

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **COMMUNITIES, ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SELECT COMMITTEE** held remotely at 10.00 am on 24 March 2020 via Skype.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 18 June 2020.

**Elected Members:**

- \* Mr John O'Reilly (Chairman)
- \* Mr Andy MacLeod (Vice-Chairman)
- \* Mr Saj Hussain (Vice-Chairman)
- Mrs Fiona White
- \* Mr Mike Bennison
- \* Mr Paul Deach
- \* Mr Jonathan Essex
- \* Mr John Furey
- \* Mr Ken Gulati
- Mrs Jan Mason
- \* Mrs Becky Rush
- \* Mr Keith Witham

**In attendance**

Mike Goodman, Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways

Denise Turner-Stewart, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience

**8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]**

None received.

**9 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 23 JANUARY 2020 [Item 2]**

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

**10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]**

None received.

**11 UPDATE ON COUNCIL CLIMATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE [Item 4]**

**Witnesses:**

Mike Goodman, Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways

Katie Sargent, Environment Commissioning Group Manager

Paul Millin, Strategic Transport Group Manager

Richard Bolton, Local Highways Group Manager

Nick Healey, Area Highways Manager

Matthew Woodcock MBE, Partnership and Expertise Manager South East, Forestry Commission – South East and London

Esme Stallard – Climate Change Project Manager

## **Key points raised during the discussion:**

### CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

1. The Environment Commissioning Group Manager introduced the Climate Change Strategy and Greener Future Investment Programme: Surrey County Council had followed government lead by declaring a climate emergency and committing to achieving net zero carbon by 2050, with an additional organisation-specific target of net zero carbon emissions by 2030. The council could not achieve these targets in isolation and needed to work with partners, residents, businesses and government to produce the action required to achieve the emission reduction targets. The Group Manager stressed the importance of both having a forward thinking strategy to inform the council's activities and a step change in the level of investment that was directed at this agenda. Officers and Members had been working to develop this strategy in conjunction with the council's borough and district partners and thus was based around the notion of a joint strategic framework and accompanied by a company Action Document.
2. The Group Manager explained how the strategy had been developed by three key work streams, namely: county emissions modelling, undertaken by Leeds University to help inform target reductions for each of the sectors in the strategy; a policy baseline exercise; thorough engagement with residents and focus groups, partners, boroughs and districts and authority partner groups. Moreover, the borough and district commitments had been updated; the language around transport had been strengthened; improvements had been made to integration of adaptation measures; stricter measures were to be imposed on school energy performance, and increased focus on energy efficiency measures in buildings.
3. The Group Manager was looking to the Select Committee to support both the approach taken to develop both the Climate Change Strategic Framework document and the Action Document and the continuation of the engagement of Surrey County Council with the boroughs and districts.
4. With regard to the Greener Futures Investment Programme, the council recognised that significant investment was required to achieve net zero carbon in Surrey. The Investment Programme set out the council's investment for the following five years however this programme was expected to evolve as the strategic framework was developed. The Group Manager called on Select Committee to endorse the investment in the Greener Futures Investment Programme and to note that officers would further develop the capital pipeline scheme so that it was fully scoped and costed.

*Paul Deach joined the meeting at 10:14*

2. The Vice Chairman asked how the council and its partners would meet the targets of the Climate Change Strategy. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste stated that both the level of and the willingness of

Surrey's district and borough council to work together showed the council's commitment to tackling climate change.

3. A Member stated that the financial repercussions of the COVID-19 virus pandemic would be felt for years. The council's climate change programme necessitated significant investment but COVID-19 would reduce the likelihood any additional funding from central government. The Member asked how the virus would impact upon the plans set out in the climate strategy. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste stated that climate change was still being prioritised and that they were confident that the council would still be able to deliver on targets of the strategy. The Environment Commissioning Group Manager agreed that there was no indication that the strategy would be delayed. The Climate Change Project Manager stated that contingency plans had been put in place for a one month, three month and six-month delay and that there were substantial benefits to continuing with the programme during COVID-19. The committee stressed that the effect of COVID-19 and the funding that it required could have a negative impact on the availability of additional funds from central government for the council's climate change strategy. It should be acknowledged that this could cause strategic problems going forward.
  
