

## **Minutes of the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee**

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2022 at 6.00 pm  
in the Council Chamber at the Council House, Priory Road,  
Dudley**

### **Present:**

Councillor D Corfield (Chair)  
Councillor P Dobb (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors C Barnett, R Collins, T Creed, C Eccles, J Elliott, J Foster, M Hanif, S Henley, M Rogers, T Russon and P Sahota

### **Dudley MBC Officers:**

B Heran (Deputy Chief Executive), A Vaughan (Interim Director of Public Realm), G Scholes (Interim Lead for Climate Change) and M Johal (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

### **Also in attendance:**

Councillor R Clinton (Cabinet Member for Waste Management and Climate Change)

Together with 9 members of the public.

### **1 Chairman's Introduction**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Committee and stated that it was a very important Scrutiny Committee which aimed to cover climate change and environmental issues. To enable proper Scrutiny to take place each meeting would be limited to one or two items.

The meeting were informed that for this meeting a time limit of 3 minutes would be set to allow individual members of the public to speak during the Public Forum item. However, there would also be an opportunity for members of the public to speak during discussion of Agenda Item No 5 should comments be related to that particular item.

Time limits for specific agenda items would be reviewed at future meetings at the discretion of the Chair.

## 2 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors C Bayton, K Casey and K Shakespeare.

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## 3 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was reported that Councillors M Hanif, P Sahota and T Creed had been appointed to serve as substitutes for Councillors C Bayton, K Casey and K Shakespeare respectively for this meeting only.

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## 4 **Declarations of Interests**

No Member made a declaration of interest, in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct, in respect of any matter considered at the meeting.

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## 5 **Public Forum**

A member of the public made comments about climate change and stated that finite fossil fuels were coal, oil and gas giving off greenhouse gases that enhanced the natural greenhouse effect. The natural greenhouse effect made life on earth possible. However, it was considered that the burning up, over 300 years, of our one-off geological inheritance was enhancing that natural greenhouse effect to raise temperatures to make life uninhabitable on earth, which was called human-induced climate change. Therefore, there was an urgent need to drastically reduce greenhouse gases by reducing our use of fossil fuels.

The following proposals to reduce use of oil and gas and on spending less were made:-

- Using a self-powered bike or a bus to attend Council meetings
- Switching off lights when vacating a room, particularly in the Council House
- Turning down the temperature of a room and wearing additional layers of clothing
- Buying less and making everything last longer
- Insulating Council offices and residential homes to the maximum possible
- Installation of secondary, double or triple glazing
- Using cars as little as possible and increasing walking, cycling and use of public transport
- Scrapping Metro tram extensions as they had spoilt and even destroyed railway lines and infrastructure in the Black Country and Birmingham
- Reinstate the commuter and regional trains back on the 120 km Black Country Railway “of national strategic significance” that had not yet been turned into the £500 million, 10 kms Dudley Tram

- Bring in fair, free public transport to reward everyone using buses, trains and trams, with traffic priority for buses on the inside lane and stiff financial penalties for vehicles not registered as essential users on main roads, within the outer Ring Road, during rush hour
- Move Council offices to more energy efficient buildings such as those at the Waterfront and to use the railway line
- To cancel the climate busting concrete and steel, double-track railway/tram viaduct to smother the carbon-absorbing grass, soil and trees/shrubs on Dudley's premier canal embankment at Merry Hill.

## 5 **Discussion on Terms of Reference and Work Programme for the Committee for 2022/23**

The Committee received a presentation from the Deputy Chief Executive with input from the Interim Director of Public Realm and the Interim Lead for Climate Change on tackling climate change together with the proposed Work Programme for the Committee for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

In presenting the information it was highlighted that it was vital to work collaboratively with partners, businesses and communities to achieve long term goals. Particular reference was made to the United Nations – 17 Goals which would be referred to regularly with a view to developing Dudley's Action Plan which would be included in the Committee's Work Programme for appropriate scrutiny.

The Interim Director of Public Realm referred to Dudley's inhouse fleet vehicles that required replacing and also on the need to review the incineration service and associated financial consideration as the waste management contract was due to expire in February, 2023. A company had also been commissioned to develop the waste strategy, of which carbon was a key component, and once options were available these would be submitted to the Committee for consideration.

The Deputy Chief Executive indicated that Council Directorates used various methods in their Sections to minimise the impact on the environment, however, it was acknowledged that these needed to be brought together and incorporated onto a "dashboard" for easier assessment and analysis.

