

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE held remotely by Microsoft Teams on Friday, 5 March 2021 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Aitchison (Chairman), H. Anderson, K. Chapman, G. Edgar, H. Laing and S. Scott
Also Present:- Councillors C. Hamilton, S. Hamilton and M. Rowley
Apologies:- Councillors J. Greenwell and S. Haslam
Absent:- Councillors D. Paterson
In Attendance:- Chief Planning & Housing Officer (I. Aikman), Corporate Policy Advisor (M. Cook), Environmental Strategy Officer (L. Cox), Democratic Services Officer (F. Walling).

WELCOME

Chairman, Councillor Aitchison, welcomed Members, officers, guest presenters and members of the public to the on-line meeting of the Sustainable Development Committee.

1. MINUTE

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the meeting of 4 December 2020.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

2. DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY COUNCIL CARBON NEUTRAL ROUTE MAP

- 2.1 The Chairman introduced Simon Fieldhouse and Sarah Farrell, from Dumfries & Galloway Council who were in attendance to give a presentation, accompanied by slides, on their Council's "Route Map to Net Zero Carbon Region by 2025". Environment Manager, Simon Fieldhouse, explained that Dumfries & Galloway Council had declared a Climate Emergency on 27 June 2019. The 12 point plan that accompanied the declaration was developed by the administration at a political level recognising the desire locally from groups and residents to address Climate Change. Whilst accepting that the target was ambitious it was felt by the Council that the target should be aspirational and challenging. A Cross Party Working Group and Officer Working Group had been set up to take forward delivery of the plan and a new Council Priority was added for Climate Change to "Urgently respond to climate change and transition to a carbon neutral region". Four initial workstreams had been set up: Regional Baseline Emissions Inventory; Strategic Plan and Route map to 2025; Carbon Literacy Training; and Development of a Citizen's Panel and Regional Stakeholder Forum. Carbon Literacy Training was being delivered to key staff across the Council, with the opportunity to train specific sectors including in procurement; youth council; teaching staff; and facilities management. Mr Fieldhouse referred to the important work to develop a baseline of emissions across the region and advised that this had been revealing. Listed in the presentation was a list of partners and stakeholders from across the region with whom the Council were working. Ms Farrell's role, as Climate Change Project Officer, was to co-ordinate and help focus efforts and support organisations and individuals to make changes to move the region to net zero by 2025. Ms Farrell gave further details about the projects and initiatives that were already up and running to promote and encourage change. She explained that the question "How Can You Help?" was being taken to officers, communities, stakeholders and residents, to support the Council's Regional net Zero ambitions; support and encourage a low/zero

carbon approach; support regional transition to green technologies; and protect the natural environment.

- 2.2 Members thanked the officers from Dumfries & Galloway Council for the interesting and inspiring presentation. In response to a question about how the Council was working with farmers in respect of their 2025 target, Mr Fieldhouse explained that they were engaging with the farming community, recognising the economic importance of that sector within the region and were working with the NFU both locally and nationally. The approach was to identify and promote examples of good practice and to look at how land management practices could be adapted to reduce secretion of carbon. Further information was requested about the development of a tender for a Citizen's Panel. Mr Fieldhouse explained that the Council was commissioning a provider with in-depth subject knowledge to design and deliver the Citizen's Panel over a 12 month period. The provider would arrange attendance in numbers, representation and diversity to ensure full coverage and would report on outcomes relevant to proceedings and recommendations. The Citizen's Panel, of between 50 and 75 members, would give the opportunity for an arm's length independent body to keep the momentum going and to scrutinise actions. After the initial 12 month period a decision would be made about whether to take the organisation of the panel in-house. In response to further questions Ms Farrell expanded on work being carried out to engage with the youth council, schools and local colleges. In terms of possible incorporation of climate education in the national curriculum Mr Fieldhouse advised that although this would be a decision for the Scottish Government there were opportunities locally to incorporate principles within subject matter. The Chairman thanked Mr Fieldhouse and Ms Farrell for their attendance and presentation.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation.

