

Scrutiny Task and Finish Group - Climate Change/Sustainability - 01/09/20

The second table showed the emissions in sectors, with industry and commercial having the largest reduction in emissions, followed by domestic. Transport saw a slight increase from 2013 which had started to reduce in 2017.

The Chair saw these as impressive reductions across the Borough and asked what the key drivers were. Joanne Halliday advised that these were outlined in the Sustainable Environment Plan at paragraph 1.38. A copy of the Plan was appended to the report.

The key aspects of the Plan were outlined at paragraph 1.38 of the report. These were Policies which could influence how the Council operates.

The Plan looked at three areas of Policy development: Local Plan, Taxi Policy and Air Quality.

In addition, Travel looked at ways of getting people to invest in modern / electric vehicles, cycling and scooters.

Assets. This area was diverse as to what the Council could do in terms of carbon capture, tree planting and whether the Council was making the best use of its land.

Keele University was very energy efficient and the Council could work with them.

As a property owner, the Council needed to understand its energy usage and was looking to award a contract for energy monitoring, having now been out to Tender.

The Council had not invested in its street lighting for many years and the possibility of LED lights could be a consideration for the future.

The question had been asked whether the Council should have solar and/or wind farms situated within the Borough. Councillor Fear felt that wind farms were not attractive and very ineffective. Reference was made to the wind farm situated off the coast of North Wales. Councillor Fear stated that, on a recent visit none had been turning and added that there were many small things that could be done which would be more effective. In respect of solar panels, Councillor Fear asked what there was on top of Castle House as an example. Such panels would look ugly in the countryside and would be better situated in areas that couldn't be seen.

Councillor Rout stated that there was good evidence that the North Wales wind farm did produce a high output and agreed with Councillor Fear regarding solar panels in the countryside. Councillor Rout added that sustainable energy was important for future generations.

Councillor Reddish agreed that wind farms were one of the ways forward.

Councillor Fear advised Members that there had once been talk of developing a vertical turbine at Keele University and asked if they could be approached to see what progress was made.

Councillor Holland agreed with Councillor Fear and advised that Keele did a lot of work on energy efficiency and there were a lot of questions that they could be asked on the subject.

Councillor Rout suggested that it may be of interest to acquire information on what happened with geo thermal output.

Councillor Holland stated that he would prefer to see a Council that used its assets in a natural way and that tree planting was best.

Councillor Fear agreed that tree planting was a good idea and suggested that local specimen trees were planted.

The Chair asked if a benchmarking exercise had been carried out with other authorities as to what could be classed as best practice?

Councillor Fear stated that the most important thing for the Borough at this present time was getting it 'back to work' following COVID-19. There were no buses at night and with a lot of 'night-time economy' businesses on the brink, the Council did not want to affect taxis. Could bus companies be approached to extend their night service to ensure that the night-time economy and the jobs that go with it, stay in the Borough?

Councillor Holland advised that the natural benchmark for the Taxi Policy would be Stoke on Trent City Council and stated that the Council needed to align with other authorities in the immediate area.

The Chair stated that Councillor Fear's point was an important one and that the Committee had to keep in mind that it was a 30 year Plan. The Council needed to have information available which could be updated in a timely fashion.

Councillor Reddish agreed that work must come first but that climate change must also be addressed. The Council must not lose sight of what could be done with taxis.

Councillor Johnson asked if funding was available for the eleven proposed electric car charging points in the Borough.

Joanne Halliday confirmed that funding was now available as part of the Air Quality work with other authorities. It was yet to be agreed where they would be situated, which would need to be at key sites. In addition, the private company needed to be approached and lease terms agreed.

Councillor Fear enquired as to how secure the charging points would be against vandalism.

Joanne Halliday advised that the company would be responsible for the machines and they therefore would make them as secure as possible as it was their funding stream that would be affected.

The Chair stated that the Council needed to ensure that it was effective in its approach and how it was monitored.

Councillor Fear stated that Keele had some good cycle tracks as did Silverdale and they were off the road. Sustainable Transport (SusTrans) were good at developing off road cycle tracks and more needed to be done to take them into the town.

Joanne Halliday advised that work had been done previously with SusTrans, who had looked at the signage to encourage people into the town centre and a re-ignition of that partnership could be looked into.

The Chair agreed that moving to off-road was important to help to take traffic off the roads.

Councillor Fear suggested that, alongside the cycle tracks, procurement should also be considered to aim to buy local wherever possible.

A report on Greenhouse Gas Emissions arising from the Council's function had been published each year since 2012. There were three categories for emissions which followed a national methodology: Direct emissions arising from gas usage and fuel for the Council's vehicles; Direct emissions from electricity used in Council buildings and street lighting and; indirect emissions from activities carried out but not directly controlled by the Council. Members were referred to the table at paragraph 1.25 of the report.

Councillor Trevor Johnson asked what the comparison of emissions was between the old Civic Offices to Castle House.

Joanne Halliday did not have the figures to hand but explained that it would be better in that lighting and heating could be better controlled in larger spaces.

Councillor Holland advised that the new building had been designed with efficiencies. The former Civic Offices were incurring rising costs and the inefficiency was also rising.

The Committee requested figures for the efficiency savings on moving from the Civic Offices to Castle House.

The Chair stated that it should be noted that the Borough Council would still work to the 2030 guideline and not the 2050 government target.

Resolved: That the Task and Finish Group recommends to the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee:

- (i) That the Council's record on mitigation and adaptation to climate change be noted.
- (ii) That the baseline in respect of the Council's current carbon footprint be noted.
- (iii) That it be recommended to Council that the target date for securing carbon neutrality as a Borough be adjusted to 2050 to align with the government target and that of neighbouring authorities and to reflect the importance of ensuring that it is achievable and credible.
- (iv) That the target date for securing carbon neutrality for the Council remains at 2030 and that this be achieved through the Sustainable Environment Strategy.
- (v) That, within the next year, a benchmarking exercise be carried out with neighbouring authorities on the Taxi Policy, to be presented back to this Committee and to the Licensing and Public Protection Committee as soon as was practically possible.

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- (vi) That the Council actively engages in looking into more off road cycle tracks and reports back to the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee in twelve month's time.
- (vii) That the Council's Procurement Strategy reflect a requirement for local provision of goods and services wherever possible.
- (viii) That discussions take place with Keele University around any sustainable energy opportunities and best practice.
- (ix) That all opportunities for tree planting, particularly local species to promote carbon capture, be explored.
- (xi) That the use of water free urinals and other water saving devices be considered.
- (x) That data on efficiency savings of moving from the Civic Offices to Castle House be presented to the December meeting of the Committee.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Fear advised Members that the former Home Farm site at Keele had water free urinals and they were odour free. He wondered if Keele would have any information as to how much water the Council could save by using this method.

The Chair stated that this could be built into the Plan as a recommendation.

CLLR GARY WHITE
Chair

Meeting concluded at 8.04 pm

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