

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny, Policies Environment committee held on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2022 at 10am, in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY

**Committee members present:** Cllr Martin Dimery (Chair) Cllr Jo Roundell Greene, Cllr Henry Hobhouse, Cllr Tom Power, Cllr Harry Munt, Cllr Marcus Kravis, Cllr Barry Clarke, Cllr Steve Ashton.

**Officers present:** Laura Jensen Economic Development Officer, Mickey Green Managing Director Somerset Waste Partnership, Jamie Jackson Governance Manager Scrutiny, Paul Hickson Service Manager Economic Development, Stephanie Gold Senior Democratic Services Officer, Lee Willment Democratic Services Officer.

### **Agenda item 1: Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Kathy Pearce, Cllr Adam Boyden, Cllr Alex Wiltshire, Cllr Matthew Martin and Cllr Alan Bradford.

### **Agenda item 2: Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made by any member of the committee.

### **Agenda Item 3: Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2022 were approved as a correct record.

### **Agenda item 4: Public Question Time**

There were no members of the public present.

### **Agenda item 5: Scrutiny, Environment committee work programme:**

Jamie Jackson, Governance Manager, Scrutiny asked members to consider and comment on the Scrutiny, Environment work programme as published. One non-committee member online asked about planning policy, and specifically whether this committee would oversee the planning policy workstreams of Local Government Reorganisation. The Governance Manager, Scrutiny advised that he would take this question and come back with an answer as soon as he was able.

### **Agenda item 6: Climate Change and the Economy**

Laura Jensen, Economic Development officer provided members with a slideshow to illustrate the key points from the report including

- There are strong overlapping themes in energy, transport, and waste
- Industry/commercial sector is responsible for 25% of the overall emissions in Somerset.
- The BISC workstream activities taking place including business engagement and financial support.
- Many SME's lack knowledge and resource to achieve net zero without support. In consultation, 41% business unsure of their role in transition to net zero.
- The team are measuring the impacts of this work by undertaking surveys and research, networking, and evaluation of direct interventions.

As per paragraph 2 - Issues for consideration.

2.1 The Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on the work undertaken to date and consider the approach proposed for future activities in delivering the Business workstream with specific reference to:

- The proposed Somerset Green Business Support Programme
- Information that would be useful for Members to support their engagement with SMEs regarding net zero goals.
- Knowledge Transfer Partnership between larger business and SMEs, as part of a wider social value remit, with reference to large council contracts
- Views on measuring the impact of these carbon reduction initiatives and more generally Somerset business journey to net zero.

2.2. That the Scrutiny Committee notes that the Council is undertaking activities relating to the Climate Emergency Strategy: Business, Industry and Supply Chain Workstream and its relevance to future economic policy decision-making.

The following comments and questions were received from members

- One member felt strongly that this report does not contain enough practical examples to help businesses reduce their energy usage. The Economic Development officer agreed that research has shown that businesses do need practical advice on carbon reduction and advised that this would be incorporated into this future green business support work.
- Businesses, particularly SME's that may be struggling in current economic climates require more practical advice. i.e., insulation and energy usage. How do we engage with them? As above, and the officer added that a direct business support advisor would be commissioned to support this.
- Can we have more detail on the effectiveness of the Somerset Growth Accelerator Fund. The Economic Development officer explained that this had been a very popular initiative and advised that whilst projects have been

approved the funding has not yet been secured. She offered to produce a more detailed report and the committee welcomed this.

- Non committee member online: Do we have any Case Studies to promote best practice to businesses?
- Non committee member online: We need to be clear in indicating the pathways to net zero for businesses. He recommended the Science Based Targets Initiative as a useful paper on this. The officer thanked the councillor for the recommendation and reassured all members that whilst the detail may not be contained within this report, the council has been working with businesses on knowledge sharing, i.e the recent Climate Summit held at Queens College, Taunton on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2022.
- How can we ensure more businesses attend the workshops being held across the county? The Economic Development officer agreed that the team were doing all they could to promote the workshops.
- Non committee member online: Particularly with the move to a unitary authority, how can we use existing networks to improve engagement with businesses across the county? The Officer advised that the team work closely with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce, The Federation of Small Businesses amongst others, but thanked the councillor for her very useful comments and asked if they could discuss other networking ideas outside of the meeting.
- Are we reaching out to micro business, that may be out of reach of the above networks? These types of businesses make up a very integral part of the economy in Somerset.
- Is the work of the district councils being integrated into this piece of work? The Economic Development Service Manager reassured the committee that all five Somerset councils were working collaboratively and aligning their workstreams on this as part of the Local Government Reorganisation programme.
- Non committee member online: What is being done in terms of driving retrofitting schemes on older business premises? Many businesses do not own their own premises, how can we engage with landlords with regards to practical energy efficiency advice? The Economic Development officer pointed members to the SWMAS programme which is facilitating the above support for owners, landlords and leaseholders of older buildings.

The Chair thanked all members and officers for the interesting points raised and praised the way the Scrutiny Environment committee is supporting this Councils climate change work so constructively.

