken.

The committee considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion the following points were raised:

- In response to a question as to whether there was enough data available and confidence in order to implement it, it was noted that work was underway and it was hoped to be able to have more accurate information moving forward
- The length of the draft strategy was highlighted and a request made for an executive summary to be produced. There was a need for people reading the document to be aware of the facts in detail and the suggestion was made that a series of executive summaries could be produced around each group of questions

- The Portfolio Holder stressed the importance of communications leading up to and during the consultation period and gave his assurance that this would happen
- A request was made for the committee to have sight of the public consultation document before the consultation period started. In response, the Corporate Director for Place Services confirmed that committee members would be sent a copy of the communications plan and be given an opportunity to contribute to the tools and techniques that would be used
- A question was raised with regard to the cost of implementing the items within the action plan, with no guarantee of funding to be provided from Government, and therefore how the council would raise the required funds
- The Chairman provided examples of areas already being undertaken which included the addition of electric vehicles to the council's fleet
- The Corporate Director noted that the action plan, which was still being developed, would provide information around costings. The action plan and financial consequences would feed into the council's wider budget process and work was being undertaken with partners to explore partnership funding opportunities. Further debate would take place at Cabinet in October 2020
- It was noted that some actions already taken by the council were already funded
- The Portfolio Holder noted that an agreement for a green electricity supply for the council had been signed and electric car charging points had been fitted in some car parks at zero cost to the council and including a percentage of profits
- A point was raised that there was a need to lobby Government with regards to funding in this area
- The point was highlighted that Dorset Council already had low carbon emissions compared to other councils and that the action being taken by the council showed that the issue was being taken seriously
- Reference was made to factors that were out of the control of the council which included national direction on issues, infrastructure and legal requirements. The point was made that Government needed to give councils the tools to be able to lead on and move actions forward within their area
- The Portfolio Holder for Planning reported that discussion had taken place between members of the climate change EAP and the Local Plan EAP. It was difficult at the current time to enforce areas that were not covered by the council's existing local plan policies. Work was being undertaken to bring forward a new local plan but this work would not be completed for another three years. Therefore there was a need for a lead on policy to come through Government
- In response to a point raised, it was noted that issues of fly tipping were dealt with through the enforcement team in waste services,

working with the Environment Agency for major incidences and that incidences of pollution were dealt with by the environmental protection team. The council continued to monitor and deal with any situations where there was potential harm to the environment

- The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment welcomed the comments made by the committee. In addition he emphasised the role that needed to be played by the public
- Councillor Kelvin Clayton addressed the committee and asked whether councillors felt that the strategy acknowledged the urgency associated with the climate and ecological emergency declared by Full Council? He felt that the strategy lacked ambition and without relevant experience, required political leadership to move forward
- The Chairman reiterated his point that the council needed an action plan and to work at pace
- The Portfolio Holder took on board the comments made and noted that the council had a draft strategy to move work forward. It was acknowledged that there was a need for guidance from Government and funding in order to get actions moving at a quicker rate
- The draft strategy set out key areas where Dorset Council would need to take action to directly reduce carbon emissions from its own operations to become a carbon neutral Council by 2040 and by working in partnership to help Dorset residents and organisations achieve a wider carbon neutral Dorset County by 2050
- A point was made that there needed to be political leadership in order to get other organisations on board. In response, the Chairman noted that the council already had very small levels of emissions and was in a position to influence
- Councillor Paul Kimber addressed the committee to express concern with regard to the 2050 deadline for Dorset County and urged that the date be moved forward. He noted there was a key role for Dorset communities in this area
- The Chairman noted that the draft strategy set out a staged message of reduction of carbon emissions
- A message of thanks was given to officers, the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment and the EAP for the work that had been undertaken in the production of the draft strategy.

The committee considered the recommendations set out within the report. The Chairman put forward suggestions for inclusion with the recommendation as follows;

1. That the consultation document be made available to Scrutiny before publishing and that scrutiny members attend the EAP meeting where this is discussed
2. To continue to lobby Government for improved policy and funding
3. To continue to lobby Government to change National Planning Policy at pace to aid climate change

It was proposed by V Potheary seconded by D Taylor

Recommendation to Cabinet

1. To approve the DRAFT Dorset Council climate and ecological emergency strategy for consultation with the public following the development of a costed delivery plan
2. That the consultation document be made available to Scrutiny before publishing and that scrutiny members attend the EAP meeting where this is discussed
3. To continue to lobby Government for improved policy and funding
4. To continue to lobby Government to change National Planning Policy at pace to aid climate change.