

CABINET – 16TH SEPTEMBER 2021

Report of the Scrutiny Commission

ITEM 9 CHARNWOOD 2030 CARBON NEUTRAL PLAN

Purpose of Report

To consider the comments and recommendations of the Scrutiny Commission in relation to the Charnwood 2030 Carbon Neutral Plan.

Recommendation of the Scrutiny Commission

That the Cabinet be informed that the Commission welcomes and supports the recommendations set out in the report of the Head of Planning and Regeneration.

Reason

The Commission, having carefully considered and asked questions on the report felt the Cabinet should approve the recommendations set out.

Meeting Discussion

- i. The existing Carbon Management Plan came to an end in 2020 and had achieved a 37% reduction in carbon emissions. That plan was now replaced, however, due to constraints caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, there had only been a 3% reduction in emissions over the past two years against the new 2018/19 baseline, illustrating the need to have a plan in place. Funding had been secured for the plan through the Capital Plan process. This new plan would consider challenges and had built-in flexibility.
- ii. All activities of the Council were to consider carbon-neutrality and a reduction in carbon emissions and external consultants had been employed to assist.
- iii. Projects to reduce carbon-emissions included tree-planting schemes and investment in solar energy as well as looking into how carbon-emissions could be reduced from the Council's buildings and fleet. A 'Green Awards' scheme was in place in the Council and all staff and councillors were able to contribute.
- iv. The base-line for carbon-neutrality had recently been reset and the way in which carbon-emissions were measured had changed.
- v. Whilst the plan focussed on what the Council could do to cut carbon emissions, it was important to encourage businesses and organisations across the borough and the county to cut emissions.

- vi. The plan emphasised the need to work with concerted action across the Council to address the challenges to ensure that the carbon-footprint was reduced. This would involve some direct projects and action but would also top-up existing projects such as boiler-replacements and insulation.
- vii. The latest IPCC report was not included in the report being presented, as it was released after the plan had been finalised, but had been noted. The IPCC report had laid out the greater challenge.
- viii. Projects would be reviewed over time through the Carbon-Neutral Board and the plan kept under review to ensure that the best outcomes from investment were secured.
- ix. There had been a high-level of officer buy-in to the plan and 'green awards' had been made within departments. With many people working from home there had not been the same ability to communicate between officers for the same sort of outcome. However, officers were aware of the need to stay on top of the plan and to review it.
- x. The target of carbon neutrality by 2030 was monitored through the corporate monitoring system. A Sustainability Officer was working to the service plan with the targets in mind, however, the need to concerted action across the council was stressed, with a particular regard to thinking what can be done to achieve the bigger target.
- xi. Future committee reports were recommended to include a section on how they contributed to the green agenda.
- xii. Risks were identified such as 'the Council fails to meet carbon neutral 2030 target outlined within its policy commitments', 'reputational risk to authority for not pursuing or meeting carbon reduction targets' and 'Carbon neutrality not seen as a strategic priority by the Council' were considered to be low due to investment from the Council. The commitment of the Council was monitored through the Corporate Performance Indicators and the Sustainability Officer had good networks across the Council to bring initiatives into play. If these initiatives were followed then it was anticipated that the Council could achieve its target.
- xiii. Companies Urban Foresight and DCA had been commissioned to prepare a carbon-neutral plan for the Council. Urban Foresight had done a lot of similar work around the country and DCA had skills in using the data from building audits to identify projects. The companies had worked collectively and had written a plan in consultation with the Council. The companies had met with the Corporate Leadership Team and had held an officer and member workshop and a there was a further member briefing in the summer of 2021. When the plan was refreshed, the companies had carried out follow-up interviews with those originally involved. Urban Foresight and DCA had also undertaken a re-basing of the carbon footprint standard.

- xiv. The priority was a reduction in energy usage in buildings and the fleet. Renewable energy was then considered, and then carbon-positive options were considered such as planting trees to take Carbon Dioxide out of the atmosphere. The design and the age of Council buildings made being carbon-neutral difficult. It was acknowledged that technology would change, however, the need to be realistic was also realised and as such the need for carbon-offsetting was identified.
- xv. It was recognised that the best options for carbon-reduction may not be the cheapest and the costing over time needed to be considered, including long-term cost savings. In terms of investments such as double-glazing normal Council maintenance budgets would be used, but could be topped up by the Carbon Neutral Fund where this would assist the Council meet the carbon neutral target.
- xvi. In terms of waste management, in the long term it was sought to make all processes carbon-neutral, however it was important to look first at what the Council could immediately control and make carbon-neutral.
- xvii. The fund was initially £500k per annum for three years, however, in October 2020 this was revised to £100k for 2020/21 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with £500k per annum from 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- xviii. If plans covered a long period it may be found that technology had moved on in that time, such that new projects are introduced or previously discounted projects become viable. It was recognised that it was important not to waste money and to use departmental budgets effectively.
- xix. It was recognised that it was possible that projects may create more carbon than they saved, especially since construction was seen as a large carbon-emitter. However, it was also recognised that many of the schemes introduced had substantially decreased the costs incurred by the Council.
- xx. With regard to requiring developers and private companies and their premises to conform to carbon-reducing standards, the Council's leadership role was highlighted. It was clarified that government planning policy intended to encourage than require energy efficiency. The Building Regulations provide the regulatory and enforcement role. However, it was highlighted that customers of housing projects were looking for energy efficient homes which had features such as electric car charging points. Attitudes were changing and accelerating towards energy efficiency, in part due to the cost of energy. With regard to Council car parks, it was suggested that more energy-efficient LED lighting was used and not illuminated all night. With regard to the relationship between the Council and the wider role with building regulations, there was a limit to what could be done at a local level and the need for national changes to planning policy was emphasised. It was recognised that there had been moves in the right direction regarding the proposed future homes standard and banning the sale of petrol and diesel cars from 2035.

- xxi. In response to a suggestion that if action was not taken quickly on emissions then 'green air levies' such as the one in Birmingham may have to be introduced, it was clarified that the Council needed to focus mainly on its own emissions, but it also needed to look more widely to encourage businesses throughout the borough and county to reduce emissions.
- xxii. Concern was raised over the amount of retrofitting that may be needed in new housing and it was emphasised that developers needed to make housing sustainable.

Policy Justification and Previous Decisions

Scrutiny Commission Procedure Rule 11.12 sets out the procedure by which a report of a Scrutiny Committee should be considered by Cabinet.

Implementation Timetable including Future Decisions and Scrutiny

The information on this in the Cabinet report is not affected by the recommendation of the Scrutiny Commission.

Report Implications

The following implications have been identified for this report.

Financial Implications

There are no further financial implications associated with the recommendation of the Scrutiny Commission.

Risk Management

There are no specific risks associated with the recommendations of the Scrutiny Commission.

Key Decision:	Yes
Background Paper:	Scrutiny Commission Minute 29 2021/22, 13th September 2021
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