

COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CABINET ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 17 February 2021

**Present: Councillor Jane March (Chairman)
Councillors Mackonochie (Vice-Chairman), Ms Palmer, Simmons, Thomson, Bruneau,
Ellis, Rutland, Hill and Pope**

Officers in Attendance: Paul Taylor (Director of Change and Communities), Karin Grey (Sustainability Manager), Gary Stevenson (Head of Housing, Health and Environment) and Mark O'Callaghan (Scrutiny and Engagement Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Bailey, Everitt and Morton

APOLOGIES

COM19/20 Apologies were received from Councillor Fairweather.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

COM20/20 There were no disclosable pecuniary or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS WISHING TO SPEAK

COM21/20 Councillor Everitt had registered to speak on Agenda Items 6 and 7.

Two members of the public had registered to speak:

Marieke de Jonge – Agenda Item 6.

Adrian Thorne – Agenda Item 7.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 14 JANUARY 2021

COM22/20 Members reviewed the minutes. No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – The minutes of the meeting dated 14 January 2021 be approved as a correct record.

FORWARD PLAN AS AT 28 JANUARY 2021

COM23/20 Members considered the Forward Plan. No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan as at 28 January 2021 be noted.

REPORT OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY ADVISORY PANEL - CORPORATE CARBON REDUCTION PLAN

COM24/20 The report was first introduced by Councillor Bailey, Portfolio Holder for Sustainability which included the following:

- In July 2019 TWBC declared a climate emergency and set an ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030.
- A Full Council motion recommended the creation of a cross party climate emergency advisory panel (CEAP) that would explore the actions required to reach that goal and to progress a carbon audit of

- the Council's existing estate and services.
- The carbon audit was conducted in 2020 using energy usage data from 2018/19 financial year.
- The Council's total carbon footprint for that year was just under 3.5 tonnes of CO₂. This was 42% lower than the audit undertaken 5 years earlier.
- The Council engaged external consultants, Laser to look at what further could be done to reduce carbon emissions by the end of this decade.
- The CEAP Panel had also made recommendations on ways the Council operated and made decisions.

Karin Grey, Sustainability Manager introduced the report that set out the results of the green audit and the actions that could be taken to meet the ambition to make the Council's operations neutral by 2030 and to inform the next iteration of the Council's Five-Year Plan which included the following:

- The report focused on the Council's own footprint.
- It proposed possible actions that could be taken to meet the Council's own ambition to make its own estate and services carbon neutral by 2030.
- The Borough wide carbon reduction ambition would need to be the next phase of work activity.
- The audit looked at data from 2018/19 to determine the Council's energy usage that contributed to the current level of carbon emissions.
- It was important to understand where the main emissions were that would enable the Council to deliver the more immediate reductions that would make the greatest impact.
- The audit was undertaken in compliance with the Greenhouse Gas protocol and divided emissions into scopes 1 to 3. The first related to the burning of gas and fuel use, the second to the purchase of electricity and the third from the Council's own purchased goods and services.
- The results of the audit were included in the report. But to note, scope 3 that included waste and leisure services made up about half of the Council's total emissions, but this was quite usual across all Councils.
- To meet the target the Council would need to reduce emissions rapidly and at least by 49% by 2025.
- The options considered included:
 - o Making properties more energy efficient.
 - o Upgrading equipment including LED lighting.
 - o Electric vehicles where appropriate.
 - o Replacing fossil fuels with 'green electricity'.
 - o Generating own renewable electricity.
 - o Reviewing activities to make them more efficient.
 - o Offsetting those emissions that could not be reduced.
- Looking at the options available would allow the Council to map a path to become carbon neutral by 2030. Details were also included showing the financial requirements needed to achieve this.
- Based on the data and modelling undertaken, the Corporate Carbon Descent Plan was put together which would also influence and inform the Council's future corporate strategies, planning and policies.
- The document was a living document that would be reviewed annually.
- One of the actions identified was a review of the Council's property

portfolio, to carry out an audit that would assess the Council's estate and assets and consider opportunities for energy efficiency and renewable energy generation e.g. solar panels.

