

## Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee – 25 March 2021

### Agenda item 5 - Public Participation

#### **Questions relating to agenda item 8 – Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy Consultation Results and Recommended Changes to Final Draft**

#### **1. Questions from Councillor Josephine Parish (questions submitted as an individual councillor and not on behalf of Corfe Castle Parish Council)**

##### Question 1.

When I opened my council tax bill this week, I felt disappointed to find that Dorset Council had yet again missed the opportunity to engage with every householder and business rate payer, on the Climate and Ecological Emergencies (CEE). An information leaflet could easily have been added inside each tax payer's envelope. This opportunity has been suggested regularly since 2019 to Dorset Council by Dorset-based climate and environmental advocacy groups; the inclusion in the Council Tax bill envelope comes with obvious cost savings on postal costs. A well-thought through Communications Plan has even been presented to Dorset Council by one of these groups. These Dorset-based groups are demonstrating their keenness to help the Council crack the challenge of engaging with this largely unengaged group of residents. Since Covid-19, Dorset Council have not held any genuine 2-way public engagement on the Climate and Ecological Emergencies. In contrast these local groups and some Parish Councils have been holding virtual People's Assemblies and virtual public meetings where the public can turn up virtually and 'have their say' at the event live; and without having to submit questions in advance. In terms of responses to the CEE Strategy Consultation these unengaged people make up around 99% of the residents of Dorset. This is a huge challenge but there is light at the end of the tunnel as these local groups are offering to help Dorset Council overcome this challenge. Given the response rate of less than 0.5% of residents that Dorset Council achieved in its consultation process, will the Scrutiny Committee recommend that Dorset Council work closely with Dorset-based climate and environmental advocacy groups and organisations (including Parish & Town Councils) which are clearly able to reach – and communicate with – concerned residents more effectively and are working up ways to reach those residents who are largely unengaged with CEE?

##### Question 2.

In relation to the CEE Strategy Consultation Results and Recommended Changes to the final draft Report, does the Scrutiny Committee think it wise to use the quantitative analysis to conclude [10.2] "that significant changes are not required to the strategy and action plan" when the detailed, informed and expert recommendations from a "number of relevant partner organisations" [9.8] clearly specify "a wide range of significant changes" are required?"

## **2. Questions from Vicki Elcoate on behalf of Dorset Climate Action Network**

Q1 The report to the committee recognises the low level of support for the 2040 and 2050 targets but promises to move 90% of the way to net zero 10 years earlier. We welcome the statement in the paper to the Scrutiny Committee that “the intention is to achieve an 80-90% reduction in emissions 10 years before these dates”. When and how will we see the specific targets for the areas that will deliver that level of 80-90% carbon saving by 2030 for the Council's own operations and how will they be scrutinised and monitored?

Q2 Given that the report acknowledges the low level of public support for the 2050 target, which is the most significant in terms of delivery of the majority of carbon savings required, how will the targets set by other organisations who will deliver these savings be scrutinised and monitored by Dorset Council to ensure they are urgent and ambitious enough?

## **3. Question from Annerose Weiler on behalf of XR Dorset Advocacy**

On behalf of XR Dorset Advocacy, I am submitting the following question (source of information is [www.dorsetecho.co.uk](http://www.dorsetecho.co.uk); 6 March2021):

Question RE: Specifics of how £19 million Salix grant will be spent

This month Dorset Council announced they had received £19 million of central government grant funding to help tackle the climate and ecological emergency. Dorset Council have expressed that the money will be targeted specifically at four areas:

1. All properties supplied by oil or LPG, suitable for heat pump heating solutions
2. Leisure centres eligible for advanced heat-pump technology for pools and air handling, as has been installed at Gillingham
3. A selected number of larger gas-supplied properties where heat pumps or hybrid heat pump solutions are suitable. These will include some larger offices and Tricuro sites
4. Installation or upgrade of our Building Energy Management System equipment across most of the estate, enabling improved or continued energy efficiency savings.

It is expected that each project will change heating systems from fossil fuels to electric heat pumps, and backed up by energy reduction through improvements to building fabric (insulation etc.) and switching to LED lighting. Each building will

also have renewable energy generation in the form of roof mounted solar panels.

