

# SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE held in Committee Room 2/3, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells on Friday, 31 January 2020 at 10.00 am

-----

Present:- Councillors S. Aitchison (Chairman), H. Anderson, G. Edgar, J. Greenwell, S. Haslam, H. Laing, D. Paterson, E. Robson and S. Scott.

In Attendance:- Chief Planning & Housing Officer (I. Aikman), Senior Policy Advisor (D. Scott), Corporate Policy Advisor (M. Cook), Senior Communications & Marketing Officer (A. Drummond), Democratic Services Officer (F. Walling).

## 1. **WELCOME**

Chairman, Councillor Aitchison, welcomed Members and officers to the first meeting of the Sustainable Development Committee and gave a special welcome to the members of the public in attendance. In his introduction, he gave a personal insight into the challenges faced with respect to climate change and loss of biodiversity, drawing attention to the way we live and use resources, the choices we make and the impact of actions we take. He noted that every political group was represented on the new Committee and looked forward to starting and leading the process towards embedding sustainable development in the Scottish Borders.

## 2. **BRIEFING: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

2.1 With reference to paragraph 5 of the Scottish Borders Council Minute of 29 August 2019, there had been circulated copies of a briefing note explaining the background to the Sustainable Development Committee (SDC). Councillor Aitchison explained that the purpose of the paper was to simply set out 'how we got here' and very broadly some of those priority areas the Council needed to work on. The paper referred to the commitment made by Council, on 29 August 2019, to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals as they related to local government, as follows:

1. An overarching ethos bringing clarity, consistency and coherence to the Council's approach across the full range of its activities.
2. Taking a leadership role in relation to sustainable development enabling the Council to maintain and build value organisationally through the efficient and sustainable use of resources, to develop public value in its relationship to citizens and communities, and to manage reputational risk.

Council agreed to establish the SDC to drive and monitor the implementation of the above goals. As part of this process, the Committee would review recent decisions and actions of the UK and Scottish Governments, UK local authorities and Borders wide voluntary sector initiatives, with a view to making recommendations as to how the Council could exercise leadership in tackling climate change. The Committee would report to Council annually on progress. Council had also agreed that, to support implementation of sustainable development, the previous Sustainable Procurement Policy Group would be renamed the 'Sustainable Development Group' (SDG) and its role extended to ensure that appropriate practice was adopted and followed in how the Council undertook the full range of its activities. Comprising both Executive Directors, the Director for Assets and

Infrastructure, and key officers from across Council services, the SDG had met twice to agree the details of its remit and membership, and to consider priority areas of Council activity and methodologies for assessment of sustainability and carbon appraisal. The SDG had recently co-ordinated Council responses to 3 recent Scottish Government consultations. For information, copies of the responses were included with the agenda papers. Chair of the SDG, Ian Aikman, explained that in representing the operational and Corporate side of the Council, the Group would support the Committee and take forward ideas and provide a practical perspective.

- 2.2 Councillor Aitchison highlighted two interrelated early pieces of work highlighted in the briefing, namely Performance Indicators and Priorities. A presentation later in the Committee agenda considered the urgency of climate action by governments, other public bodies (including the Council) and of society as a whole. Other priority areas identified by officers included – energy, transport and biodiversity. Clearly, there was considerable overlap between these. It was noted that the Council had been investing in energy saving projects for a number of years, and this programme would continue producing carbon savings and cost savings. A key step in ensuring that the Council delivered improved sustainable development performance was ensuring that we could measure progress. Some appropriate indicators already existed but it was clear that there were gaps. A vital task of the SDG would be to develop a suite of performance indicators, which could support improvement. Some potential measures, such as energy savings, and street cleanliness were already reported. Consideration would need to be given to which indicators should be reported where, as well as to the refinement of existing indicators and the development of new indicators. It was expected that updates on performance reporting activity would be available at the next meeting of the Committee. There followed a brief discussion about the introductory paper, with Members commenting on some effective measures already taken by the Council to save energy and reduce waste in particular. Members also made reference to very difficult decisions and perhaps unpalatable decisions that would need to be made in the future.

## **DECISION NOTED**

### **3. DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

- 3.1 As the main part of the meeting, Councillor Aitchison welcomed Dave Gorman, Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability at the University of Edinburgh. Mr Gorman was in attendance to give a presentation entitled 'Responding to the Climate Crisis – Urgency, Embedding and Lessons Learned'. The outline of the presentation slides fell into 5 main sections as follows:

- Some background on the science and why this really is an emergency
- Impacts (or why we should be concerned...)
- (Briefly) the Sustainable Development Goals and broader context
- The University of Edinburgh and its approach
- Leadership and Change Making for Adaptive Problems