5. A Member asked to what extent the council's investment decisions would impact the council's carbon reduction targets and whether a review would be undertaken to ascertain this. The Environment Commissioning Group Manager stated that it needed to be very clear what the money invested would deliver in terms of carbon reduction and climate benefits; there needed to be better analysis at the business case stage. There also needed to be greater understanding of how the schemes would be managed to ensure that they were delivering on the expected carbon reductions; officers were working on the delivery of this. They also appreciated that transparency was crucial and informed the committee that an evaluation framework was being developed.
  
6. A Member asked how the council would ensure coordination of the strategy across the various partner organisations. The Environment Commissioning Group Manager stated that governance processes that would enable the partnership coordination to perform effectively were in place. A board had been established to make decisions about the strategy and delivery of the climate change work. The Group Manager assured the Committee partnership working would continue to improve once it started delivering tangible successes. The committee agreed the importance of joint scrutiny of the overall strategy with district and borough councils. The working group could report to a joint scrutiny committee comprising representation from all twelve local authorities in the county.
  
7. A Member stated that enforcing the strategy would require effective coordination and asked what the leadership structure for it was and who the accountable individuals were. They also asked how continuity on such a long

term and complex project could be ensured. The Climate Change Project Manager outlined the different streams of coordination: a project board enabling officer input from different service areas; meetings with Members from district and borough council through the Surrey Environmental Partnership; in-depth workshops with officers; Members input through the Select Committee and the working group. There would be discussion on how continued input from Members could be coordinated across all authorities. They appreciated that the governance could be perceived as very complex but this did reflect the complex nature of the work being done. The Project Manager said that they were happy to share with members the relevant governance documents.

8. A Member asked what the council's share of central government's grant funding for investing in buses was. Expanding the bus network in Surrey would be key, not just electrification of the existing fleet: Surrey was a high transport emissions county thus there needed to be a shift from private to public travel. The Strategic Transport Group Manager stated that the existing revenue spend funded 130 bus routes (in whole or in part) which constituted 25% of all patronage in Surrey; the other 80 services were commercially run by a range of different operators. There was £47m allocated in the capital pipeline for the acceleration of ultra-low emissions vehicles; the majority of this would be invested in buses (£41m). Overall, improvement of the delivery and quality of the service would be a joint investment with the industry and borough and district councils.
  
9. A Member asked whether there was scope for new local community-led bus services. The Group Manager stated that, generally, the community-led bus services were successful particularly when initiated by the community itself. If there was a community that wanted to develop the service, the Group Manager was very happy to have a conversation about how funding could be secured.
  
10. A Member highlighted that there was no funding attached to building and infrastructure in the Greener Futures Investment Programme, the Strategic Transport Group Manager highlighted that the county council was not a housing authority and that responsibility of this area lay with districts and borough councils.

#### ACTIONS

- i. The Strategic Transport Group Manager to send to Members relevant contact details regarding funding for local community-led bus services.

- ii. The Climate Change Project Manager to share with members the relevant governance document for the council's climate change strategy.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. The Committee supports the current approach taken to develop the Climate Change Strategic Framework and Action Document.
- ii. The Committee supports the continuation of engagement of the council with districts and borough councils with the intention to support joint endorsement across the 12 authorities.
- iii. The Committee encourages the continued development of the actions contained within the action plan document, to develop ownership, appropriate levels of funding and key KPIs for monitoring.
- iv. That the Committee investigates avenues for joint scrutiny with district and borough councils to review the impact of the climate strategy and continue its development.

