

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
10 SEPTEMBER 2024, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Jacobs (Chair)
Councillors P Boylan, E Buckmaster,
R Carter, N Clements, C Horner, S Marlow,
S Nicholls, M Swainston, G Williams,
S Watson and D Woollcombe

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors B Deering and T Hoskin

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Erica Gant	- Electoral Services Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Peter Mannings	- Committee Support Officer

130 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Andrews, Cox, McAndrew and Thomas. It was noted that Councillor Watson was substituting for Councillor Cox and Councillor Marlow was substituting for Councillor Thomas.

131 MINUTES - 1 JULY 2024

Councillor Swainston proposed and Councillor Buckmaster seconded, a motion that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

132 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reminded Members to use their microphones as the meeting was being webcasted.

133 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

134 COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability submitted a report inviting Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the council's actions in reducing its carbon footprint in line with its commitments in the Climate Emergency declaration passed by Council on 26th July 2023.

Members were advised that the report provided the opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny to review the issues involved and share views and ideas about tackling climate change with the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability.

The Executive Member said that the council had unanimously approved the making of a climate emergency declaration on 26 July 2023, and this built on a climate change declaration made by Council on 24 July 2019. He said that the council had maintained its commitment to becoming a net zero carbon council by 2030.

The Executive Member emphasised that the council had also committed to reducing its emissions to a minimum by

2027 and had also identified a pathway for offsetting any residual emissions. He said that the analysis was based on the carbon emissions report which was referenced in the document and was also available on the council's website.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability invited Members to consider the recommendation and pass any comments to him for his consideration when determining priorities and actions.

Councillor Buckmaster asked what the council would consider to be a minimum in terms of emissions so that the council knew what progress was being made. The Executive Member said that 75% of the 2019 emissions were committed due to the Combined Heat and Power (CHP) boilers installed at the leisure centres. These units were one of the largest emissions within the council's footprint and the second one was the diesel vehicles used for waste collection.

The Executive Member said that the council needed to evaluate whether it was cheaper to reduce emissions or to offset the emissions. He said that this piece of work was being carried out in collaboration with the University of Hertfordshire.

Councillor Clements commented on the disparity between the 40% carbon reduction identified in the 2021 sustainability plan and the current prediction of 25%. He referred to the current figure of 17% and the detailed roadmap for how the figure could reach 37%. He commented on the current listed actions and asked about the confidence level that the 25% level could be reached.

Councillor Clements said that the big-ticket items that might make a difference for reducing carbon would be delivered in 2026/27, and this did not leave much leeway if these measures did not work out.

The Executive Member acknowledged that there was

some uncertainty in this phase and whether it was worth replacing a gas boiler with an air source heat pump or better to invest in some offsetting measures locally. He said that a piece of work had been commissioned with the University of Hertfordshire in conjunction with the Hertfordshire Climate Change Group. The Executive Member summarised the 5 topics to be covered by the research.

The Executive Member confirmed that more offsetting would need to be considered to reach a net zero position. He referred in particular to the future electrification of HGVs and said that smaller six and a half tonne vehicles would all be electric.

The Head of Housing and Health referred to the carbon emissions report and referred to assumptions in respect of offsetting. He said that the figures were being refined and he talked about moving over to a non-carbon tariff for the 6% of the council's electricity which was still on a carbon tariff. Members were also advised that the full impact of the council's electric vehicle (EV) fleet would be factored in.

The Head of Housing and Health also advised that more business travel being via the EV fleet and the removal of gas at BEAM could also be factored in. He said that the council was also talking to SLM (the leisure provider) in respect of what more could be done at the leisure facilities which accounted to 48% of the council's emissions.

Councillor Carter asked if there were standard ways that councils measured carbon emissions. She referred to the difficulties in comparing emissions from council to another. The Executive Member said that across Hertfordshire there was a more standard approach for measuring emissions. He said that there was not yet a model for what to do with regarding the offsetting the residual waste that could not be offset.

Councillor Horner said that he would like to see more detail in respect of offsetting. He said 2027 was not far away in terms of working out policies for how to do that. The Executive Member said that the council would be better informed but would then have to translate the academic outcomes of the university study into a practical piece of work.

The Executive Member said that the council would have to evaluate both the cost and effectiveness of offsetting the council's carbon footprint. He said that if offsetting was impractical beyond a certain point, the only other option was to get into carbon reductions.

Councillor Nicholls asked if Member activity had been considered within the staff figures for carbon emissions. She referred in particular to Member travel and how this compared to the district as a whole as a percentage.

