Meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 17 September 2019, 10.00 am

Committee Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor George Chivers
Councillor John Cottier (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor Gloria Johnson
Councillor Mrs Judy Smith
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew (Chairman)

Cabinet Members

Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations, Councillor Dr Peter Moseley
Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Barry Dobson

Other Members present

Councillor Mrs Jacky Smith

Officers

Interim Chief Executive (Paul Thomas)
Strategic Director, Commercial and Operations (Gary Smith)
Assistant Director, Commercial and Operations (Ian Yates)
Head of Environmental (Anne-Marie Coulthard)
Grounds Maintenance Coordinator (Lynne Lord)
Communications Officer (Chris Prime)
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)
Democratic Officer (Naomi Page)

10. Apologies

There were no apologies received.

11. Disclosure of Interests

None disclosed.
12. **Action Notes from the meeting held on 18 June 2019 and updates from the previous meeting**

The action notes of the meeting held on 18 June 2019 were noted. There were no updates from the previous meeting.

*The Chairman decided to swap the first two items of the meeting to allow the Interim Chief Executive to be present for the climate change workshop item.*

13. **Climate Change informal workshop update**

The Strategic Director, Commercial and Operations provided a presentation outlining the findings from the climate change workshop. The workshop was held on 30 July 2019 and had facilitated the gathering of information relating to climate change and explored how the Council could approach the issue and make priorities moving forward.

In the wider context of the Council’s approach to climate change, a report to Cabinet had been made on 10 September 2019 recommending that South Kesteven District Council declare a climate emergency. Cabinet agreed a number of points to recommend to full Council on 26 September 2019, including the timescale by which the Council would aim to become net-zero carbon, the importance of the Council’s role as a community leader in reducing South Kesteven’s carbon footprint, the creation of a ‘Climate Change Action’ task and finish group and the allocation of funds from the 2019/20 budget to allow for the recruitment of a Climate Change Officer. However, Cabinet added that the 50k figure mentioned should be clarified as ‘up to’ and subject to the agreement of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The climate change workshop had been an interesting opportunity to trial new ways of using technology to attend meetings, with the main presenter and one of the Members using Skype to participate. This highlighted the potential of using such technology to allow virtual attendance at future meetings. An officer from Lancaster City Council had provided an example of how the issue of climate change could be approached. Members were also given an update on the Council’s ‘Energy Reduction and Climate Change Action Plan’. This had been initially launched in 2012 and Members were informed of the actions taken and progress made since that time.

Key messages from the workshop had included the need to have a clear target and the importance of Senior Member and Officer ownership. Also noted were the importance of coherent decision making, and having short-term and long-term goals. An update had been given on the role of technology and agile working, indicating that responding to climate change would lead to adopting new technologies. There was also an overview of the Council’s use of utilities included. It was noted that there would need to be further work carried out to ensure that the Council’s baseline usage was fully represented.
and that a clear understanding of the data included was given. The information would be circulated wider once it had been developed to be fully representative of the Council’s current usage. An overview of the Council’s use of solar panels was also provided at the workshop, with Members being given details of the types of panels used and the financial benefits of their use. Members had agreed that a further workshop would be held on 28 October 2019. Councillor Baxter requested that the names of those in attendance at the workshop were recorded (Members in attendance at the workshop were Councillor Trollope-Bellew, Councillor Baxter, Councillor Dilks and Councillor Mrs Judy Smith). He also disagreed with the use of the word ‘informal’ to describe the workshop.

The Interim Chief Executive then presented the draft Terms of Reference for the ‘Climate Change Action’ task and finish group. The Terms outlined the purpose of the task and finish group and its role in supporting the Council’s ambition of reducing the organisation’s carbon footprint by 2030 and becoming net-zero carbon by 2050. The group would be used to identify the steps needed to work towards these goals in practical terms.