#### TREE STRATEGY

1. The Environment Commissioning Group Manager stated that as part of the Greener Future programme the council had committed to facilitating the planting of 1.2m trees in Surrey by 2030. This initiative was a partnership initiative which had been calculated to have the potential to sequester an estimated 300,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide over the lifetime of the trees planted. The council had produced guidelines for both tree planting and verge planting. Consultation responses had generally been positive but there were some caveats and concerns in the report thus the Group Manager welcomed a steer from Select Committee and sought both endorsement from the committee and comments on specific issues raised.
2. The Vice Chairman asked what the expected impact on climate change the council's Tree Strategy would have in both the short and medium term. The Environment Commissioning Group Manager stated that it was difficult to estimate the carbon capture of trees as there are many determining factors such as tree age and type. Sequestration is also estimated on hectareage of woodland, making it difficult to quantify carbon capture of a singular urban tree. Based on estimates and assumptions, it had been calculated that 300,000 tonnes of carbon could be sequestered. The Forestry Commission's Partnership and Expertise Manager (South East) stated that management of the woodland was critical. They also emphasised the importance of optimising the multi functionality of trees.
3. The Vice Chairman asked whether there were any plans in place to remove tree stumps. The Local Highway Services Group Manager stated that there were approximately 2 million trees to maintain on the highway and that this money was prioritised for safety critical works. The revised policy enabled residents groups to fund the removal of stumps themselves. If there was additional funding available then the Highways Team would look to remove them.

4. A Member asked how residents could propose locations for tree planting in their communities. They also asked how residents could find out what types of trees were suitable to be planted. The Environmental Commissioning Group Manager stated that they were happy to receive suggestions of where trees could be planted in the county. The National Lottery Heritage Fund had funding available for community orchards, the council could support bids from parish councils to this fund. The Partnership and Expertise Manager stated that there was a range of funds available for the planting of trees. The Forestry Commission administered the government's Urban Tree Challenge Fund that supported a range of initiatives around the country. The Tree Council also had money for the planting of individual trees. The Woodland trust also offered funding. Additionally, there were various initiatives for smaller areas of woodland. In terms of tree felling, the Forestry Act stated that government controlled wider tree felling but had no control over tree felling in residential gardens.
5. A Member highlighted that many healthy trees were cut down on private land and that there was a lack of control over this. The Environmental Commissioning Group Manager stated that residents should contact borough and districts councils to see what trees were protected and that educating residents of the important of trees is very important. Working with schools around benefits of trees would also be crucial.
6. A Member asked whether work to protect existing trees in Surrey could be included in the supplementary planning guidance. They also asked whether a spatial plan could be included in the strategy's delivery plan to inform the public where additional woodland would be planted. They also requested a map be added to the new renewable energy strategy in order to inform development of a land-use plan. The Environment Commissioning Group Manager stated that there were already starting work with planning specifically around trees. They were also in conversation to different service providers around how newly planted trees were captured and mapped in a way that could be easily accessed by residents of Surrey. There was transformational funding to look at how land could be used for renewable energy generation.
7. The Partnership and Expertise Manager of the Forestry Commission informed the committee that a masterclass had been developed for planning teams to highlight how they could protect trees and be proactive with the planning. Responding to a suggestion from the committee, potential for an internet seminar would be explored.

#### ACTIONS

- i) For Members of the Committee to provide comments on the Tree Strategy to Democratic Services.