Arising from the presentation, members of the public from various organisations were given the opportunity to make their comments which included the following:-

- Reference was made to the need for public support and input such as via the setting up of a citizen's climate assembly in Dudley
- It was considered that the Green Care Team in Dudley created a barrier to biodiversity, particularly on their mowing methods
- The Council's renewable energy supplier needed reviewing as it was considered the organisation were not a 100% renewable energy supplier
- Reference made to traffic congestion which impacted on children as they were unable to play outside and the need to reduce car dependency by introduction of various schemes such as encouraging walking to school



- The instructions for recycling were not clear and these needed to be reviewed for ease of understanding
- Protection of the natural environment was vital due to its absolute crisis and it was explained that insects, species and flowers were dying and drastically reducing as they were being destroyed through over enriching grass and the ground. The use of fertilisers to tidy edges also needed to be reviewed as it had a knock-on effect.
- It was considered that Heath Lane in Stourbridge was one of the highest polluted areas in the country and proposed air quality improvement plans, particularly in that area would be welcomed.
- Reference was made to electric bicycles, however there were no dedicated cycle lanes and future plans on any proposals were queried.
- The need to work with schools to encourage cycling and walking to and from school
- Review the use of glyphosate weedkiller as it contributed to the decline of insects
- Better information and communication to the public on grants available for insulating homes

Members then made comments including the following:-

- Reference was made to the Black Country Plan and that it was integral to climate change
- The Black Country Plan had many challenges and although consultation had taken place it was not certain concerns on biodiversity and the impact on the environment had been adequately addressed
- There had been a decrease in public transport owing to the lack of demand and it was considered that this had been contributed by there being no proper strategy to encourage the use of public transport
- Reference was made to Fens Pool and the uncertainty of the impact from additional developments and whether overall consideration had been given to the impact of proposed developments on green belt sites
- The need to work jointly with Future Council Scrutiny Committee on issues around the Black Country Plan with a view to addressing concerns
- The need to ensure residents and businesses were involved and engaged in work programmes
- In the Council Climate Plan Scorecards website, Dudley scored zero in all Sections which had been highlighted by the press
- The Council did not have a dedicated section on climate change on the website to include assistance and links to grants
- Transport and housing were two key areas for scrutiny
- The impact of the Metro on green spaces and natural habitat, and given its connectivity to Merry Hill, the conflict in encouraging people to buy less
- It was considered that greenspaces and natural habitat should be considered earlier in the work programme of the Committee
- Feedback on trials of the use of non-pesticides was requested



- The need to encourage Planning to be stricter with developers in relation to green agendas for proposed developments
- The Stourbridge Household Waste Recycling Centre did not serve the needs of residents as it only opened from 8 am to 4 pm and was not accessible to all
- The need to be specific on items and elements to be scrutinised given climate change and the environment were massive topic issues and cross cutting
- Green care issues related to blocked drains, weedkiller use and litter contributing to fly tipping and the need to review practices
- The need to have a baseline to work to including best practice from other Local Authorities
- An assurance that resources were available for delivery of proposed actions

The Cabinet Member for Waste Management and Climate Change acknowledged concerns and points made and explained about the ongoing work being undertaken in the background, particularly on short term outcomes that could be delivered quickly. One of the short-term proposals was to focus on schools with a view to encouraging each school to develop their own strategy to monitor air quality, which could include low speed zones in the vicinity. Businesses were also being encouraged to be environmentally friendly, particularly on any proposed developments in the area, with the possibility of making requirements mandatory.

Arising from a query about the Climate Change Group, the Deputy Chief Executive clarified that although regular feedback would be provided to this Committee on its work, the group was separate to this Committee. It was further indicated that the group would include input from residents.

It was noted that at each meeting the items for discussion at the forthcoming meeting would be reviewed to reflect any changes that might arise from time to time.

In concluding the debate Members agreed that Working Group meetings should be held as and when necessary and that a site visit to Lister Road be arranged in due course.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the terms of reference for the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee be submitted to the next meeting for noting.
- (2) That the work programme of the Committee be confirmed in line with the programme of business below, subject to the need for flexibility to reflect any changes that might arise during the municipal year:

### **Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2022**

Overview report showing operational progress across Council Teams

Update on progress with Air Quality Monitoring and Filtering

Progress with developing Climate Change Strategy, Action Plan and performance management arrangements

Developing the programme for engagement across the Borough – our workforce, our partners, our residents and businesses

Progress with Street Cleansing and Green Care (Including protection of our Greenspaces and Natural Habitat) and moving to a greener delivery model

### **Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2022**

Overview report showing operational progress across Council Teams

Update on Waste Management Strategy to include plans around the future development of the energy from waste plant based at Lister Road, the proposed options to maximise recycling through changes in our waste collection system

Transport Fleet Strategy and Green Transport

### **Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2023**

Overview report showing operational progress across Council Teams

Review of Corporate Estates

- (3) That the following specific elements be included in the Work Programme for detailed scrutiny whilst considering the relevant topic items:-

Cycling Provision in Dudley

Dudley Council's Climate Plan Scorecard

Transport and Housing performance indicators related to Climate Change and Environment

Stourbridge Household Waste Recycling

Pesticides

Biodiversity

- (4) That Working Group meetings be arranged on an ad hoc basis, as and when necessary, throughout the year.
- (5) That the Lead for Law and Governance, following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, be authorised to make all the necessary arrangements to enable this Committee to undertake its programme of scrutiny work during the 2022/23 municipal year.

The meeting ended at 7.57 pm

CHAIR



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