



Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 18:55

9 September 2021

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Fulton-McAlister (M), (vice-chair), Carlo, Driver, Everett, Galvin, Giles, Manning, Osborn, Stutely, Thomas (Va), and Thomas (Vi)

1. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED, to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2021.

4. Air pollution from woodburning

Following consideration of this topic at the previous meeting, the committee heard further evidence from James Verlaque of the Stoves Industry Association and Matthew White, a local resident.

James Verlaque explained the structure and role of his association. He referred to what he considered to be an incorrect study into domestic wood burning for DEFRA, and that there had been ongoing discussions over 5 years with the government on the evidence of air pollution produced by the modern wood burner models. DEFRA recognise that there are errors in some of the evidence. The association recognised that it was important for local authorities to do all they could to reduce emissions in their areas. He mentioned the Clear Skies Mark certification scheme which provided information to consumers on the standard of appliances available on the market.

There was growing evidence that other sources including cooking, candles etc in the home produced higher levels of particulate matter than wood burning. The association fully supported sustainable wood management.

James Verlaque then answered a number of members questions. He said he would fully support an annual servicing requirement for wood burning stoves, and there was sufficient resource within the country to maintain chimneys and stoves to a required standard.

He explained the costs of purchase and installation of the eco designed wood burning stoves, and the range of products available. He considered that the new stoves were an effective method of heating a small space in a domestic setting but were more of an aesthetic feature in a commercial venue. He said that he found the attention given by local authorities to this issue to be helpful.

The chair thanked James Verlaque for his presentation and answers to members questions.

Matthew White then gave his evidence to the committee. He explained that he had been diagnosed with two lung conditions and need to be careful with avoiding air pollution. He did like fires within homes but said it would not be sensible to have this in his own home. He said that he could not have his windows open when neighbours were using their wood burners. He referred to the effects of air pollution on those with health conditions, children and the elderly. He suggested that the idea that wood burning was carbon neutral was a myth and that the government should take this issue more seriously in view of its policies on climate change and ban wood burning in urban areas. A number of London authorities had produced information for the public on the effects of air pollution and wood burning in particular.

Matthew White then answered a number of members' questions. He said that he did not support nuclear energy but suggested that in his view improved insulation and ground sourced heat pumps would help improve heating in homes. Councils could do a lot in communications such as the Citizen magazine, educating residents by visiting homes and leaflets to every resident. In terms of health education, there was a great deal produced on the effects of smoking but he felt hardly anything on pollution. The data provided by air pollution monitors in the city was dependent on their location.

Members then discussed the evidence that had been presented. In response to a question, the executive director of development and city services said that the article on wood burning would be included in the winter edition of the Citizen. He said that the direction of the government's regulatory framework was not to the level where councils would be empowered to ban the use of wood burning stoves. He also suggested that there was not sufficient evidence available from the air quality monitoring stations to evidence the level of overall air pollution in the city.

With reference to health education, it was suggested that other partners would need to be involved in this aspect of the communications on air pollution from wood burning.

A number of members suggested that any public education on this issue should be within the context of climate change and the need to move to electric power sources to enable a reduction of air pollution from a number of sources. There was merit in

encouraging a move from open fires and old style wood burners to the new eco standard models.

Members also referred to other sources of air pollution including bonfires and firepits and suggested that these be included within the communications strategy and review of policies and regulation on council properties

A member suggested that the council should re-examine the use of solid fuel burning in council properties. Members also expressed concern about the need to ensure protection for employees working in licenced premises where wood burning stoves were used. The public protection officer said that the Council had powers of enforcement on air pollution in licenced premises. Another member suggested that the Council could conduct a more detailed study with partners, possibly including the UEA over the winter period to establish the levels of air pollution in Norwich.

RESOLVED to recommend to cabinet that it :-

- (1) Prepare a communications strategy on air pollution for residents
- (2) Submit the committee's findings to the Chair of the all -party parliamentary group on Air Quality
- (3) Work with the Clinical Commissioning Group on health education regarding respiratory problems
- (4) Investigate the level of solid fuel burning in City Council owned properties
- (5) Review enforcement against burning of wet leaves on bonfires on Council properties
- (6) Write to Norwich MPs about resources available to support employees working in licensed premises
- (7) Discourage the use of bonfires across the whole of the city and encourage people to use their brown bins and composting

CHAIR



Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 18:00

16 September 2021

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Fulton-McAllister (M) (vice-chair), Carlo, Giles, Manning, Stutely, Osborn, Thomas (Va) and Thomas (Vi)

Apologies: Councillors Driver and Galvin

1. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED to ratify the decisions made at the meeting held on 9 September regarding air pollution from wood burning stoves

4. Appointment of substitute member for the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub-Panel

RESOLVED, having considered the report, to appoint Councillor Stutely as a substitute member on the NCCSPSSP.

5. Appointment of representative to Norfolk Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee

RESOLVED, having considered the report, to appoint Councillor Stutely as the council's representative to the NHOSC

6 Setting of the Scrutiny Committee work programme

The Executive director of community services introduced the report. She referred to the number of recurring topics that had already been allocated to the work programme including business plans, budget scrutiny and equality and diversity. There were slots available at the October, November and January meetings for

consideration of other topics. The list of topics suggested for consideration had been circulated to members.

Councillor Fulton-McAllister (Vice-Chair) reported that the Labour group were proposing that the following topics be allocated:-

A sustainable, inclusive Norwich economy following Covid-19
The emerging new social inclusion agenda following Covid-19
Review of the environmental strategy following Covid-19

Councillor Osborn reported that the Green group were proposing the following topics:-

Green Finance
Policy and procedures regarding tennis provision
Review of the environmental strategy following Covid-19

Councillor Osborn also said that his group were proposing that biodiversity was considered as part of the scrutiny of the NCSL Business Plan. The executive director of community services raised concern there would be insufficient time to consider this as an issue and that the shareholder panel would be monitoring the performance of the company. She also said that officers would need to consider whether there was sufficient resource at this time, due to the preparation of the MTFS and budget, to support consideration of the Green Finance topic.

Councillor Osborn expressed concern that the social inclusion and economic recovery topics were very wide issues and suggested that there needed to be a specific aspect of each selected to ensure that the committee's time was effectively used.

During discussion some members said that the recommendations of the committee should be more effective than they had been previously and that Norwich residents would expect the committee to focus on important issues affecting the city.

Councillor Thomas (Va) referred to the Covid recovery plan and suggested that there was a limit to what the Council could do in view of restricted funding.

The Chair confirmed that, in view of the topics proposed, the Emergency Planning Strategy and Support for Carers would not be included in the programme.

(The committee adjourned from 5.15 to 5.30pm)

RESOLVED to allocate the following scrutiny topics to meetings in the current civic year:-

October – Review of the environmental strategy following Covid-19

November – The emerging new social inclusion agenda following Covid-19

January – A sustainable, inclusive Norwich economy following Covid-19

The executive director of community services reminded members that it was very helpful for officers and external witnesses to receive comments and questions from members in advance of each meeting so that this can be incorporated into their presentations and reports to the Committee.

CHAIR