**Witnesses:**

Denise Turner-Steward, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience

Alan Bowley, Head of Environment

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. The Chairman asked why the previous arrangement between Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Surrey County Council did not work out. Conservation and habitat management had become the priorities of SWT and thus the organisation didn't identify visitor service and property as its core business. Therefore SWT was happy to make the adjustments made. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience went on to state that SWT were provided for from the funding from the council and funded by grants from Natural England and additional membership fees.
2. A Member asked what the advantage to the council was of switching to a strategy which required £500K of investment, particularly when the council had previously been focusing on reducing the input it had to its estate. The Cabinet Member informed the committee that there would be a review on the status of all property on the countryside estate in order to discern the optimal solution for the Cabinet to hold, manage or invest.. The plans showed considerable improvements that would increase engagement and satisfy the health and wellbeing agenda. The Head of Environment stated that the current arrangement had always seen SWT reinvest property income into funding visitor services and that this principle would continue under the council's management. The Head of Environment added that the transformation fund would look at the visitor enhancement programme with an aim of returning to self-sufficiency. This fund would also allow the council to have a series of mini feasibility studies around key locations to optimise investment and returns.
3. The Chairman asked whether The Head of Environment could give an indication of when support for the countryside would not be required. The Head of Environment answered that it was difficult to say but the intention was to return to equilibrium within 2-3 years. The council had looked at potential liability of delivering the service and the officer assured the committee that strong due diligence had been carried out.
4. The Chairman asked whether the figures quoted in the report on investment (the capital budget included funding for the Visitor Services Enhancement Programme of £1.1m across 2020-2025 and provision of £8m of investment in countryside properties in the capital pipeline, from 2020-2025) and revenue costs (minimum of £0.4m per annum until 2052) were realistic. The Head of Environment stated that the figures in the paper had been derived from a number of sources: a review of spend to date; condition surveys of residential properties; assessment of commercial properties. Full condition surveys were also being rolled out on commercial property. The final figures were dependent on where costs went post-COVID-19.

6. A Member asked how the council would manage if there was conflict between conservation objectives and the improvement of visitor experience objectives. The Member highlighted a transitional arrangement for Sawmill at Norbury Park and asked whether the Cabinet Member could confirm whether this would become council-run? The Cabinet Member stated that the aim was to retain Sawmill but this arrangement was yet to be confirmed. The Cabinet Member assured the committee that the council would be talking to SWT regarding any areas of sensitivity. The Head of Environment stated that there was protocol in place that enabled both organisations to anticipate where potential conflicts could arise.
7. A Member asked for information regarding successful established voluntary contribution visitor car parking schemes that generate revenue in other organisations to be circulated by the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience.
8. The Chairman stated that, whilst this plan may be approved by Cabinet, performance monitoring of the strategy by the Select Committee would be very important given the degree of uncertainty on its implementation

#### ACTIONS

- i. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience to circulate to members information and examples of successful established contributions schemes in other organisations.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. The Committee expressed reservations with the business case including the continued revenue cost to the council and the council's capacity to manage the property in-house.
- ii. The Select Committee to review the implementation of the Cabinet decision mid-2021.

### **13 RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 6]**

#### **Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. The Chairman stated that the committee would take the lead regarding the major policy initiative to introduce the community investment fund. The Chairman informed the committee that there would be a task and finish group to develop the governance of the scheme and asked whether any members of the committee would like to volunteer.
2. A Member asked when the committee would be scrutinising the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service improvement item that was deferred from this meeting. The Chairman suggested that this could be provisionally put on the agenda for the following Select Committee meeting in June.



3. A Member asked when the conclusion of the fire service pension fund would be brought to Select Committee . The Committees Business Manager stated that the pension fund was being scrutinised by the Local Firefighters Pension Board. The Committees Business Manager agreed to look into the timescales of this and when the Select Committee could be briefed on the outcome.
4. A Member asked whether an update on and the priorities of the revised Horizon programme could go on the forward work plan for the September Select Committee meeting. The Chairman agreed.
5. The Vice Chairman stated that they would like the council's plan for infrastructure to go on the forward work programme.

#### ACTIONS

- i. The Committees Business Manager to look at the timescale of the scrutiny of the fire service pension fund led by the Local Firefighters Pension Board

#### **14 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING: 18 JUNE 2020 [Item 7]**

The Committee noted its next meeting would be held on 18 June 2020

Meeting ended at: 12:45pm

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**Chairman**

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