Members were then given the opportunity to discuss the draft Terms of Reference and ask questions:

- One Member expressed that he felt the targets outlined in the Cabinet recommendations to Council (as reflected in the ‘purpose and context’ section of the draft Terms of Reference) could have been more ambitious. During the discussion, it was noted that one of the primary objectives of the task and finish group would be establishing a more defined trajectory of the Council’s path towards the established targets. This would include the collation of data available regarding the Council’s existing carbon footprint, as well as external influences outside of the Council’s control. This information would then be used to ensure that decisions moving forward were data-led as well as ambitious. The current central government target was set at net-zero emissions by 2050. In aligning the Council’s target with this, it was intended that work could be undertaken to reduce the Council’s carbon footprint as quickly as possible, whilst also working to a deliverable long-term plan. It was also noted that this time frame would allow the Council to move in line with industry and commerce, as long-term goals would be influenced by the availability of necessary infrastructure.

- The membership aspect of the task and finish group was discussed. Importance was placed on the group including both elected Members and Officers, in order for it to be established as a separate approach from a formal Committee.

- Members expressed that it was important that the selection of Officers and Members for the task and finish group were made based on their ability to provide valuable input on the critical work to be done by the group.
• It was suggested that one of the Officer places in the task and finish group be offered to an external member who may be able to provide valuable expertise on the climate change subject. Members noted that in addition to this, if Council agreed on the funds to be allocated as recommended by Cabinet, there would be additional scope to seek external advice.

• Members also considered inviting guests to the task and finish group meetings, in particular those from local authorities who had already made in-roads into addressing climate change themselves, in order for a sharing of information to take place.

• Members enquired as to the relationship between the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the task and finish group. It was explained that the task and finish group would be focused on fact finding and looking at specific actions, whereas the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be developing policy to support the ambition to deliver and ensure that the Council had the framework in place to maintain its stance after the task and finish group had ended. The task and finish group would be reporting its initial findings to the Committee in Spring 2020. Immediate budget requirements identified would be presented in a timely manner in order to feed into 2020/21 budget proposals.

Members then voted to agree the recommendations outlined as a result of the climate change workshop, with additional points included based on the meeting of Cabinet on 10 September 2019 and the present meeting:

**Recommendations**

- A further climate change workshop be held on 28 October 2019
- The request be reiterated to add ‘climate change’ to the list of potential themes for the Gravity Fields Festival
- Recommend to Cabinet that SKDC seeks to reduce single use plastic at its organised events from 2020
- That the Council allocate up to £50,000 to enable external advice and the recruitment of a Climate Change Officer
- That the Council contact Lincolnshire County Council to see what advice or capacity they may be able to provide in moving towards its climate change targets
- That an external appointee from an environmental background be invited to become a member of the Interim Chief Executive’s Climate Change Action task and finish group
14. **Gambling Statement of Principles**

Members were advised to consider the report of the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations, along with the draft Statement of Principles. The Gambling Act 2005 required that the Council publish a Statement of Principles every three years, meaning the current Statement would be due for renewal by January 2020. As part of this renewal process, a public consultation had been undertaken. Two responses had been received, but no changes to the draft Statement were deemed necessary as a result of the responses. As the Statement was a statutory requirement and only minor amendments had been made, Members agreed to recommend that Cabinet present the Statement to Council for adoption.

**Recommendation**

The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that the revised South Kesteven District Council Gambling Statement of Principles is suitable to be presented to Council for adoption.

15. **Tree Guidelines**

Members were advised to consider the report of the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations. Three documents had been produced (appendices 1-3) to create a coherent model to guide how the Council dealt with trees, including a ‘Member Tree Notification Protocol’, a ‘Charter for Trees, Woods and People’ and ‘Tree Guidelines’. These documents had been produced in response to requests for the Council to formulate a clearer, more formal stance to its approach to trees and tree management. The Committee discussed each of the documents in turn and had the opportunity to ask questions or make comments.

