

REPORT OF THE PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Place Scrutiny Committee met on 25 November 2020.

Present: Councillors Bob Bowdler (Chair), John Barnes, Martin Clarke, Godfrey Daniel (Vice Chair), Chris Dowling, Nigel Enever, Darren Grover, Pat Rodohan, Stephen Shing, Andy Smith and Barry Taylor

Also present: Councillors Nick Bennett (Lead Member for Resources), Bill Bentley (Lead Member for Communities and Safety), Claire Dowling (Lead Member for Transport and Environment), and Rupert Simmons (Lead Member for Economy).

1. Scrutiny Review of Becoming a Carbon Neutral Council

1.1 The Place Scrutiny Committee has completed its Scrutiny Review of Becoming a Carbon Neutral Council. A copy of the Committee's full report is attached at Appendix 1.

1.2. A Review Board was established in November 2019 and was comprised of Councillors John Barnes, Bob Bowdler, Martin Clarke (Chair), Pat Rodohan and Stephen Shing. The review examined the actions the Council is taking to reduce its carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gas emissions in order to achieve its ambition of becoming carbon neutral.

1.3 The scope of the review includes:

- Energy use in the Council's corporate buildings, maintained schools and street lighting;
- Staff business travel and commuting (including councillors), electric charging points at council offices and the Council's fleet vehicles;
- The scope for using renewable energy sources (solar, wind, etc.) and carbon off-setting;
- Use of emerging and alternative technologies; and
- Communications and leadership, including co-ordination of the work on the climate emergency.

1.4 The review has examined evidence from key officers, external expert witnesses and published documents on this topic. The challenge for the review has been to develop recommendations that will support the Council's ambitions in this area, whilst taking into account the Council's financial position. The Council's Climate Emergency Plan represents an important starting point in the Council's work to become carbon neutral and this review makes a number of recommendations in support of the actions contained in the Plan.

1.5 The intention of the review is to set a direction of travel for the Council in its ambition to become carbon neutral and to maintain the momentum created when the Council declared a climate emergency. The Place Scrutiny Committee is aware that in order to implement some of the recommendations, the Council will need to assess funding through the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) budget setting process, where it will be important to balance the short and long term social, economic and environmental implications of funding these proposals.

1.6 The Place Scrutiny Committee **recommends** to the County Council that –
Building Energy Use

1.6.1 Priority consideration should be given to the implementation of low carbon heating systems, e.g. the use of ground source and air source heat pumps, in all newly commissioned buildings and when renewing systems in existing buildings. The most energy efficient type of heat pump currently available should be used where possible (e.g. ground source, then air source heat pumps).

1.6.2 The Council should keep the use of hydrogen gas heating technology under review and ensure all new or replacement boilers are capable of being 'hydrogen ready'.

1.6.3 The Council consider through the RPPR process opportunities for capital funding within the core capital programme to carry out carbon reduction projects in its corporate buildings, notably building fabric improvements, and lobbies Government for additional funding in this area.

1.6.4 In developing energy efficiency projects, the Council should take a whole building approach, which is based on whole life costings.

1.6.5 The Council should explore installing solar panels on its buildings and energy storage where this is possible. In particular, the Council should explore the feasibility of installing solar panel canopies over the car parks at County Hall and use the resultant energy in the building and to power Electric Vehicle/electric bike charge points in the car parks.

1.6.6 The Council, in conjunction with maintained schools, publishes comparative data on energy efficiency (e.g. league tables and energy performance), sets a carbon reduction target and encourages engagement with pupils in learning projects and activities to reduce carbon emissions.

1.6.7 The Council consider through the RPPR process providing capital funding for a pilot project to install heat pump technology in one of the County's maintained schools as a best practice case study.

1.6.8 The Council lobbies the Department for Education to provide sufficient funding for new schools to be built to a carbon neutral standard and provide funding for major improvements to retrofit energy efficiency and carbon reduction measures to all school buildings.

1.6.9 The Council reviews the payback periods used for major building refurbishment projects and adjusts the provision of capital funding for carbon reduction projects to enable more work in this area to be carried out based on whole life costings.