Marieke de Jonge representing Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth had registered to speak which included the following:

- Although the original motion on Climate Emergency stated for the wider Borough to achieve carbon neutrality, the report was only aimed at reducing the Council's own carbon emissions and offered no suggestions beyond this. This was a shortcoming.
- Laser identified that the main chunk of the Council's emissions was from waste and leisure contracts, with vehicles from the waste collections at 27%. However, there were no plans to address this until the current waste contract was up for renewal in 2029. Given that this was such a large proportion of emissions, the Council was urged to review the current contract and renegotiate the terms now.
- The leisure contract was at 28% and Friends of the Earth supported a strategy to reduce emissions by installing more energy efficient solar panels which would make a marked difference.
- Two notable options included in the report to get to net zero was investment in a solar farm and offsetting.
- A solar farm needed financial investment which could be shared with other organisations or done as a community energy project.
- There were ways in which Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth could contribute to the setting up of such a scheme, by doing research and planning crowdfunding etc.
- However, a solar farm that potentially occupied viable farmland seemed less desirable than roof top panels, ground sourced heat pumps or wind farms.
- Going forward this scheme should save the Council money on electricity and could eventually create an income. There were also grants available for community energy projects.
- Offsetting would be necessary if no investment was made in renewable energy generation.
- However, this could become a rather costly exercise and would have to continue to be paid year after year as long as the Council's own emissions were not at zero. It also meant that the Borough would not achieve zero and therefore this option was not recommended.
- On finances the report stated that no additional funding had been set aside and no additional funding or freedoms had been received from Central Government. This section needed clarification on how funding would be managed. The whole paragraph sounded vague and non-committal which suggested that each project would have to go back to the table for approval. The critical question and observation was had Central Government actually been lobbied? You can't get funding if you haven't applied for it.

Councillor Luke Everitt had registered to speak which included the following:

- The report outlined the scale of the challenge and the cost of reaching the Council's commitment to be a carbon neutral authority by 2030.
- We find ourselves in this position because of the inaction and failure of this Council's political leadership on climate change matters over the past decades.
- Climate change was not a newly identified issue, yet you would not

know it existed if you read this Council's still current Five-Year Plan. It was astonishing that only now in 2021 that our Council would be finally assessing new third party contracts and services on carbon emissions as a process.

- Decades in which we should have been making a difference had been wasted.
- Aside from the political leadership, mostly ignoring climate change, the scant environmental policy of the past was a litany of failure and missed opportunities.
- A decade ago we paid the Carbon Trust to produce a plan to reduce the authorities emissions at that time by 25%.
- By 2015, the last reported figure which was in 2014, the Council was failing to reach that target.
- Since then the Council's emissions had been reduced but it could have been far better.
- The Council once had a plan to install solar panels on the roof of the Town Hall. This was a great idea, but was mysteriously cancelled at the last minute by the last Leader, David Jukes.
- The decision, presumably was due to the now failed Calverley Square. A project that had wasted over £10m of public money. The Council would never be able to get this money back and one can only imagine what could have been done with it.
- While this was happening, in 2015 another Council was becoming the first carbon neutral Council in Europe. And yet, here we are, only just beginning this process. This was a very sad comparison.
- All this inaction now added on significant potential costs to this Council. This, on a issue, our role in the face of climate change, that we had known had been coming for decades.
- The Council cannot ignore this subject any longer and we need whoever controls this Council after May 2021 to show the leadership on this matter that it required.
- We had some big decisions regarding the future of the Civic buildings, the overall strategy of this Council and where the Council sees its role in the Borough's wider emissions for which a Citizens Assembly was key.
- All of these key decisions needed to be made within a framework that took account and contributed to our recognition of a climate emergency.
- We can do this but we cannot repeat the failures of the past and the Committee was therefore asked to support this report and to continue progress on this matter.

Discussion and responses to Members questions included the following:

- The waste contract tender process started in 2017. It included local air quality emissions as one of the criteria. It also included the option for the contractor to look at rationalising the rounds so they could be constructed in the most efficient way.
- The vehicles currently being used were either on long term leasing or had been purchased, so to change vehicle types mid-way through the contract would be exceptionally expensive. Going forward most Councils would therefore look for a phased approach for the introduction of low carbon vehicles.
- The initial term of the contract for 8 years, 2029 allowed time for a changeover should the current contract not be extended.
- The waste contract had been discussed on many occasions at CEAP.

Vehicles with lower emissions tended to be experimental vehicles, some on hydrogen and one on battery power. However the hardware wasn't available at the start of the current contract.

