

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE held remotely by Microsoft Teams on Friday, 4 June 2021 at 10.45 am

Present:- Councillors S. Aitchison (Chairman), H. Anderson, G. Edgar, J. Greenwell, H. Laing, D. Paterson and S. Scott
Also present:- Councillors J. Linehan and M. Rowley.
Apologies:- Councillors K. Chapman and S. Haslam
In Attendance:- Chief Planning & Housing Officer (I. Aikman), Corporate Policy Advisor (M. Cook), Environmental Strategy Officer (L. Cox), Project Management Team Leader (E. Doyle), Youth Engagement Officer (P. Rigby), Youth Ambassadors for Sustainability (L. Barber and E. Gibson), 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. The Chairman did not change the order of business but gave notice that he would take two additional items at Item 10 of the agenda.

1. MINUTE

It was noted that the Minute of 4 December 2020 had been mistakenly included with the agenda papers. Apologies were offered for this oversight. The Minute of 5 March 2021 was circulated to Members during the meeting and this was approved.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

2. CLIMATE CHANGE ROUTE MAP

- 2.1 Before asking Chief Planning & Housing Officer, Ian Aikman, to introduce the slide presentation on the Climate Change Route Map, the Chairman thanked Mr Aikman, Mr Cook, Ms Cox and all the officers included in the huge amount of work involved to get to this point of setting out the scope and rationale of a way forward for the Scottish Borders towards a position of net zero in 2045. With reference to paragraph 5 of the Minute of 5 March 2021 Mr Aikman gave a summary of the Draft Climate Change Route Map, which would be presented to Council on 17 June 2021. Mr Aikman explained that the Route Map was a Scottish Borders Council led document but the absolute focus was on partnership and collaboration to work towards the two goals of a net zero Council and a net zero region. The Route Map was a framework to support long term planning with phased definition and delivery. It aligned with the Scottish Government net zero emissions target of 2045 and interim targets for reductions of 75% by 2030 and 90% by 2040. Focus would be on a green recovery 'which prioritises economic, social and environmental wellbeing and responds to the twin challenges of the climate emergency and biodiversity loss'. Corporate Policy Advisor, Michael Cook, went on to explain the direction of the Route Map, from a calculated emissions baseline, through 5 main themes of Resilience; Transport Use; Nature Based solutions; Energy; and Waste Management. Each theme would be translated into milestones and within the milestones there would be actions identified by officer workshops and detailed to drive delivery. The presentation gave an example of how milestones, actions and sub-actions would be developed within

one particular theme. Mr Cook went on to refer to engagement, governance and delivery of the Route Map. As part of active engagement with the public and stakeholders it was planned to have a Climate Citizens Assembly/Panel. Also proposed was a high level Advisory Group to provide external oversight and a Biennial Conference to involve interest groups, communities, local and national partners and elected Members in a review of climate change matters and our response.

- 2.2 Members thanked officers for the presentation and for the work undertaken to get to this point. They stressed the importance of translating the Route Map into actions as soon as possible recognising that some actions were already in progress. Mr Aikman advised that the actions in progress and those under development would be reflected in future reports. Once the Route Map was approved officers would address implementation with work being carried out to ensure actions and sub actions were mainstreamed throughout the Council. Organisationally the Council should show leadership in terms of what was needed for the region. In response to a question about the presence of natural carbon sinks in the Borders, Mr Cook explained that there was some evidence of sites. However there was still debate over the significance of carbon absorption and technology was still in development in terms of sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere. With regard to the Citizens Assembly which was proposed as part of the Route Map, Mr Cook advised that this was not likely to be on a one-off basis but would continue to exist in order to inform and advise the regional approach. It would be necessary for the membership of the assembly to be truly representative to enable co-governance of the approach, particularly around a 'just transition'.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation attached as an appendix to this minute.

3. ESESCR WORKFORCE MOBILITY PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Chairman introduced Project Management Team Leader, Ewan Doyle, who was in attendance to give a presentation on the Workforce Mobility Project – Integrated Regional Employability & Skills, being developed as part of the Edinburgh & South East Scotland City Region Deal. Mr Doyle explained that the aim of the project was to identify mobility barriers to sustained education, training and employment in the region and to implement long term sustainable interventions. There was evidence that the transport barrier in Edinburgh and South East Scotland was not solely related to affordability and there were numerous factors that had created a fragmented transport system. The presentation gave results of data gathering - which led to the calculation of a Workforce Mobility Index scoring methodology - and analysis which included surveys across employability partners and business groups and data gathering across transport partners. Analysis of major employer staff data for 700 staff based at Scottish Borders Council Headquarters showed the level of provision of bus services and routes that would be needed to result in all staff having access to bus transport. The benefits would include more services to support employment, education and training; services designed around the need of the passengers; and cheaper bus fares. In terms of benefits to the environment and based on the 700 employees, there would be fewer cars on the road (a reduction of approximately 9 thousand miles per day); more sustainable transport options; and carbon savings of approximately 467,200 kg CO₂ per annum. There would also be less requirement for Council subsidised bus services. The presentation went on to outline the next steps for the project which included further data gathering and analysis; policy review; and other transport issues. Members welcomed the report and recognised the potential of the programme as it developed, noting the level of access to transport deprivation in the Borders area. In response to a question, Mr Doyle emphasised that, through the policy and ambition towards a net zero position it was important not to increase inequalities. The National Transport Strategy was being developed in a way to create better connectivity and transport links. There was a need to be innovative and consider all options such as demand responsive transport. In terms of timescale, Members were advised that there were no easy or quick solutions to the challenges presented and that this would be a long term project.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation attached as an appendix to this minute.

4. REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY/NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 UPDATE

4.1 By way of a slide presentation, Mr Aikman provided Members with an update on the National Planning Framework (NPF) 4 and Regional Spatial Strategies as related to Climate Change. Mr Aikman explained that the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 had brought about a fundamental change to the planning system. The NPF now incorporated Scottish Planning Policy and became part of the Development Plan. Strategic Development Plans had been removed and Regional Spatial Strategies introduced. There would also be 10 year Local Development Plans with the addition of Local Place Plans. Within NPF4 there had been a reframing of Planning Policy on climate change which signalled a significant shift in the way we thought about planning and a move from a focus on 'low carbon' towards a more ambitious 'net zero' agenda. There were four key themes: net zero emissions; resilient communities; wellbeing economy; and better, greener places. The presentation went on to provide further details of where the focus would be within each theme. The themes of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for South East and South Scotland were: efforts to address the global climate change emergency; deliver a greener economy; resilience to the effects of climate change; safeguarded and enhanced natural capital; and utilise transition assets and sustainable development opportunities. The draft NPF4 would be laid before Parliament in Autumn 2021 before going out for consultation and adoption in Spring 2022.

4.2 Members discussed the presentation and received further information in response to their questions. A definition of 'nature-based solutions' was requested. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, 'nature-based solutions' were defined as 'actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits'. In terms of how NPF4 would link with Scottish Borders Council planning policy, Mr Aikman explained that at present there would be a transitional arrangement with the current Local Development Plan and NPF4 used as guidance. However it was likely to have a strong influence on policy in the preparation of the next Local Development Plan. With regard to land use and the issue of large scale forestry plantations in the South of Scotland, to offset carbon, Mr Aikman noted opportunities to test approaches presented by a number of initiatives, including the Regional Land Use Partnership Pilot. Indeed, the two-year South of Scotland Regional Land Use Partnership Pilot offered a very significant opportunity to examine a range of issues at landscape scale, helping communities, land owners and stakeholders work together to find ways to optimise land use in a fair and inclusive way and supporting Green Recovery and the journey to net zero. It was proposed to prepare a Special Planning Guidance document (SPG) for approval by Council in the not too distant future, to encourage the planting of more sustainable woodland. If the pilot was successful this could conceivably inform land use in other parts of Scotland.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation attached as an appendix to this minute.

5. CATERING PACKAGING IN SCHOOLS

With reference to paragraph 3 of the Minute of 4 June 2021, Mr Aikman gave an update on discussions with colleagues in Education, Catering, Finance and Waste on the proposal to decommission single use plastic bottles in schools. As expected, the proposal was not straightforward and there were implications to consider. There remained work to do on the financial implications but this was in progress and it was hoped to take a briefing paper soon to CMT before presenting a proposal to Members.

DECISION

NOTED the update.

MEMBERS

Councillors Edgar and Laing left the meeting.

6. URGENT BUSINESS

Under Section 50B(4)(b) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Chairman was of the opinion that the items dealt with in the following paragraphs should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency, in view of the need to keep Members informed.

6.1 Learning For Sustainability

The Chairman introduced Debbie Matthewson, Principal Teacher at Stow Primary School and representative on the Education Scotland National Learning for Sustainability Group. Ms Matthewson was in attendance to give a presentation on the background and significance of Learning for Sustainability (LfS) in schools. She gave a definition of LfS as 'a whole school approach that enabled schools and their wider communities to build the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and confidence needed to develop practices and take decisions which are compatible with a sustainable and equitable society'. LfS was aligned with National Improvement Framework Priorities and the values underpinning the Curriculum for Excellence were also consistent with the values of LfS – wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity. The LfS Report, published in December 2012, contained over 30 recommendations across many aspects of education. These were currently being taken forward by the LfS National Implementation Group. Members thanked Ms Matthewson for the interesting presentation. In response to a question about whether all Primary Schools in the Scottish Borders were incorporating LfS at the same level, Ms Matthewson advised that there was a lot of good practice going on but there was a need for a more joined-up and co-ordinated approach across schools. She added that work was ongoing nationally to co-ordinate LfS across schools in connection with COP26. She confirmed that, rather than having dedicated teachers, the LfS approach was embedded across all teaching staff. The Chairman thanked Ms Matthewson for her attendance.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation attached as an appendix to this minute.

6.2 Pesticide Action Network

Councillor Anderson explained that Peebles Community Council had requested assistance to take forward a pilot in Peebles to go pesticide-free, following guidance from the Pesticide Action Network. Councillor Anderson asked if the Community Council representatives could be invited to make a presentation to the Sustainable Development Committee. The Chairman agreed in principle to the request but advised that he would firstly consult with the Service Director Assets & Infrastructure about the proposal for a pilot and he would keep Members informed.

DECISION

NOTED

The meeting concluded at 1.05 pm