



Overview and Scrutiny Committee Briefing Paper

Subject: Scrutiny Working Groups update

Climate Action Scrutiny Working Group

Membership:

Councillor Grace Conway-Murray – Chairman
Councillor John Broad – Vice Chairman
Councillor Barry Wood
Councillor Rebecca Biegel
Councillor Isabel Creed
Councillor Les Sibley

Executive Member:

Councillor Tom Becket – Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities

Service Lead Officers:

Jo Miskin - Climate Action Manager, Environmental Services
Hitesh Mahawar - Climate Change Programme Manager

Scrutiny Support Officers:

Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
Martyn Surfleet - Democratic and Elections Officer.

Update

The Climate Action Scrutiny Working Group met on 31 January 2025, when it received oral evidence from expert witnesses Dr Marco Raugei - Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow in Mechanical Engineering, Oxford Brookes University and Andy Wainwright - Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN). The Working Group also heard from Christina Cherry – the Council's Planning Policy, Conservation and Design Manager.

Dr Marco Raugei provided evidence on his research on Renewable Energy, Photovoltaics and Energy Transition Scenarios and answered questions from the Scrutiny Working Group on range of related issues such as the feasibility of domestic solar panels, generation and storage of solar energy, as well as network infrastructure and technology.

Andy Wainwright provided evidence on the role and work Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) carries out as an energy supplier within Cherwell and their goals for decarbonization and Net Zero.

Christina Cherry - Planning Policy, Conservation and Design Manager answered questions related to planning policy and Cherwell District Councils Climate goals, the inclusion of climate and environmental impacts within planning applications as well as the



integration of climate actions within the Local Plan, NPPF and Development Plan.

On 20 February 2025 the Working Group considered updates on The Draft Solar Strategy, Local Area Energy Plans (LAEP) and the Council's Green House Gas Report, as well as questions to Ed Potter - Assistant Director - Environmental Services on the decarbonization of the Councils fleet of vehicles and to Mona Walsh - Assistant Director of Property on how the Council's main offices move to Castle Quay and work on the Councils' buildings contribute to the goal of Net Zero by 2030.

Jo Miskin, the Council's Climate Action Manager verbal update on Cherwell District Councils draft Solar Strategy informed on the progress to date since the request to draft the strategy in 2024 and how officers have been working with consultants and Local Partnerships on the plan, and that the main bulk of the work had been completed pending final updates from Local Partnerships.

The Climate Action Manager's update on the Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) followed on from the Seminar held on 18 February on the Oxfordshire local area energy planning process and how it is critical to reaching net zero in Oxfordshire. The recording of the LAEP Seminar was also circulated to members for information.

The Climate Action Manager's update on the Cherwell Green House Gas report reported on the greenhouse gas emissions produced by the Council and its operations, including the Councils work on reducing emissions for the goal of Net Zero by 2030. The Working Group heard that progress on this had plateaued 2021 to date and considered measures for identifying key factors to tackle looking forward, measures such as fleet de-carbonisation, switching from natural gas to other greener or more renewable energy with the primary areas being the Fleet and Buildings within the Council's ownership.

Ed Potter - Assistant Director - Environmental Services provided a presentation and answered questions on the decarbonization of the Councils fleet vehicles. Members heard that the Council owned circa 90 vehicles of which 15% were electric vehicles, predominantly smaller cars and vans, and considered the barriers and challenges to electrifying larger goods vehicles (LGV's aka HGV's) such as, grid capacity, charging facilities, financial cost vs financial benefits, as well as limitations of the market and current available technology. Alternative lower emission fuels were also considered, such as hydrogen and Hydronated Vegetable Oil (HVO), but their long-term viability and sustainability meant that they were better suited as transitional options whilst electric options were pursued.

Mona Walsh - Assistant Director of Property briefed members and answered questions on how the move to Castle Quay and work on the Councils' buildings contribute to the goal of Net Zero by 2030. The Working Group heard that the move to a more modern building was the first step in reducing emissions as there was more opportunity to utilise greener technology and materials, but that further significant investment would be needed across the Council's buildings to achieve the goals set, and that there were also significant financial risks associated with not achieving Net Zero, but work was proceeding.

On 28 February 2025 the Scrutiny Working Group agreed its conclusions and recommendations to the Executive, to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



The Food Insecurity Scrutiny Working Group

Membership:

Councillor Rebecca Biegel - Chairman
Councillor Phil Chapman – Vice Chairman
Councillor Dr Isabel Creed
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke.

Executive Member:

Councillor Rob Pattenden –Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities
Councillor Ian Middleton – Member Champion for Food

Service Lead Officers:

Nicola Riley - Assistant Director of Wellbeing and Housing Services
Edward Frape - Senior Healthy Place Shaping Officer
Libby Knox - Food and Wellbeing Officer

Scrutiny Support Officers:

Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
Martyn Surfleet - Democratic and Elections Officer.

Update

On 23rd January 2025 the Scrutiny Working Group received an update on the Food Action Plan update and report on Community Activities, as well as an update on the Household Support Fund and received oral evidence from expert witness Alison Drake manager of the Bicester Foodbank.

Alison Drake explained that Bicester Foodbank was working to combat poverty and hunger and provided details of the work and initiatives happening to support the local community in the Bicester area, including providing hot food on site, as well as the wealth of support and information on food education and nutrition, in the form of cooking classes, information leaflets and recipe books.

The Cherwell Food Action Plan update covered the key aspects of the action plan:

1. Tackle food poverty and diet related ill health
2. Build vibrant food communities with the capacity and skills to enjoy food together
3. Grow the local good food economy through enterprise, local jobs, local wealth generation
4. Strengthen short, transparent local food supply chains
5. Improve the health and sustainability of institutional catering.



