

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE held remotely
by Microsoft Teams on Friday, 16 September
2022 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors J. Linehan (Chair), D. Begg, J. Greenwell, N. Mackinnon, J. PatonDay, E. Small, A. Smart, E. Thornton-Nicol, R. Tatler and T. Weatherston.
Apologies:- Councillor L. Douglas
In Attendance:- Chief Planning & Housing Officer (I. Aikman), Climate Change Officer (J. Fausset), Senior Policy Advisor (M. Cook), Sustainability Manager (L. Cox), Project Management Team Leader (E. Doyle), Youth Engagement Officer (P. Rigby), Democratic Services Officer (D. Hall)

1. **MINUTE**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the Meeting held on 17 June 2022. With reference to paragraph 6 of the Minute, Councillor Begg requested an update on Carbon Literacy training. The Sustainability Manager, Ms Louise Cox confirmed that a timetable for the training had been agreed and that the programme would run from October to November.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

2. **LOCAL HEAT AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS** 2.1 The Chair welcomed the Senior Energy Efficiency Strategy Officer, Mr Neil Robertson, to provide an update on Local Heat and Energy Efficiency in the Scottish Borders. Mr Robertson explained that Scottish Borders Council (SBC) was in the process of producing a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) which would aim to reduce energy demands and decarbonise energy supplies. Every building in the region would be assessed and would be expected to have a plan in place to facilitate decarbonisation. Mr Robertson explained that LHEES plans had been developed over the preceding 4 years, and that every Local Authority in Scotland had been involved in the pilot stage. Following legislation passed in the Scottish Parliament, it was a statutory requirement to have a LHEES in place by the end of 2023. There would be a subsequent 5 year rolling review and renew cycle. Mr Robertson explained that the current stage of the LHEES concerned the creation of the strategy, with adaptations made as the energy landscape changed. Following the end of 2023 there would be a shift to the delivery phase. Given that the whole process was planned to be reactive in nature it was expected that there would be changes during the delivery phase. The use of various data sets to drive the planned work was highlighted, and would help initiate improvement by allowing key areas to be targeted for different kinds of work, such as cavity wall insulations. Mr Robertson confirmed that the core LHEES strategy team were in place, with technology support available, and plans to recruit and bolster the team during the delivery phase under development. With regard to early activities of the LHEES, Mr Robertson highlighted an external wall insulation scheme in Kelso, which could benefit up to 30 homes. It was hoped that work on projects such as the aforementioned one would benefit the wider region by promoting the use of local companies to drive the shift to renewable technology.

- 2.2 In response to a question regarding the feedback on the energy efficiency scheme in Kelso, Mr Robertson explained that feedback would be sought post install and after 12 months.

Digital monitors had also been installed to assess heat and humidity changes, with the data from those monitors collected and processed. Regarding the potential to install ground or air source heat pumps in green spaces in towns across the region, Mr Robertson explained that he expected that projects of that nature would be unaffordable in areas which were not densely populated. Mr Robertson confirmed that projects would be explored if the requisite conditions existed. In response to a question regarding how reactive the LHEES was to opportunities, such as upgrading buildings when they were closed for a considerable time for unrelated reasons, Mr Robertson explained that when any opportunity presented itself it would be assessed for feasibility. Mr Robertson confirmed that with regard to energy savings schemes, the tenant was generally the person who was assessed when considering eligibility for schemes.

DECISION NOTED.

MEMBER

Councillor Tatler left the meeting during the discussion of the item below.

- 3 **TRANSPORT PRIORITIES UPDATE 3.1** The Chair welcomed the Project Management Team Leader, Mr Ewan Doyle to provide an update on the Electric Vehicle Charging Feasibility Study. Mr Doyle explained that that the feasibility study took place in the context of the National Transport Strategy 2, which had initiated a considerable shift in the focus of transport towards delivering net-zero, reducing inequalities, supporting economic growth and improving health and wellbeing. Transport was the single biggest carbon generator in Scotland. The shift towards net zero initiatives meant that the focus of transport had shifted from increasing capacity and infrastructure for growing vehicle numbers towards sustainable solutions to daily travel and mass transit.
- 3.2 Ms Mairi Joyce was present at the meeting, and explained that she had worked with Mr Doyle on the Electric Vehicle Charging Feasibility Study. As part of the study a baseline review was undertaken to assess current electric vehicle usage and what levels of infrastructure was available to support those vehicles. A key focus of any infrastructure work for electric vehicles in rural areas was a need to avoid black spots, and a considerable amount of work had gone into understanding the private sector and their plans. The study had aimed to assess what role the Council should take in the provision of new infrastructure for Electric Vehicle charging across the region. Regarding demand assessments, there remained a considerable amount of uncertainty in the area, with a wide variety of forecasts for electric vehicle usage in existence. A number of different types of charger were also available, which had the potential to affect electric vehicle usage numbers. The approach which the Council decided to take had a number of ramifications and would affect how the private sector responded accordingly. A number of scenarios and models was presented, with a balanced approach considered the most prudent.
- 3.3 In response to a question regarding charging points in smaller villages, Ms Joyce explained that a number of strategic sites were being considered. Regarding the assistance offered to individuals to install charging points at their homes, Ms Joyce explained that she was unaware of the specifics regarding grant funding, and highlighted that the cost gap between electric and diesel powered vehicles continued to narrow and was expected to reach parity. In response to a question regarding capital costs, Mr Doyle explained that the study was focused on assessing whether the private sector would provide the required infrastructure needed for electric vehicle users in the Scottish Borders. Members highlighted that a considerable number of people lived in flats and apartment buildings in town centres, and that slow charging would be more fit for purpose when that was taken into account. Councillor Mackinnon highlighted that protections needed to be built into the model of partial public ownership to ensure that profits were not solely diverted to shareholders and were

used for the benefit of the public. Mr Doyle undertook to make the slide presentation available for distribution and stressed that when seeking investment it would be more effective to pull the whole region together under one contract to secure adequate investment and increase market interest. Regarding future proofing the network and taking into account the development of hydrogen powered vehicles, Mr Doyle stressed that the landscape was changing rapidly, and that the approach to developing transport networks would be phased to allow flexibility.