Street Lighting Energy Use

1.6.10 The Council explore the scope for further energy savings by reducing the amount of time street lights are on through ongoing maintenance and replacement programmes.

1.6.11 The Council explore the use of alternative technologies such as solar and wind turbines for less essential lit signs and other street furniture.

1.6.12 The Council keep the use of intelligent lighting systems for street lighting under review and install intelligent lighting in the car parks and campus at the County Hall campus as an example of best practice.

Staff Travel & Commuting (including councillors) and Fleet Vehicles

1.6.13 The Council explore more varied patterns of working to determine what is the best level of remote working from a staff perspective and for the Council to meet its business needs and reduce carbon emissions.

1.6.14 Work is undertaken to support cultural change to embed changes in working practices that reduce the need to travel, or encourages less travel, such as the use of technology to hold meetings remotely and provide training using remote meeting technology.

1.6.15 The Council explores the provision of more capacity for drop-in centres / hot desking and collaboration space in regional offices so staff do not always need to travel into the main office buildings, including County Hall, as part of the future workplace planning arrangements.

1.6.16 The Council investigate the introduction of hybrid committee meetings where councillors can either attend remotely or in person.

1.6.17 The Staff Travel Plan is revised to encourage, and where appropriate consideration is given to the potential for incentivising, the use of other travel modes (e.g. walking, cycling and public transport) and the uptake of Electric Vehicles to reduce carbon emissions.

1.6.18 The Council considers lobbying the Department for Transport to make changes to season tickets for train and bus travel so they can be used flexibly by staff commuting to work.

1.6.19 Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points are installed at the main office buildings, or at least County Hall, with a plan agreed by the end of March 2021.

1.6.20 Smaller own fleet vehicles should be replaced by EV's in the short term when the leases expire.

1.6.21 The car lease scheme is reviewed to encourage staff to select low emission or zero emission vehicles.

1.6.22 The Council considers specifying the early use of low emission vehicles in the procurement of major contracts (e.g. the Highways maintenance contract), where feasible.

1.6.23 The Council should keep the market for larger hydrogen powered vehicles under review, with a view to undertaking early pilot schemes and eventually phasing out the diesel-powered larger vehicles in its fleet in line with Government policy.

Carbon Off-Setting and Renewables

1.6.24 The Council keeps opportunities for investing in natural habitats under review for inclusion in a carbon off-setting plan at the appropriate time when the science has been developed.

1.6.25 The Council develops a carbon off-setting plan which includes investment in woodland creation, natural habitats and renewable energy generation.

1.6.26 The Property Asset Disposal and Investment Strategy is reviewed to identify land availability and opportunities for carbon off-setting habitats and investment in the development of solar farms.

Communications and Leadership

1.6.27 The Council develops an interactive communication/information platform, which includes details on what the Council itself is doing on climate change and to discuss opportunities where residents may take an active role in lowering community carbon emissions.

1.6.28 The Council uses its convening power to co-ordinate the actions it is taking on climate change with its partners, and in particular with the District and Borough Councils in East Sussex.

Other Issues

1.6.29 Business case evaluation and procurement decisions should include an assessment of the carbon impact of the proposal.

1.6.30 Reports that go to the Executive and Council should include an assessment or statement of the carbon emissions impact of the proposals/decision in the report where relevant and material.

1.6.31 The Council lobbies Government at a national level via the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) and the South East 7 partnership, to amend the planning system and building regulations so that the carbon performance of new buildings, including school buildings, can be taken into account in planning decisions.

1.6.32 East Sussex County Council build on the existing Dutch Elm Disease Strategy to develop a Strategic Tree Policy and action plan to manage Ash Dieback, Dutch Elm Disease and other tree diseases/pests which includes a programme to replace lost trees where possible (subject to safety issues) to mitigate the impact on carbon absorption.

1.6.33 Both County and District/Borough Planning teams should be encouraged to attend the master class training provided by the Forestry Commission on the retention and protection of woodlands and trees.

[See also Report of the Cabinet – 26 January 2021]

25 November 2020

BOB BOWDLER
Chair