Dorset Council also stated that all works under this grant must be completed and commissioned by September 2021, which is at most only 6 months away.

Replacing heating systems is likely complex and takes time, often requiring the building(s) to be shut down or at least parts to be out of action.

Can the Scrutiny Committee establish how the £19 million is apportioned to each of the named projects (how many millions for each of the four areas), and is there any contingency plan for spending some of the money on other projects e.g. C&EE community initiatives, should it become apparent that the work cannot be completed in the required time frame?

Considering the recent rise in Council Tax, this could be felt to be a sensitive issue by Dorset taxpayers and may therefore carry reputational risk to Dorset Council.

#### **4. Question from Julie-Ann Booker on behalf of Dorset Action**

##### **Due Diligence to embed the CEE Strategy across all strategies**

In February 2020 Dorset Council adopted their overall Council Plan 2020 – 2024. During the consultation process there was strong representation that having declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) in May 2019, one of the key priority themes for the Council Plan should be the CEE.

Council decided that rather than being a separate priority, the CEE would be a cross cutting theme included across the entire plan.

Minutes of 18 February 2020 full council meeting record that: “People were generally supportive of the five overall priorities and following consultation changes had been made to reflect that CEE was a cross-cutting theme that must be emphasised across the entire the plan”.

The Council Plan (p.7) noted that in 2011 renewable energy produced in the Dorset area was only 1% of demand. By 2016 this had only risen to 5.5%.

The draft CEE strategy has a specific Action Plan for Renewable Energy.

One action is to “Lobby central government over the major hurdles to renewable energy deployment, the Navitus Bay decision, investment needed on grid infrastructure and future of heat”.

Another action is to “Work with renewable energy developers in Dorset to secure new renewable energy generation to meet (and exceed) needs of Dorset Council.

Following consultation on the CEE strategy the report being considered today makes no changes to either of these actions having taken account of comments received during consultation.

However the draft Local Plan, recently out for consultation, states (3.7.6.) “When refusing the proposed Navitus Bay Wind Park, the Secretary of State accepted that the proposals would change how the WHS (World Heritage Site) would be experienced or enjoyed in its surroundings, and so would have adverse implications for the site’s significance and OUV (Outstanding Universal Value). Consequently, how a development could adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the World Heritage Site will be a consideration when determining planning applications”.

This implies that Dorset Council is proposing, as part of the Local Plan, to oppose any off shore wind farms visible from the Jurassic Coast (as well as any other development that affects the 'enjoyment' of the coast’).

This seems to be in direct contradiction to the draft CEE strategy and illustrates that the draft Local Plan (surely a key council strategy) has not embedded the CEE strategy so does not meet the clear requirements and framework of the overall Council Plan.

**Question: Is Scrutiny Committee satisfied there are sufficient due diligence processes and links in place to ensure that all key strategies embed the CEE Strategy and if not what recommendations will you make to rectify this?**

**5. Question from Andrew Carey (submitted as company director, individual Char Valley parish councillor and resident)**

A number of responses to the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy Consultation, including the collective response from Dorset Climate Action Network and the response from Char Valley Parish Council, called for Dorset Council to champion local ideas, initiatives and knowledge in order to create a “Vision for Dorset” and position itself as a visionary and far-sighted 'climate-progressive' authority. In this way the council could engage with the public, galvanise action by local businesses and individuals and create momentum for change. Does the Scrutiny Committee agree that the '*Report on the Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy Consultation results and recommended changes*' (Agenda Item 8) misses a very important opportunity to adopt this (very low cost) idea.

## 6. Question from Dr Sandra Reeve

On page 103 of the report, informed organisational response reveals that the proposed action on the Climate Emergency is not matched by action on the Ecological Emergency. For example, Dorset Wildlife Trust is quoted as saying: 'The action plans have a column for CO2 saving, but nothing for ecological gain. There is no ecological equivalent to the section Action Against Climate Change which runs from p16-17 or Carbon Emissions and Achieving Net Zero p18-20 or Carbon Budgets – pathways and trajectories p21-22. Does the Scrutiny Committee think that this is an admissible omission within a Climate and *Ecological* Strategy and Action Plan in 2021?