- 3.2 Following the comprehensive presentation, which was very well received by those present, Mr Gorman responded to questions and comments from Members of the Committee. When asked for his view about Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage, as supported by Scottish Government, Mr Gorman believed that all measures that were available would be needed to tackle carbon emissions. Edinburgh University was a leader in Carbon Capture and storage and was also working on a machine to extract carbon from the atmosphere. With regard to the need to develop carbon literacy, Mr Gorman advised that there was extensive guidance available to calculate carbon footprint. He referred to 3 types of emissions involved in the calculation, which were differentiated as follows: Scope 1 were direct emissions, e.g. burning of fuels on site; Scope 2 were indirect emissions, e.g. generated by electricity consumed; and Scope 3 were broader indirect emissions controlled by a different emitter, e.g. by use of air travel. He added that an organisation should choose the scopes on which to focus. It was also important for an

organisation to develop mechanisms to adapt to the effects of climate change. e.g. to extremes in weather. As to whether it was easier for an urban area than for a rural area to achieve zero carbon emissions, Mr Gorman accepted that the situation was different and probably more difficult for a rural area, having potentially more adaptation costs. However he also pointed out that in terms of population, rural communities often had more local identification and engagement with initiatives than an urban population. There were also more opportunities in a natural environment to offset carbon emissions in other ways, e.g. by planting trees. Discussion continued about the need for Scottish Borders Council to firstly carry out an audit of its current carbon footprint, noting the steps already taken to reduce emissions. Mr Aikman confirmed that this work to establish the current position had already been started by officers. The key was to confirm the current position, identify targets and to put in place an effective action plan which could be considered alongside the budget planning process. It was recognised that alongside this process the Council needed to develop expertise. Although the organisation had skills and knowledge covering a number of areas, Mr Aikman accepted that the SDG was in its early stages and a dedicated expert resource would be helpful. Members commented on the apparent level of awareness of climate change issues amongst young people and welcomed that. However they also referred to the need for schools to focus on helping pupils develop the new and different skills that would be needed in the workforce particularly as part of the construction industry's contribution towards sustainable development. A further point touched on in the discussion included the issue of responsible investment and implications of an organisation's financial investment decisions in terms of both long term returns and climate impact. In conclusion Councillor Aitchison thanked Mr Gorman for his hugely important and thought provoking presentation and expressed the hope that a relationship in this area could be maintained between Scottish Borders Council and the University of Edinburgh.

## **DECISION**

**NOTED the presentation as attached to this Minute.**

### **4. CLIMATE ACTION - PLAYING #OURPART**

- 4.1 The second presentation, from Mr Aikman, expanded some of the key messages of the previous presentation with the particular aim of preparing the Council for a step change in its approach to climate action. After referring to statements on the evidence of a climate emergency Mr Aikman highlighted that in Scotland 20 Councils had declared a climate emergency, including all Scottish Borders Council's partner councils in the City of Edinburgh and South-East Region, in Borderlands (including Carlisle City, Cumbria and Northumberland County Councils) and in the South of Scotland. Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 set a legally-binding 'net zero' target of all greenhouse gases by 2045 with interim targets for reductions of at least 56% by 2020, 75% by 2030 and 90% by 2040. As well as legal duties, Councils had a vital role in responding to the climate emergency: in terms of their scale and large resource base; influence over key areas such as planning, transport and procurement; and in a leadership role. Scottish Borders Council had made progress in a number of areas such as LED street lighting roll out; Energy Efficiency Programme; fleet transition to low emission vehicles; and council mileage reduction and efficient pool car fleet. In terms of next steps, Mr Aikman highlighted that the SDG now needed to develop a clear target and coherent plan for climate action and put in place effective performance monitoring. The time was also appropriate for a report to Council to propose the way forward.
- 4.2 In the ensuing discussion the question was asked as to whether the Council had resources to put in place the harder actions, having already introduced easier fixes. Mr Cook emphasised that, although there would be difficult choices to make and possibly up-front costs to manage, in many cases there were long term savings associated with sustainability. However there was no illusion about the element of challenge involved. Mr Aikman added that a large proportion of Council spending was supported by funding from other partners and unless the authority could deliver on sustainability that funding was unlikely to continue. Discussion continued about the importance of communicating to the

public a positive vision to accompany choices made by the Council in terms of the climate change agenda, rather than decisions in spending simply being seen as cuts. On being invited, by the Chairman, to contribute to the discussion, a member of the public reinforced the strong positive vision that the future could be better, not worse. He welcomed the new committee and wished it well, emphasising the level of support there was in the community for climate change actions. The Leader responded that any assistance to spread the message within the community and through Community Councils in particular would be welcome.

- 4.3 Councillor Aitchison thanked Mr Aikman for his presentation and led a discussion on the way forward. It was noted that the SDG would continue to work on establishing the Council's current position in respect of carbon footprint, set out targets and put in place an action plan accompanied by performance monitoring measures. With reference to the presentations Councillor Aitchison emphasised that there was clear evidence of a climate emergency and that the Council must play its fullest part in responding to that emergency. There was unanimous agreement that officers prepare a report to Council on the climate emergency as soon as possible.

#### **DECISION**

- (a) **NOTED the presentation 'Climate Action – Playing #OurPart' as attached to this Minute.**
- (b) **AGREED to recommend to Council that Council considers a report on the climate emergency as soon as possible.**

#### **5. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

In terms of the cycle of future meetings Members suggested that the Committee meet 4 times per year once its role was fully established. However it was agreed that at this early stage a more ad hoc arrangement of meetings would be more appropriate, a meeting in April, June and early Autumn being suggested. In response to a question about the Committee's input into the draft report to Council, Mr Cook hoped that the report would be prepared in time for the March meeting. This would leave insufficient time for an additional SDC meeting but as part of the usual formal committee report timetable, the report would be available to Members prior to the Council meeting.

**AGREED the arrangements for future meetings outlined above.**

*The meeting concluded at 12.10 pm*