

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP held at ZOOM, on MONDAY, 23 JANUARY 2023 at 7.00 pm

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

Officers in attendance: B Brown (Assistant Director - Environmental Services), C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer) and V Reed (Climate Change, Lead Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pavitt.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7th December 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

Councillor Light asked some questions relating to the last minutes and the Climate Change, Lead Officer gave the following responses:-

- There would be a formal update of the Climate Change action plan's achievements in quarter 4 which would be published in March.
- The transport studies being commissioned were linked to the Local Plan and supported the Saffron Walden Clean Air Project.
- The local cycling and walking infrastructure study had just started and would be a key piece of work for the Local Plan. The consultants were PJA.
- The Saffron Walden Clean Air Project, funded by the Department Of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), had been delayed due to resourcing, however, work had been carried out since November on stakeholder engagement. A press release was imminent to start the project. The Environmental Health Manager (Protection) had received an extension from DEFRA which meant the project would run for the next two years. A road map would be produced with more detail and some mobility schemes could be up and running by the summer.

The Chair said there were 20 applications for the Zero Carbon Communities Grants which closed on the 5th January 2023. She said that an update would be provided to the working group, and a paper prepared for Cabinet in due course.

The wording of the last minutes were incorrect in relation to Councillor Driscoll leaving the meeting, the wording would be changed.

ESSEX JOINT MUNICIPAL WASTE STRATEGY (VERBAL UPDATE AND PRESENTATION)

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services presented an update on the Waste Strategy from Essex:-

He began by going through National Issues:-

Deposit Return Scheme

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that the government had published more details on the scheme, which had been pushed back to 2025. He said that the scope of the scheme had been specified and it related to all drink packaging including plastic and tin, but in England it excluded glass. He gave details of the scheme but said that there was no information yet on the implications, including financial, for the Local Authorities.

In response to Members questions the Assistant Director of Environmental Services said :-

- Glass would be included under a different scheme, Extended Producer Responsibility, (EPR).
- The scheme would be mandatory for retailers, including online companies. The idea was to remove the items from the waste stream to minimise the risk from contamination and therefore increase successful recycling.

Extended Producer Responsibility

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that this included a range of products including household packing, furniture recycling and batteries. He said that this scheme had also been delayed, and would run alongside a new labelling arrangement, to help consumers understand what materials were recyclable. He said that there was a recent trend increasing compostable plastic, however, he said that this was still difficult to recycle, and under new arrangements there would have to be a label stating that it could not be recycled. He said that retailers would then pay into a collective pot according to the packaging they produced and eventually this money would be distributed back to Local Authorities, who were ultimately dealing with the recycling of the packaging produced.

He said that there would be an assessment of each Local Authority's collection service, and EPR funding money could be withheld if recycling was not effective and efficient. He said that the aim would be to have a more consistent collection system across the whole Country.

In response to a Member question the Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that the scheme was likely to cover commercial and trade waste.

Consistency of collections

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services explained that there had been strong Government emphasis on providing the same service and systems across the Country. He said that details of the consultation would be available shortly and were likely to have more emphasis on kerbside sorting of waste.

Garden Waste Services

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that ability to charge for the removal of garden waste by Councils could be removed. He said that 50% of Councils did charge and it would be a significant loss of income.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that Uttlesford's garden waste service was a non-profit scheme that provided income to run the service.

Waste Management Strategy Essex

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that there was a need to update the Waste Management Strategy in Essex. He said that in the County approximately 50% of waste was recycled, with food waste being collected separately.

He said that the new strategy would focus on improving environmental performance, using proven technology already in existence within the Country. He said that incineration (with energy from waste) within Essex was a possibility and this process had to have good environmental controls and energy recovery from waste.

In response to Members questions the Assistant Director of Environmental Services said:-

- The Anaerobic Digestion System, used to recycle food waste, produced electricity which was used to run the plant with any excess feeding into the national grid.
- There was no location identified for an incinerator yet, but there was one being built near Rivenhall which had no County connection.
- The waste transfer site in Dunmow had closed and vehicles were now travelling to Braintree near Freeport. He said the routes had been changed because of this and the impact was being monitored. He asked Members to send details of any streets that had been missed but thought that all collections were up to date.