3. STOPPING THE USE OF PLASTIC BOTTLES IN SCHOOLS

- 3.1 The Chairman introduced Youth Ambassadors for Sustainability, Liberty Barber and Ruby Finn, who were in attendance to give the presentation which they had written on 'Stopping the Use of Plastic Bottles in Schools'. In the introduction to the presentation it was highlighted why using less plastic would benefit us all and emphasised that simply recycling food packaging was not good enough as plastic use must be reduced to achieve a circular economy. It was pointed out that schools in the Scottish Borders still used a lot of plastic, most of which was found in the canteens in the form of food wrappers, plastic drink bottles and disposable cutlery. It was suggested that to stop selling plastic water bottles would be a good start towards replacing single use plastic in schools. This could be achieved by installing more water refill machines and providing re-usable bottles to pupils who did not have one. Pupils could help promote this transition in their schools and educate others about littering and reducing plastic use. The Youth Ambassadors hoped everyone could work together to make Schools operate in a more sustainable way and concluded by providing a link to a letter signed by over 125 experts stating that using reusable bottles plates and packaging was safe even during the pandemic.
- 3.2 Members welcomed the presentation. They noted that the sale of plastic bottles had already been stopped in Peebles High School and that Eyemouth High School had recently achieved plastic free status. Members discussed how this could be rolled out in all schools across the Borders and asked for a report to be brought to Council on how quickly decommissioning of plastic bottles across schools could be achieved. Mr Aikman advised that the way forward would be to discuss the implications of the proposals with officers in Education, Catering and Finance and that a report on possible options for implementation would be taken to Council as soon as practicable. The Chairman thanked the Youth Ambassadors for their attendance and thought-provoking presentation and gave his assurance that the proposals would be taken forward in a positive way.

DECISION

- (a) **NOTED the presentation.**
- (b) **AGREED that in terms of decommissioning single use plastic bottles in schools, discussions on the implications of this proposal should take place with colleagues in Education, Catering and Finance and that a report on possible options for implementation be brought to Council as soon as is practicable.**

4. **ENERGY EFFICIENT SCOTLAND: AREA BASED SCHEMES (EES:ABS) PROGRAMME UPDATE**

- 4.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director Corporate Improvement and Economy providing an overview and update on the local Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme (also known as EES:ABS). Donna Bogdanovic, Principal Officer, Housing Strategy, Policy & Development, was in attendance to present the report. Ms Bogdanovic explained that the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2017-2022 was the Council's key strategic document for planning and delivering initiatives to reduce fuel poverty and improve home energy efficiency. Priority 2 of the LHS was that "More people live in good quality, energy efficient homes". The key delivery channel for addressing fuel poverty and improving domestic energy efficiency was the Energy Efficiency Scotland: Area Based Scheme (EES:ABS) This had been the cornerstone of both the Scottish Government's and Local Authority's energy efficiency improvements for private domestic properties since 2013. A grant funding allocation was made available annually for local authorities to develop and deliver these programmes in areas they identified as having high fuel poverty. Programmes typically included the installation of external and internal wall insulation as well as cavity wall insulation. However the scope of eligible measures was now widening. In the last year Scottish Borders Council had introduced decarbonisation and renewable technology in the form of Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) and Solar Photovoltaic and battery storage (PV Battery) to the programme. The Scottish Borders Council EES:ABS Overview February 2021 was attached as an appendix to the report. Specific property archetypes of the Scottish Borders and the region's rurality presented both challenges and opportunities. It was generally accepted that there were four contributory factors to fuel poverty: the energy efficiency and heating systems of the home; fuel prices; income of the household; and behavioural (how people lived within their home/use their heating). Scottish Borders Council worked closely with agencies such as Home Energy Scotland to ensure those accessing the programme were supported to address the other drivers of fuel poverty. Over the period April 2013 to December 2020 Scottish Borders Council had secured £13.6m in funding to deliver the programmes. £10.6 million had been Scottish Government EES:ABS grant funding allocation and £3m in Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding.
- 4.2 Members asked for more information about the Council's partnership work with Changeworks, for an explanation of the barriers to delivering energy efficiency improvements to homes within the Scottish Borders and how the planning system could assist to make the process easier. Ms Bogdanovic explained that Changeworks worked with Home Energy Scotland and this had included work with the Council's Housing Strategy Team on area selection analysis, bid document construction, procurement as well as quality control and delivery. Ms Bogdanovic referred to experience gained from a recent Changeworks programme in Peebles where it emerged that there were barriers to overcome in terms of engagement with householders about conversion to renewable technologies particularly in those cases where subsidies for the work would not be available. Mr Aikman agreed that the provision of planning advice packages may help householders embark on works to improve energy efficiency. He agreed to discuss this with colleagues within Planning & Development with a view to putting in place the facility to make it as easy as possible for householders to go through the statutory process.