3.4 The Waste and Passenger Transport Manager, Mr Ross Sharp-Dent provided an update on PINGO, the demand responsive transport (DRT) scheme which had been trialled in Berwickshire. The PINGO service consisted of two mini buses that did not operate on a fixed bus route schedule, instead users would book via app or telephone the service, with a route being plotted following the receipt of bookings. The feedback of the trial had been positive, with a steady increase in the number of under 22s that had used the service. Mr Sharp-Dent highlighted that feedback had been extremely positive, and highlighted a number of Facebook posts which had praised the scheme. The purpose of the scheme had been to assess whether DRT could be cost effective. A number of journeys on routes had been single occupancy, which suggested that if DRT was to be used in the future there would have to adjustments made.

3.5 Regarding the planned bus service review, Mr Sharp-Dent explained that Scottish Borders Council supported 42 bus routes. Without the support of SBC many of those routes would not take place. The review was focused on ensuring that the £1.2m provided by SBC to support the bus network was used in the most effective manner. Work was ongoing to assess which changes and adjustments could be made, and conversations were taking place with major employers to ensure that commuters would be able to access bus routes at the most fit for purpose time. Members explained that the feedback they had received from constituents on PINGO had been overwhelmingly positive, expressed hope that DRT could be rolled out across the other wards within the Scottish Borders, but stressed that single occupancy journeys needed to be addressed. Mr Sharp-Dent highlighted that the bus industry was facing considerable challenges, with user numbers low, and driver shortages having a negative impact on the viability of bus networks across the country. Members highlighted the need to ensure that different elements of the transport network linked up with each other in a more effective manner in order to allow passengers to travel freely across the region. Regarding the availability of data on passenger numbers, Mr Sharp-Dent explained that discussions were ongoing with operators and other Local Authorities to allow data to be more widely available. Regarding the matching up of train arrivals to bus arrivals at Tweedbank station, Mr Sharp-Dent explained that it was not always possible to ensure that services were linked due to geographical and logistical constraints. The possibility of introducing a ticket similar to that of an oyster card in London had been raised with Transport Scotland by the Director of Infrastructure and Environment and was being examined.

DECISION NOTED.

4. MANDATORY REPORTING AND CARBON BASELINING PROJECT (ECCI)

4.1 There had been circulated copies of a slide presentation on Mandatory Reporting and the Carbon Baseline Project by the Climate Change Officer, Ms Jenny Fausset, with the agenda. Ms Fausset explained that there was a mandatory report under the Climate Change Act 2009 which SBC was required to submit to the Scottish Government. The report would cover carbon emissions; key strategies and projects in place; targets in place; building resilience; procurement; and publicise progress. The report was expected to be presented to Council in October 2022 for approval prior to submission to the Scottish Government. Ms Fausset highlighted that one of the key aims of the annual reporting process was to ensure that improvements were made on a continual basis. Regarding the carbon baseline project,

Ms Fausset explained that the project would help manage and monitor emissions and allow SBC to manage its progress. The baseline would be reviewed at regular intervals.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation.

5. FORWARD PROGRAMME FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

There had been circulated copies of a Draft Forward Programme 2022-23 for the Sustainable Development Committee with the agenda. The Senior Policy Advisor, Mr Michael Cook, advised that the plan was not strictly set, and that it could be flexibly altered depending on a number of factors and as matters arose. A number of key elements had been factored into the programme, with plans made to examine the individual themes of the Climate Change Route Map; promote sustainability beyond climate action; and a focus on education and wider change was highlighted. Guest speakers would be invited where appropriate to provide educational opportunities and insight. Members welcomed the direction of travel and highlighted that the flexibility was important.

DECISION

NOTED.

6. CIRCULAR ECONOMY UPDATE

The Waste and Passenger Transport Manager, Mr Ross Sharp-Dent updated the Committee on SBC's submission to two recent Scottish Government consultation on the circular economy and a proposed circular economy bill. Mr Sharp-Dent detailed the Council's responses, explaining that the economy operated in a linear manner. Resources were used to produce things, the products were used, and then thrown away. Under plans to create a more circular economy, resources would be kept in use for longer, with their value maximised. Recycling rates of 75% were targeted in Scotland by 2025. Rates were on average 40%, which indicated a considerable amount of work required to reach the target. Under the proposed Circular Economy Bill, there was likely to be an increase in the number of legal requirements incumbent upon Local Authorities in Scotland. Members highlighted that the Bill was a positive step, and that in order to achieve the benefits of the circular economy considerable behavioural changes were required.

DECISION

NOTED.

The meeting concluded at 12.20 pm.