### **Agenda item 7: EV strategy and roll-out impacts and implications.**

Mickey Green, Managing Director at Somerset Waste Partnership provided members with a slideshow to highlight key points from the update report including:

- The context of the climate emergency
- The national picture of EV infrastructure
- This work is part of the Council's wider Local Transport Plan
- Research has shown that 'Capacity to charge' has replaced 'range anxiety' as the biggest barrier for EV users.
- In benchmarking exercises Somerset is slightly behind compared to other counties in terms of EV infrastructure, this is likely due to Somerset being a rural area.
- There is a need to continue to work with private sector to identify market failings and fill in gaps in EV infrastructure, to reach all areas of the county including its most isolated rural communities.
- There are many complexities around EV infrastructure including use of cabling and gullies, streetlighting, parking.
- Big challenges for the future include Planning policy, The MTFP budget gap, impacts of LGR, rapidly evolving technology, governance, and the need to provide solutions at a more localised level.

As per paragraph 2 Issues for Consideration/Recommendations.

2.1 The report is for information only following recommendations are to note only. Scrutiny comments are welcomed on the direction of travel, and further updates are intended to be brought to scrutiny at key milestones.

The following comments and questions were received from members:

- Battery technology is evolving rapidly, how can we ensure we keep up with the rate of change here? The Managing Director SWP agreed that battery technology is indeed changing quickly and that some aspects of this work will need evolve with it, where this aligns with the needs identified in this Councils' EV programme.
- The importance of working with private sector electricity providers on this.
- There will need to be different solutions for different types of EV user.
- What impact is the current energy crisis having on this strategy. i.e., huge increases in electricity costs?
- Why are cable protectors an issue for EV infrastructure? The Managing Director SWP advised that current Government guidance makes it very clear that cable protectors are not an acceptable on-street solution. Gullies are a preferred method of installing on-street EV infrastructure.
- How are the district councils' EV infrastructure projects being incorporated into this strategy? The committee were advised that whilst this report looks at County Council fleet only at this stage, it would be aligned with all five councils' activities as LGR takes effect.

- What are we doing about the increased fire risk of electric vehicles? The Managing Director SWP agreed that this was an emerging issue and advised that this was being taken in consideration as part of this work.
- What is the plan for disposal of used batteries? As above, this would be taken in consideration as the programme evolves.
- How can we lobby government regarding financial support for councils and greater legislative powers regarding EV infrastructure in place planning? The Managing Director pointed members to the action plan within the report which talks about lobbying and conversations with DNO's (Distribution Network Operators)
- How can we manage demand on EV chargers at tourism hot spots across the county.
- Members discussed accessibility to the right charging solution for different levels of EV user, the compatibility of EV charging networks and how this impacts the roll out of the programme going forward.
- Rapid chargers will be needed for the biggest road users i.e. taxis.
- How does this work fit in with parking strategy in Somerset? The Managing Director advised that the Councils Parking Strategy was somewhat out of date and due to be reviewed, and that EV infrastructure would be addressed as part of this and the wider Transport Plan for Somerset.
- Will Somerset County Council be offering its employees a salary sacrifice scheme or similar, to purchase EV vehicles? The Managing Director SWP advised that a salary sacrifice scheme was being worked up within HR and that details would follow in the next report.

The Chair thanked all for their comments, questions, and positive discussion on the update report.

### **Agenda item 8: Approach to Fleet decarbonisation**

Mickey Green, Managing Director at Somerset Waste Partnership presented members with a brief set of slides to highlight the key points from the report.

These key points included:

- This work is focused on SCC fleet only, of which there are currently 243 vehicles.
- Somerset Council fleet will be more than 700 vehicles.
- This work will lead to a full fleet replacement timetable.
- Carbon footprint of SCC fleet is coming down from previous years.
- Potential to reduce fleet size by making other arrangements for low-mileage users. i.e., pool cars

As per paragraph 2 - Issues for Consideration/Recommendations

### 2.1. To note:

- Progress to date, including the phased approach being taken to decarbonise the Council's fleet whilst acknowledging the financial and other resource constraints.
- The intention to make recommendations to the Council during 2022/23 on the approach to future vehicle replacement programmes, in particular how we can minimise/prevent any further internal combustion engine vehicles under 3.5 tonnes being bought. This work has identified that some vehicles are not being as fully utilised as we would expect, and there will be both environmental and financial benefits from tackling that.
- Further work is planned in the future, in particular around hire/pool car, grey fleet, and larger/specialist vehicles.

The following comments and questions were received from members.

- Have we looked at carbon footprint of taxis used for school contracts?
- Concerns that the pace of SCC fleet decarbonisation is being driven by financial pressures, and not environmental.
- What research has been done into use of HVO's? (Biofuel vehicles)

### **Agenda item 9: Scrutiny at Somerset Council**

Jamie Jackson, Service Manager for Governance, Scrutiny introduced the report which was essentially a request for three members of the Scrutiny, Policies Environment committee to volunteer to sit on a task and finish group looking at how the Scrutiny Function will operate in the new Somerset Council. He advised that the group would be required to meet once or twice before making recommendations to the Constitution and Governance committee at the end of January '23.

Three committee members expressed an interest in assisting with this work, and the Service Manager Scrutiny and Governance thanked those members and informed them that he would contact them again outside of the meeting.

### **Agenda item 10: Any other business**

There were no other items of business raised by the Chair.