**South Kesteven District Council Member Tree Notification Protocol**

This document had been produced to support the role of Members in their Wards, providing them with the relevant information needed to respond to their area constituents regarding major tree works. Members were reminded that decisions regarding major works to be carried out in respect of trees would have been made after receiving a professional report and in the interest of public safety. As such, it was recognised that the works themselves would be non-negotiable, but the guidance of the document would aid the communication of such matters to Members so they were aware and able to answer queries from the public. Members noted the importance of having such a document.
Action point

Some amendments to the document were suggested:

- Points 6, 7 and 8 to include ‘notify ward and Cabinet Member’ under the ‘additional proposed’ heading
- The layout to be reconsidered to allow the clear separation of points relating to trees falling under the responsibility of the Council, and trees outside of Council owned areas

Members discussed Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), as mentioned in the protocol document. It was considered that further information could be collected regarding how many TPOs there were currently in the Council’s area, and where the corresponding trees were situated. Members asked how a TPO could be attained. Officers advised that the Planning section was responsible for keeping information regarding TPOs. Members suggested that an officer from Planning could be invited to a future meeting to provide further information on the subject.

Action point

- An officer from Planning to be invited to a future Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to provide further information regarding Tree Protection Orders

Charter for Trees, Woods and People

Members were advised that this document had been produced with the support of the Woodland Trust, who had helped the Council to produce the Charter as an adaptation of their own Tree Charter, acknowledging the requirement for the Council to balance its positive commitment to trees with its wider obligations as a public sector organisation. Members welcomed the Charter for Trees, Woods and People, considering that the Council should have a proactive approach to trees and tree cover.

Recommendation

The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet to propose that Council endorses the draft ‘Local Government Charter for Trees, Woods and People: Principles’

Tree Guidelines for the Management of Trees within South Kesteven District

Members expressed that the Tree Guidelines document complemented other work currently being progressed by the Council, supporting its overall aim to be deliberate in its approach to climate change. During discussion, Members considered the national challenge of increasing tree cover in order to support
climate objectives and noted the importance of replanting where possible after major tree works had been undertaken, as well as ensuring that developers followed through on their tree planting objectives as outlined in planning conditions. Further to the Council’s current practice of replanting when possible in its open spaces when trees were felled, Members suggested that this practice could be developed into policy and potentially extended to be more proactive in its approach to tree planting. Developing a policy relating to tree replanting would also allow for the negotiation of budgetary support for the purchase of new trees.

Action point

- Information to be provided for Members indicating the typical costs incurred by purchasing and planting trees, as part of or alongside the immediate climate change budgetary requirements expected at the next meeting

Recommendation

That the Council endorses the ‘Tree Guidelines for the Management of Trees within South Kesteven District’, with the provision that the document be an on-going development to be reviewed in one year.

16. Food Waste Trial update

Members were invited to consider the ‘SKDC Food Waste Trial Consultation Results’. The presentation was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations, who explained that responses to the consultation had been positive. A very high percentage of respondents reported that they put their caddy out every week. This was attributed to an effective communications strategy regarding the scheme, as well as the development of an easy and efficient service.

It was hoped that the Council would be able to secure funding from Lincolnshire County Council via the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership to role the scheme out further across the district. The challenge for the Council moving forward would be the additional cost of the food waste collection service in comparison to the financial renumeration for the disposal of the waste. It was noted that although a food waste collection service had high financial implications, the environmental benefits of the scheme supported the Council’s co-ordinated approach of its environmental and waste departments, which had already been praised by DEFRA. The Waste and Recycling team were currently trialling a new collection method for food waste, with the aim of increasing the efficiency of the service.
Members asked about the areas covered by the trial waste scheme. The route schedule had been developed to cover all demographics within the district, to give a representative view of how the scheme would be received by residents if rolled out further. Members of the Committee were keen to see the food waste initiative implemented throughout the district, including their ward areas where a number of constituents had expressed a desire to utilise the scheme. Further information outlining the costs for the collection and disposal of food waste was requested.

**Action point**

**Members to receive further information detailing the costs involved in the collection and disposal of food waste in the new year**

17. **Work Programme**

It was suggested that the Committee incorporate dates in the Work Programme for the last four points. The Chairman related that the Committee would be in more of a position to establish time scales for these items following its meeting in November.

18. **Any other business which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent**

None.

19. **Close of Meeting**

The meeting closed at 12.07pm.