The Executive Member said that the council did not include councillors and their travel patterns in the calculations and no authorities in Hertfordshire had factored in IT footprint. He said that officers had the option to work from home and the council make significant use of the IT to reduce travel by using email and Microsoft Teams.

The Head of Housing and Health referred to the council's 2022 – 2026 climate change strategy, which was due to be renewed in a year's time. Councillor Swainston asked for and was given some clarity in respect of the offsetting of carbon emissions and trees and the introduction of newer more efficient diesel-powered waste disposal vehicles.

The Executive Member and the Head of Housing and Health responded to further questions from the committee regarding Officer and Member travel and carbon offsetting.

Councillor Williams said there were a lot of car parks in

Ware, all of which were in locations people wanted to use such as the library, doctors' surgeries, and the train station. He said that none of these car parks had safe bike storage points.

Councillor Williams also commented on drainage and the flood risk to Musley Lane and the lack of tree coverage to slow the effect of rainfall and prevent flooding. He mentioned the problem of blocked drains as run off from precipitation picked up detritus. He asked if the focus should also be what benefits net zero could bring to communities.

Councillor Buckmaster said that there needed to be an open and honest conversation about how much more carbon could be reduced in a more traditional way. He said that the council should look at the waste contract specifically and it would be in everyone's interest to increase recycling rates and removing the carbon element. He said that the council needed to look for the most impactful things that could be done to reduce carbon.

The Executive Member and the Head of Housing and Health commented on the future electrification of the waste vehicle fleet and the EV vehicles that were available for staff to use for business travel.

The Head of Housing and Health responded to a question from the chair regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and decarbonisation projects. Councillor Boylan commented on working with households in respect of decarbonisation plans. He referred in particular to the significant number of listed buildings across the District.

Councillor Clements proposed and Councillor Nicholls seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny had considered the council's progress to date in reducing its own carbon footprint to an absolute minimum and identifying a pathway to offset its residual carbon and had passed comments to the Executive Member for

Environmental Sustainability for his consideration when determining priorities and actions.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - that Overview and Scrutiny had considered the council's progress to date in reducing its own carbon footprint to an absolute minimum and identifying a pathway to offset its residual carbon and had passed comments to the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability for his consideration when determining priorities and actions.

135 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee Support Officer submitted the work programme report and drew Members' attention to the Appendix containing the items identified by Members at the workshop held on 11 June 2024.

The Committee Support Officer reminded Members to complete the scrutiny proposal form circulated by email on 12 June 2024. He said that this was particularly important for the housing topic for the November meeting.

Councillor Carter mentioned glyphosate and the officer briefing paper that had been circulated to Members. She said that she would like to see this matter come to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a meeting. Councillor Carter said that it would be useful to see to what extent the council was using glyphosate and what could be done to minimise it. Councillor Horner said that he would be happy to talk to Councillor Carter about putting in a scrutiny proposal.

The Chair sought the committee's views on moving the housing item from 5 November on the forward plan to later in the civic year given the substantial proposed

changes to the planning process announced by the government. He commented on the clear relationship between these changes to planning and housing.

Councillor Boylan said that he was supportive of delaying this matter to later in the civic year until there was more clarity in terms of the impact of these changes. The Chair said that moving housing to March 2025 would leave a gap for 5 November which could be filled by considering glyphosate.

The Chair said that he had attended a meeting of the Joint Administration Steering Group and a number of items had come out of the discussions for possible considering by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He referred to the consideration of the parking engagement strategy in January 2025.

Councillor Swainston raised the topic of air source heat pumps and the council's planning policy on this matter. The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability referred to 3 ongoing appeals and whether the committee should discuss planning policy out with specific cases that were out to appeal.

Councillor Woollcombe proposed and Councillor Nicholls seconded a motion that the 2024/25 Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme in Appendix 1, be agreed subject to the following changes:

- Glyphosate considered on 5 November 2024
- Parking Engagement Strategy considered on 14 January 2025
- Housing topic moved to 4 March 2025
- Additional items in the email sent to Overview and Scrutiny by the chair on 5th September 2024

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the 2024/25 Overview and

Scrutiny Committee work programme in Appendix 1, be agreed subject to the following changes:

- Glyphosate considered on 5 November 2024
- Parking Engagement Strategy considered on 14 January 2025
- Housing topic moved to 4 March 2025

Additional items in the email sent to Overview and Scrutiny by the chair on 5th September 2024.

136 URGENT ITEMS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.47 pm

Chairman
Date