- The current waste contract was a partnership contract with Tonbridge and Malling. Any decisions would have to be done in agreement with them.
- It would probably take a couple of years of data before emission details for the new waste service would be known. However it should be noted that comparisons with the old service would be difficult as the mix of vehicles was different due to a different mix of materials being collected.
- One of the downsides of the method of collecting carbon emissions, all the carbon saved on the materials collected (food waste and recycling) didn't count in the Council's carbon footprint.
- The Council was not aware of any specific funds that were available from Central Government at this time.
- The Council was working the Kent CC on their Energy and Low Emissions Strategy which was the second tranche of work looking at Borough wide emissions. This included lobbying for funding.
- The Council had also recently tried to apply for the De-Carbonisation Grant funding in terms of the Council owned properties. However, the turn around times for applications sometimes meant the Council missed opportunities. The Council were therefore looking to prepare potential projects in advance so that when an opportunity presented itself, the information would have already been prepared.
- TWBC were responsible for waste collection, but it fell to Kent CC to manage the disposal and treatment of waste. It would therefore be contained as part of their carbon reduction plan.
- Kent CC had announced recently that their food waste would be treated via an aerobic digestion plant rather than being composted as part of the garden waste. Gas would be generated that would be used to power the plant.
- TWBC's residual waste went to an energy from waste plant at Allington. It was one of the biggest energy from waste plants in England and generated a large amount of power.
- The current waste system had been set up to be as environmentally friendly as possible.
- Kent CC had recently completed a report that detailed carbon emissions across the whole of Kent. TWBC would be looking to work with Kent CC to deliver a joint approach to this work. This would form part of the second tranche of work.
- If the Council decided to dispose or upgrade any of its assets it would be important to include measures and conditions to ensure the reduction of emissions was taken forward. It might be possible to include a form a words that reflected this issue but this would need further investigation.
- For example, the Amelia Scott had a number of sustainability measures within the building and a significant amount of what had been excavated had been upcycled, recycled or reused.

RESOLVED – That subject to consideration being given to the addition of a form of words that recommended conditions be attached to Council owned properties that were intended for sale, the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

REPORT OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY ADVISORY PANEL - CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

COM25/20 The report was first introduced by Councillor Bailey, Portfolio Holder for Sustainability which included the following:

- The July 2019 Climate Emergency motion included a recommendation to run a Citizen's Assembly as a way of involving residents and businesses in tackling Climate Change.
- The CEAP Panel undertook research in this area and it became apparent there were a number of options and costs associated with it.
- The report included details of the options and costs and it was recommended this be taken to Full Council for further discussion.

Paul Taylor, Director of Change and Communities introduced the report that set out the Climate Emergency Advisory Panel's (CEAP) approach to citizen engagement and how it would proactively include young people in the process which included the following:

- The report included 3 options that CEAP had researched:
 - o A Citizen's Assembly – estimated cost between £80-£100k.
 - o A Citizen's Panel – estimated cost between £40-£70k.
 - o A Citizen's Jury – estimated cost between £15-20k
- Citizen's Assembly:
 - o A group of between 40 and 75 participants, chosen via a random selection process, would be taken through a fairly structured three stage process of learning, deliberation and decision making.
 - o The duration of the exercise was about 30 hours.
 - o The group would be supported by a team of impartial facilitators.
 - o The participants learnt about the project that included presentations with a variety of opinions.
 - o The participants would then come together to give their conclusions.
- Citizen's Panel:
 - o Made up of about 20 representatives with a cross section across the Borough, selected via a random process (same as for the Citizen's Assembly).
 - o The duration of the exercise was about 20 hours.
 - o They were then invited to a rolling programme of research and consultation, e.g. surveys and focus groups.
 - o The main difference was the size and duration of the exercise – this was a smaller group.
- Citizen's Jury:
 - o Another tool used for engagement, used for a wide range of issues.
 - o The number of participants was smaller than for the other two options, typically between 12 and 24.
 - o The duration of the exercise was about 14 hours.
 - o The group would still be representative of the Borough.
 - o The group would hear from a wide range of stakeholders and professionals and there was time allocated for questions and for witnesses to be called.

- The final decision was either reached by consensus or by a vote.
- The options would be put forward to Cabinet and then on to Full Council for a full debate.

Adrian Thorne, member of the public had registered to speak which included the following:

- The report recommended moving the decision to Cabinet and then to Full Council. My view was that nineteen months ago, Full Council voted overwhelmingly for a Citizen's Assembly.
- We seem to be going around in circles. It was quite clear that Cabinet made the decision on whether or not to progress. I would therefore encourage that Cabinet get on with this as soon as possible. I see no benefit of taking it to Full Council.
- At the beginning of the meeting it was made clear the importance of having sufficient evidence. It was therefore worrying that the CEAP report omitted a lot of the essential points. The report provided a rather negative view of a Citizen's Assembly and not giving the same degree of fairness to the other two options.
- We have been waiting nineteen months for this report and it covers a mere 11 sides of A4.
- Young people were mentioned as a priority at the top of the document and yet they were never mentioned again in the report.
- The report presented all these options on a sliding scale. The three options were three very different cases which would give you different results.
- It was important to note that a Citizen's Assembly was much more than a voting exercise – there were not there to mark Councillors homework. They actually came up with ideas and solutions.
- You would have 100 people together including experts to solve issues that affected our town. This could bring up some really good ideas.
- It would then be for Councillors to take these ideas forward.
- It was in the Council's interest that they be as professional as possible.