Councillor Freeman said that he had details of a company in Sweden who very successfully ran an incinerator to heat the whole town.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that Essex County Council (ECC) were in the process of modelling outcomes from their disposal options including environmental performance, cost, carbon capture and heat recovery. He said that they had also looked at each Council to identify what waste systems were currently being used. He said this would eventually feed into an overall document which would go out to public consultation in the summer of 2023.

He said that he would bring regular updates to the Working Group and at some point this would need to be considered as a Council.

The Chair said that one of ECC's objectives was that nothing would go to landfill by 2030.

In response to a question from Councillor Light, the Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that an incinerator required a lot of space due to the scrubbing technology required to clean the gases. He suggested that if there was any interest, he could arrange a trip to a facility. He said that the anaerobic treatment of food waste could be smaller sites and that there were a number within the County.

Councillor Light asked if this could be included within the strategy. The Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that Uttlesford District Council (UDC) could use the consultation period to feedback to ECC about smaller incinerators, but it would be up to them to decide what was included as the disposal authority.

The Chair said that the Government was planning to ban single use plastic by October 2023. The Economic Development team were also encouraging local businesses to get involved with green issues.

In response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that ECC were engaging with Councils throughout the process and had paid for a number of models for delivery that could be used across the County. There was no obligation to sign up to any of them but it was a good opportunity for the Council to look at and consider all the issues.

The Chair said that at a recent meeting she had attended there was an organisation that was turning plastic into sustainable aviation fuels. She said she would find the link and circulate to the Working Group.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services gave an update on the decarbonisation strategy. He said that the fleet emissions were the main carbon source at the Council. He said that they were looking into ways to decarbonise the fleet and had considered a number of options. He said that the challenge for the district was to find a viable option that could cover the whole district due to its rural nature.

He said that small electric vehicles had been trialled for ground maintenance teams and the current vehicles were up for renewal later this year. He said that the grounds fleet could be replaced with at least some electric vehicles where this was possible.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that there was charging infrastructure available at the Canfield site and investigations were on going for ground equipment to be battery powered by solar, moving away from petrol.

He said that hydrogen was potentially of interest although there were currently supply challenges. The Chair said that in Aberdeen there was a hydrogen hub,

and Councillor Driscoll said that they made their own hydrogen. He said that Dundee ran all their buses using electric vehicles and that they had solar panels in car parks. The Assistant Director of Environmental Services said he was due to attend a fleet decarbonisation webinar, and Councils were sharing information all the time.

Councillor Freeman said to be cautious in advocating hydrogen as 95% produced was made from hydrocarbons which produced carbon dioxide. He said that the only green hydrogen came from the electrolysis of water.

In response to a Member question the Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that the majority of the fleet would need to be replaced in 3 years time; in the future he would try to replace them on a more cyclical basis. He said that it was likely that the fleet would use existing technology as the current challenge in a rural area was that electric vehicles did not have enough charge to cover the distance, especially now that the Braintree waste transfer site was adding an extra hour onto the day.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services talked through operational issues including the waste transfer station, which meant longer journeys for the waste vehicles.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that there was a new requirement to manage the disposal of sofas, upholstery and other furniture. The Environment Agency had talked about banning these from landfill, and new enforcement regulations had come into effect from 1st January 2023. He said that this service had been paused to allow for the logistics to be considered. He said there was a cost implication for the Council and these items would need to be taken to a different waste facility near Colchester.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services agreed to circulate the slides to Members.

There was discussion about the number and challenge of the objectives coming from the Government, the Assistant Director of Environmental Services said that the Waste Strategy was ambitious but it was mainly sensible suggestions that the Council would look at as they came through. It was agreed that the deposit return scheme would hopefully reduce littering and make bigger retailers look at the amount of packaging they were using.

The meeting closed at 8:24pm