## 7. Questions from Caz Dennett

### Question 1 on C&EE Strategy Consultation Survey Quality

The C&EE Consultation Results and Recommended Changes to Final Draft says, "The lowest level of positive net agreement was around the target dates of 2040 and 2050 although when the results from the short survey are included the level of support dramatically increases. Some respondents questioned the urgency of the targets and suggested that the dates should be moved forward" [9.10].

- long survey: "Do you agree with the target?"
- short survey: "Dorset Council wants to be carbon neutral by 2040... Do you think it is a great idea?"

This latter question leaves no room for a respondent to say "it is a good idea in principle but the target date is wrong". It is commonly **bad practice** in survey design, to ask leading questions that state a desired position or outcome. The Market Research Society (professional body for research, insight and analytics), gives very clear guidelines on this (page 19 of the MRS Guidelines for Questionnaire Design)

<https://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/2014-09-01%2520Questionnaire%2520Design%2520Guidelines.pdf>

*"Researchers should take particular care to ensure that participants are not lead to a particular answer...**Positive phrases such as "the proposal is a good idea" in a question without a balancing negative phrase may lead the participant to a positive view of the proposal under consideration"***

The poor questionnaire design of the short survey, places a question mark over the reputation of Dorset Council to be able to seek public opinion in a fair and balanced way. By the Council's own admission, the results from the flawed question in the short survey significantly changed the outcome of the consultation

with regard to the target dates by which the Council and the county should be zero-carbon.

**Does the Scrutiny Committee recognise that the conclusion in the report is invalid because the two surveys asked significantly different questions and the short survey question is leading and biased according to opinion research guidelines?**

**Question 2 on decision not to adjust target dates**

In the graph titled: Overall Net Agreement (all questions) on page 5 of the Consultation Response Report, the Net Agreement for the target dates is significantly lower than that for all other aspects of the Strategy and Action Plan that have used a quantitative measure.

Reliance on Net Agreement scores masks the true public response; a great many respondents indicated that they agreed with the Council's approach whilst calling for changes/amendments especially to target dates.

**Given the comparatively low Net Agreement for the target dates of zero carbon for Dorset Council by 2040 and 2050 for Dorset overall, and the highly questionable design of the short survey which lead participants towards a positive response, will the Scrutiny Committee ask why Dorset Council concludes "The target dates will remain as 2040 Dorset Council itself and 2050 for the wider Dorset Area" and recommend they bring the dates forward?**

**Questions relating to agenda item 9 – Dorchester Office Strategy**

**8. Question from Mary Calvert**

South Walks House is central and accessible with good public transport links, whilst County Hall is relatively hidden away , remote and inaccessible. In the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), what public access problems have been identified for:

1. the physically impaired
2. the partially sighted and blind
3. the hearing impaired and deaf?

Are you satisfied that these have been given sufficient attention and weight in this proposal?

## **9. Question from John Calvert**

I have been a resident of Dorchester for 10 years now and have appreciated the building of South Walks House putting facilities in a central position in the town. Indeed I attended a meeting of the Shadow Unitary Council in that building and asked if the Council was going to rely on its staff expertise or spend money on consultants and was assured the former.

In item 9 the Council mentions the use of at three consultant firms at least looking at various aspects of the proposals.

One to look at Colliton Park, and two others to look at South Walks House. So no overall advice.

My question is - How much will the Council pay for these reports because the cost is not obvious in item 9, surely the Council is spending our money to learn how to spend more money?

### **Questions related to other issues**

## **10. Questions from Helen Sumbler**

Q1 Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) Implementation Plan Four was due to be published in April 2020 to cover 2020 to 2023. As a resident who has worked in public transport for over 38 years, and given that transport accounts for the highest percentage of carbon emissions by both Dorset Council and the County as a whole, that the Dorset Local Plan includes commitments to “focus travel onto active travel and public transport options”, and critically that the draft Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy states, in terms of progress so far, that “Dorset’s Local Transport Plan already demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainable transport policies and carbon reduction”, could I ask the Scrutiny Committee to explain why it is acceptable that no current Implementation Plan exists for LTP3 and what actions are being taken by Dorset Council, in conjunction with BCP Council, to address this significant omission?

Q2 Could I also ask how work is progressing to produce an updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan (the existing Dorset County Council plan runs from 2011 to 2021) and when this new plan might be published?