Councillor Luke Everitt had registered to speak which included the following:

- The Labour Group advocated support for this report. This would ensure that progress continued.
- A full Citizen's Assembly should be the option that Full Council and Cabinet supported. In an ideal world this report would only contain this option.
- The original motion stated that the Council had a responsibility to reduce the wider Borough's emissions. Given the scale of the challenge to just reduce TWBC's emissions, the challenge to reduce the Borough's emissions should not be underestimated or at worse, ignored.
- Wider Borough reductions would require residents and businesses to examine the way they heated their buildings, their travel and behaviour.
- Luckily it was clear from consultations that even on the other side of this awful pandemic, people were keen to make changes and live in an environmentally friendly manner.
- To advocate change we cannot simply issue a few leaflets telling

people how to live their lives. This went against liberty and was most likely to be ignored.

- We are facing a climate emergency and we must work collaboratively with our residents to create a roadmap of what we and they can do to respond the challenges that we need to face.
- In monetary terms, I believe that a full Citizen's Assembly would prove to be the cheaper option in the long term. Instead of a piecemeal spending on consultations and consultants over a number of years.
- I think the development of the Local Plan demonstrated how quickly costs could mount. With one spend we could create a document, informed by residents and experts that would prove useful in the decades ahead. Let's not think in the short term and instead think in the long term.

Discussion and responses to Members questions included the following:

- It would be important to involve young people in the process. It was confirmed that young people could be included.
- CEAP felt that all three options should be explored.
- The full motion concentrated on the need to reduce emissions with only a bullet point that related to a Citizen's Assembly. At the time of the motion there was no mention of the cost involved.
- The report included more information that would now allow for a more informed decision to be made.
- There was debate as to whether the full motion committed the Council to a full Citizen's Assembly.
- There was a general consensus that the process should be full and inclusive.
- The cost involved was a determining factor and there was concern that given the current financial pressures on the Council, residents should be made aware before a final decision could be taken.
- The possibility of external funding should be explored that would alleviate the burden of cost on the Council.
- Members of CEAP were keen that Full Council had the opportunity to debate the issue now that further information had been provided. However, the final decision was an executive decision and therefore one that must be made by Cabinet.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT - PROPOSED NOVATION AND CONTRACT EXTENSION

COM26/20 Gary Stevenson, Head of Housing, Health and Environment introduced the report that recommended the novation of the Grounds Maintenance Contract from Sodexo Limited to Tivoli Group Limited and to extend the existing contract for a period of 12 months which included the following:

- The contract covered grounds maintenance services in the Borough's parks, sports grounds and crematorium.
- Sodexo had recently sold their horticultural division to Tivoli Group Limited.
- Sodexo had sought the Council's consent to sub contract this work to Tivoli – which had been agreed. The work continued as previously

- (same staff etc.), but with different branding.
- It was the Council's view that a direct contract with Tivoli would be more efficient.
 - The option to extend for a further year would allow the Council additional time to review the service in terms of specification and delivery.
 - It would also allow the Council to review again any opportunities to introduce carbon reducing measures.
 - A Report would come back to Cabinet towards the end of 2021.

Discussion and responses to Members questions included the following:

- Tivoli were quite a large grounds maintenance company in their own right. Sodexo were a much more wide ranging Facilities Management Company.
- Over the life of the contract the level of service provided by Sodexo had had mixed reviews. However, over the last 2 years and with a new contract manager, their performance had been a lot better.
- The contract allowed for a negotiation period that would cover the extension and Tivoli had already expressed an interest. The Council had made clear that the figures would have to be in the same ball park as the current cost of the contract. The contract included an RPI uplift every year and the Council would be looking for the extension to stay within the uplift and certainly no more than a 4-5% increase.
- Tivoli were already undertaking the grounds maintenance work for the borough council following the sub-contracting agreement.
- The Council were not aware of any corners being cut but would continue to monitor to ensure delivery was maintained to the agreed standard.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

URGENT BUSINESS

COM27/20 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

COM28/20 The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 25 March at 6:30pm.

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 8.40 pm.

An audio recording of this meeting is available on the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council website.