

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP held at ZOOM on WEDNESDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor L Pepper (Chair)
Councillors M Caton, G Driscoll, B Light, R Pavitt and G Smith

Officers in attendance: B Brown (Assistant Director - Environmental Services),
C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer) and M Watts
(Environmental Health Manager - Protection)

ECC7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Freeman.

There were no declarations of interest.

ECC8 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 31 May 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

The Chair drew the Member's attention to the following: -

- Climate Change now featured at the beginning of the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan, which indicated its growing importance and focus.
- The Climate Change June update would be circulated.
- A waste and recycling newsletter was available and residents could sign up to receive it.
- There was a big green week planned for 24th September on the Common in Saffron Walden.
- The Climate budget had been fully allocated.

In response to Councillor Smith's question the Chair said that staff costs within the budget related to 2 year working contracts and did not include the Climate Change Officer post.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services explained the budget and highlighted the following: -

- Zero Carbon Communities Initiative £300,000
- Inhouse Carbon initiatives £200,000
- Staffing costs £384,954

In response to Members questions the following comments were made: -

- The Littlebury Energy Plan Project was a trial set up to produce practical plans for individual households to improve energy savings and a community based approach with potential collective buy ins.
- Funding for local projects as part of the biodiversity survey were included in the Zero Carbon Communities Initiative budget of £300,000.

- The new Climate Change Officer would start on the 26th September 2022 and they would explore Community Energy Projects to create renewable energy to light and heat houses.

ECC9 SAFFRON WALDEN AIR QUALITY INITIATIVE

The Environmental Health Manager - Protection provided a verbal update on the Saffron Walden Air Quality Initiative.

He said that the project had been put back with the agreement of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and would continue until October 2024.

In response to Members questions the following comments were made:-

- An independent water and rivers survey had been commissioned and there was funding allocated.
- The Local Plan and the Climate Change team were communicating to make sure that work was not being duplicated.

ECC10 SUSTAINABLE WARMTH

The Environmental Health Manager - Protection provided an update on sustainable warmth. He said that the previous schemes, authority delivery (LAD) scheme and home upgrade grant (HUG) had ended and they were being combined under a single scheme called 'Sustainable Warmth'. The scheme had been delayed and now had only 6 months left for the funding to be spent. He said that they were trying to target vulnerable and low income households. He said that he had no idea what would happen when this scheme closed in March 2024 but currently any money not spent would go back to the Government.

In response to Members questions the following comments were made:-

- The current discretionary grant scheme would be reviewed and circulated for comment. There was discussion as to whether this continued as a grant that was repaid (interest free/as a Land Charge) or as an emergency grant that was not repaid.
- The sustainable warmth scheme only related to private households.
- The Chair asked if Councillor Smith and all Members would write to the local Member of Parliament to ask for an extension in order to implement the scheme properly and to spend the money that had been allocated.

ECC11 ZERO CARBON COMMUNITY FUND

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services presented the report on the Zero Carbon Community Fund.

He asked that Members considered proposing:

- Allocation of £300,000 of the Climate Emergency Budget for the purpose of community based climate projects.

- The value of grants to be between £1,000 to £35,000.
- The eligibility criteria set out in the report.
- The decision on awarding funding to be delegated to a named Officer in consultation with three representatives from the Climate and Energy Working group.

Members made the following comments:-

- There were enough projects to ensure that the money would be spent.
- Stansted Mountfitchet LED lighting throughout the Parish could get funding as part of this project.
- To ensure that the money would be evenly distributed across the district including small parishes.
- Essex County Council (ECC) also offered a £20k community grant for similar projects.
- There needed to be a statement about biodiversity within the assessment criteria not just carbon capture.
- Confirmation that the grant would be used for capital outlay rather than revenue and there would be no ongoing financial commitment as a result of the project.
- The need to be clear about the financial sustainability and biodiversity statements and to give more detail within the criteria to ensure that they were understood.

Members were asked to send any further suggestions and concerns to the Assistant Director of Environmental Services within the next few days. The report would go onto Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet and would then be promoted to residents, through the website, which would also include funds available through other bodies.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services said he hoped this would be live in early October.

RESOLVED: To forward the report onto Scrutiny and Cabinet with amendments made to the eligibility criteria to make it clearer and to ensure that funding was spread throughout the district.

ECC12 CLIMATE CRISIS ACTION PLAN

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services provided a verbal update on the Climate Crisis Action Plan. He said he would circulate the slides and the report that recently went to Scrutiny. He went through the 11 actions points and said that the new Climate Change Officer would pick these up when they started, and that they would also make sure measurables were added onto the action plan.

The update was noted.

ECC13 FINDINGS OF THE 2022 ANNUAL STATUS REPORT

The Environmental Health Manager - Protection presented the findings of the 2022 Annual Status Report. He said that the annual report was a legal requirement and had been approved by Defra. He highlighted the following:-

- There was a downwards trend of monitored NO2 air pollution.
- No air quality exceedances had been identified in 2021.
- No air quality exceedances had been identified for five years.
- There were no new developments that would have a significant impact.

The report was noted.

Councillor Light said she was against the revocation of the AQMA, especially because of the large amount of development planned.

The Environmental Health Manager – Protection said that Defra expected the Council to carry out a review and to consider whether the AQMA could be revoked. He suggested that a review of the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP), due in 2022 would be suspended whilst a review to revoke the AQMA was made.

He said that should the outcome of the review indicate that the AQMA be revoked, this would make the AQAP redundant. The Environmental Health Manager – Protection told the group that in addition, there was a new requirement to prepare an Air Quality strategy in 2023. This would, in effect also replace the AQAP.

Councillor Smith asked if there could be additional monitoring of the overall district. The Environmental Health Manager – Protection said there were 35 monitoring locations which could be expanded and each year these would be reviewed. If there was a particular problem identified it could also be monitored.

ECC14 REVOCATION OF THE AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREA

This was Included in agenda item 7.

The meeting closed at 8:50pm.