DECISION

NOTED:-

- (a) **the progress made in delivering the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme (EES:ABS) in the Scottish Borders.**

- (b) **that the Chief Planning & Housing Officer would discuss with Planning & Development colleagues the provision of advice and support to householders to simplify the statutory process associated with works to improve home energy efficiency.**

5. UPDATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE ROUTE MAP

- 5.1 With reference to paragraph 6 of the Scottish Borders Council minute of 25 September 2020, the Chief Planning & Housing Officer, Ian Aikman, and the Corporate Policy Advisor, Michael Cook, gave a presentation on the preparation of a Climate Change Route map, which was scheduled to go to Council on 17 June 2021. Mr Aikman and Mr Cook firstly set the national context and in particular to the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 which set targets to reduce Scotland's emissions to net-zero by 2045 at the latest with interim targets for reductions of at least 56% by 2020, 75% by 2030 and 90% by 2040. From 2022, legislation would require public bodies to report on their targets for achieving zero direct emissions and reducing indirect emissions and to report how spending aligned with emissions reduction. Mr Cook referred to natural capital being one of the greatest assets of the Scottish Borders which was central to the movement towards a net zero economy, developing thriving rural economies based around woodland creation, peatland restoration and biodiversity as well as sustainable tourism, food, drink and energy. He stressed that climate change action must be integrated into all the Council's decisions and service delivery. There would be a comprehensive approach and roll out of training across all service areas including 'Keep Scotland Beautiful' carbon literacy training to cohorts of staff and proposals developed for cascading wider training for staff and elected Members. Mr Cook went on to explain what the Climate Change Route Map would look like. Following work on baseline and phasing a series of workshops on energy; transport; waste; and resilience/engagement was being undertaken. The Route Map would represent an evolving strategy and framework for the future. It was planned to hold a briefing for elected Members on the Route Map prior to the presentation of the report to full Council in June. In conclusion Mr Cook referred to opportunities to be involved in the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) being hosted in Glasgow on 1-12 November 2021.

MEMBER

Councillor Edgar left the meeting.

- 5.2 In response to a question about identifying baseline greenhouse gas emissions, Mr Cook confirmed that some work had already been carried out on this. Although emissions in the Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway were comparatively low, it had been recognised that this was due to the region being sparsely populated and that work was required to reduce emissions per capita which were comparatively high. Members discussed the presentation and asked for more detail about the Council's involvement in COP26. Mr Cook explained that a South of Scotland application was being submitted for involvement in the Green Zone – which was a platform, managed by UK government, for general public, youth groups, civil society, academia, artists, business etc aimed at promoting dialogue, awareness, education and commitments. The South of Scotland application represented 'a new and innovative collaboration to develop a 'natural capital region' which explicitly established natural capital as the foundation of a 'green recovery'. Central to this was the Borderlands initiative and the Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUP) Pilot, which was an element of a wider strategy to develop a strategic vision for land use.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation

6. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATIONS

Mr Cook drew attention to three current Net Zero and Energy focused consultations as follows:

[Consultation on Scottish skills requirements for energy efficiency, zero emissions and low carbon heating systems, microgeneration and heat networks for homes.](#)

This consultation set out Scottish Government proposals for energy efficiency, zero emissions and low carbon heating systems, microgeneration and heat network skills requirements. Whilst the primary focus was on retrofit work for homes, it was expected some of these skill requirements would also be relevant for new-build housing and in certain circumstances non-domestic buildings. Once implemented, these skills requirements would create a best practice standard for the sector, and would be a minimum requirement for Scottish Government-supported programmes. The consultation was seeking views on both the proposals and their implementation. In response to a question about setting targets in terms of insulation and conversion to low carbon heating systems and the availability of contractors to carry out this work, Mr Cook confirmed that there was a focus on skill requirements within the supply chain. The Environmental Strategy Officer, Louise Cox offered to prepare a short briefing note to Members to summarise the huge amount of work being carried out by the Council in this area.

[Heat in Buildings Strategy](#)

The consultation presented a draft Heat in Buildings Strategy. The strategy outlined the steps Scottish Government proposed to take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from Scotland's homes, workplaces and community buildings and to ensure that poor energy performance was eradicated as a driver of fuel poverty.

[The Low Carbon Infrastructure Transition Programme - Call for Evidence to Support Development of Future Programme](#)

This followed on from the previous Low Carbon Infrastructure Transition programme, in which the Council was awarded match funding to install Solar PV, Battery Storage and EV charging infrastructure at HQ and the Newtown Depot - to support both commuting and fleet vehicles. The consultation sought evidence and views on the barriers to the delivery of low and zero emissions energy infrastructure projects, the challenges and risks to delivering large scale low emissions energy infrastructure projects, the priority areas identified for the future delivery programme, and sustainable support mechanisms to enable increased uptake.

DECISION

NOTED:

- (a) **the current Net Zero and Energy focused Scottish Government consultations; and**
- (b) **that, in terms of skills requirements relating to energy efficiency work within homes, the Environmental Strategy Officer would provide a briefing note to summarise work being carried out by the Council.**

The meeting concluded at 12.25 pm