Particular attention was drawn to initiatives 1 and 2 with updates on the Winter Warmers, Healthy Out of Homes as well as updates on the new community food grant funding.

The Scrutiny Working Group heard that the volume of applications for the community food grant exceeded available funds and that officers were working on a scoring matrix to ensure a fair and even distribution of available funds and that once scored the applicants will be shared with the Chairman of the Scrutiny Working Group, along with the Council's Food Champion and Executive portfolio holder for Healthy Communities.

The Council's Senior Healthy Place Shaping Officer updated members on the status of the household support fund, and it was noted that following on from the Cost of Living review, funds were still available using the HSF6 monies for food providers to refer for supermarket vouchers. Referrers were Banbury and Bicester Trussel Foodbanks, North Oxon Foodbank (Kidlington), the Sunshine Centre (Banbury), Sunrise Multicultural Project (Banbury) and Homestart. Vouchers have been well used with regular requests from groups to support vulnerable residents across Cherwell.

The Scrutiny Working Group was also updated on the Community food grant fund scheme, and it was noted that £28K had been set aside for groups running initiatives in line with CFAP priorities.

On 26 February 2025 the Scrutiny Working Group received an update on the Food Action Plan update and Community Activities, including a summary of progress to date, including key aspects of the action plan:

1. Tackle food poverty and diet related ill health.
2. Build vibrant food communities with the capacity and skills to enjoy food together.

Officers also provided updates on CFAP funds 2024/5 and a summary of expenditure of Y1 funds.

The Scrutiny Working Group also received a further update on Household Support Fund. It was reported that vouchers have been well used and still in circulation with regular requests from groups to support vulnerable residents across Cherwell.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group

Membership:

Councillor Rebecca Biegel – Chairman
Councillor Gemma Coton - Vice Chairman
Councillor Barry Wood
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Dr Chuckwudi Okeke



(This Scrutiny Working Group is made up of members of the Personnel Committee and members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee).

Executive Member:

Councillor Chris Brant – Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

Service Lead Officers:

Claire Cox – Assistant Director Human Resources

Nicola Riley - Assistant Director Housing and Wellbeing

Scrutiny Support Officers:

Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead

Martyn Surfleet - Democratic and Elections Officer.

Update

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group met on 30 January 2025 and reviewed the Review of the Including Everyone Framework in detail, Equalities Diversity and Inclusion Performance, Equalities Impact Assessments Process and received oral evidence from expert witness David Crutchley – Oxfordshire Youth.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources updated on the work carried out on the Council's equalities diversity and inclusion strategy titled Including Everyone Framework and reviewed other councils' EDI frameworks as well as the LGA (Local Government Association) framework.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources introduced the Council's Equalities Impact Assessments Process, and the Scrutiny Working Group noted that all departments should be subject to an EDI Impact Assessment and take into account protected characteristics and that mitigating actions and measures should be put in place.

The Performance Team Leader updated the Scrutiny Working Group on the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) performance Q2 report, providing a brief overview of the progress to date, highlighting key indicators that were behind schedule and answered questions from the Working Group, including questions on performance of accessibility at the new Castle Quay offices and the reworking of measurables within the report. It was agreed that work was needed to improve the measurables to make them clearer.

David Crutchley – Oxfordshire Youth provided evidence to the Working Group on the work of Oxfordshire Youth, including its work carried out within the district and answered questions from the Scrutiny Working Group. This included evidence on the ongoing work carried out by the staff and volunteers, as well as the complex growing needs of young people today.

Members posed a range of questions surrounding youth work and organisations within the district, and how the Council can help in improving and enriching youth work within Cherwell. It was suggested and agreed that officers look to incorporate the principles of the Lundy



model as well as other wellbeing frameworks within the Councils emerging updated Including Everyone Framework.

On 28 February 2025 the Scrutiny Working Group agreed its conclusions and recommendations to the Executive, to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with 10 recommendations to the Executive to be put forward.

Planning Application Appeals Scrutiny Working Group

Membership:

All Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Executive Member:

Councillor Jean Conway - Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management

Service Lead Officers:

David Peckford - Assistant Director - Planning and Development
Christina Cherry - Planning Policy Team Leader

Scrutiny Support Officers:

Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
Martyn Surfleet - Democratic and Elections Officer.

Update

Members met on 25 February 2025 to consider planning application appeals, having particular regard to planning application refusals overturned at appeal (Planning Committee and delegated decisions), the reasons for cost implications and lessons learnt.

The Head of Development Management gave a presentation on Cherwell District Councils planning application appeals, with particular regard to planning application refusals overturned at appeal, the reasons for cost implications and lessons learned.

Members heard that the Council had performed well in the speed of decision making for both major and non-major applications. It had also performed well on the quality of decision making for non-major applications. However, the Council had underperformed on the quality of decision making for major applications. This was as a result of a high number of major appeals being allowed (12) against the total number of major application decisions made in the assessment period (114). This resulted in a figure of 10.53% of appeals allowed, which was over the 10% threshold set by the government.

Members heard that, as a result of this underperformance the Council could be at risk of being 'Designated as underperforming' and if designated, the Council might lose the ability to determine some applications and also lose the associated planning fee. In addition, members were advised that defending Cherwell District Council's the high number of appeals, came at a



cost to the Council, as such there were financial implications if the appeal performance was not improved.

Members put questions covering various topics such as the applications process, performance, speed of applications, and costs implicated, as well as applications overturned against officer recommendation. Members agreed four recommendations to the Executive under the following key themes

- Lessons Learnt
- Member Training
- Action Plan
- Monitoring Improvement

To be presented for agreement by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Completed by: Michael Carr, Interim Principal Officer – Scrutiny & Democratic Lead
Date: 3 March 2025

Presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 11 March 2025