NORWICH City Council

MINUTES

Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Panel

16:00 to 17:40 **11 February 2025**

Present: Champion (Chair), Hampton (Vice-Chair), Harper, Hoechner, Lubbock and Padda

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Hampton declared an interest in item 4 as a vice-chair of the Norwich Climate Commission

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024.

3. General Update

The Environmental Strategy Manager introduced the report.

A supplier had been appointed to install solar panels on the Riverside leisure centre and work was due to take place late February/early March.

The Council was progressing the Solar PV feasibility study for General Fund Assets to the next stage. Solar PV had been installed at City Hall and work was underway to identify other buildings where solar panels could be installed. The team were building a business case and submitting planning applications for further installations. The fitting of panels at the Halls would be in the second tranche and would be a more difficult building to attach PV panels too.

Officers considered the best way to use the funds set aside. Officers had agreed that minimal risk/high return measures were the best options, such as roof and wall insulation. The installation of heat pumps would be considered when sufficient funds were available. A further exercise would take place during 2025/26 to establish further funding option using council or municipal loans.

The Panel noted the success of the “Be bright be seen” stall which had been sited in City Hall in December 2024. Together with its partners, Sustrans, and Norfolk County Council, it had distributed bicycle lights and reflectors to staff.

The Chair asked if the Council was part of the cycle to work scheme. Officers would investigate and feed back to the Panel.

One member asked if the current spend on the completed leisure centre retrofits would mean that not all fifteen leisure centres would be completed. Officers confirmed there was sufficient funding to complete all fifteen.

Officers reported that a bid had been submitted under the Government's "Warm Homes" scheme. The bid was for £21m for a three-year scheme. However, if the Government continued to fund this scheme it was expected to become a five-year scheme. The cost of the scheme was £7m a year so the bid would then increase to £35m. The Government would be awarding the funding based on "expression on interest" (EOI) so no formal bid was needed and the outcome of the EOI would be known at the end of February.

One member was concerned that the HRA was underspent and queried what would happen if the warm homes funding was underspent and whether it would need to be returned. Officers explained that the Government was mindful of local authorities' ability to spend and the EOI was based on the best 6 months previous performance. The team had been successful in delivering the scheme previously and officers were confident that this would be the case in the next round of funding. The Environmental Strategy Team has sufficient funds to recruit before the scheme started as they had used previous schemes to build capacity.

One member asked if the scheme included private rental tenants and officers confirmed that it would. Households in areas of multiple indices of deprivation with an EPC rating of below C would qualify. Households with an income of less than £36,000 would also be able to apply and the Government had simplified the application process.

(Asher Minns, Co-Chair of the Norwich Climate Commission and John Moore, independent technical consultant for Norwich Climate Commission joined the meeting at this point to give a presentation. The slides for the presentation were available here: link to slides)

Asher Minns introduced the presentation and highlighted the work of the Norwich Climate Commission. He outlined the effects of global warming in Norwich. Detailing the correlation between income and emissions; emissions were higher in more affluent areas. Another factor affecting climate risk was a rise in the population. Several challenges would need to be considered to address these issues. Asher Minns also highlighted the successful funding applications and future plans of the Commission.

John Moore then detailed the work of "Our Power". "Our Power" had received funding and six "Energy Champions" would be working in six pilot communities who had delivered over 200 engagements and it was expected that by the end of the pilot programme there would have been over 450 engagements. The organisation would be attending the Norwich Science Festival which would take place between 15 and 22 February 2025. Members noted the volunteer recruitment event taking place on 27 February 2025.

John Moore highlighted the Green Doctor scheme, run by Groundwork East, helped people with energy debt. It was proving to be extremely popular. The scheme started in July 2024 and so far, 127 households had been visited. It provided energy saving solutions such as radiator reflector panels and draught proofing windows and doors.

The scheme had saved 19,876kgCO2e across the city. The Panel noted that “Our Power” provided a similar scheme. Officers were considering making a case to “Groundwork East” to provide another Green Doctor.

In relation to the Norfolk Net Zero Communities project a retrofit working group had been established to develop a retrofit hub, £25,000 had been allocated to the project’s budget for an online trusted information resource which would also be available in other formats. The group had developed a briefing for the hub. They were working on how to engage different communities. The objective of the hub was to provide good quality information and have funding freely available to people.

The Panel was provided with an update on EV charging. Officers explained that the future of transport was not just EV chargers but improving public transport to avoid reliance on car use.

Norfolk County Council had made an offer to install a rapid EV charger in one of the City Council owned city car parks and it was proposed that this could be the Queens Road car park. The installation of lower power EV chargers was continuing. There would be twenty-two installations across the city. Thirteen were already active with the remainder due to be installed shortly.

Officers updated members on the “Big Community Switch,” a collective purchasing scheme which offered household the opportunity to save money on energy bills. The registration for the scheme closed in December 2024. A total of 670 residents had registered.

A theatre project “Mousehold to the Marsh” was being delivered by the Common Lot. It was aimed at engaging Norwich residents, through art and media, in topics relating to nature and climate change. The Council had provided a grant of £3000 to underpin the project. Performances would take place between 2 and 13 July 2025 at various green spaces across the city.

The Chair had suggested that a Mousehold Heath Fair should be held to coincide with the final performance and welcomed support.

The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) a £5.1m scheme, in partnership with Eon Energy Solutions Ltd, in 2024/25 and 2025/26, to install solar PV, as well as loft insulation. The scheme was off to a strong start with sixty-five of the target 260 installations already underway.

Officers were waiting to hear if their bid to the Warm Homes: Social Housing fund (wave 3) had been successful. If successful the funding of £36m would be used to deliver solar PV, air source heat pumps and a ground source heat pump system over a three-year period commencing in April 2025.

Work was underway to understand the potential for low carbon heat networks in the Council’s social housing estates. To replace out of date gas boilers in one of the city’s general needs housing blocks, a feasibility study had been undertaken on a replacement ground source heat pump system, which was included in the Warm Homes: Social Housing fund bid.

Officers had made an expression of interest (EOI) to the Nature Towns and Cities Fund, which was led by the Council in partnership with Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Norfolk County Council and South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils. The EOI had been successful, and the Council had been invited to submit a bid. The bid would be for £0.775m to deliver the “Nature City Norwich” project.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was being consulted on, with the responses due on 11 February 2025. Following this a wider consultation would be undertaken.

Officers were exploring the creation of an urban nature recovery network which would enable partners to further protect habitats and create a “nature map” of assets. The assets on the outskirts of the city had been mapped and officers were now looking to map the nature areas in the city.

One member pointed out the link between nature and mental health. Officers confirmed that this was one of the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy, which included improving wellbeing by improving access to nature.

The Panel noted that plans in relation to Nature Recovery Networks (NRN) were being developed. The responsibility for NRNs could be subject to change under Devolution and Local Government but officers were trying to progress as much as possible before this took place.

The Council was consulting with key partners and anchor institutions regarding the “Climate Responsive Norwich (CRN) Programme 2025-2035. Responses were expected by 31 January 2025, once analysed they would be incorporated into the citywide climate action plan. The council was also meeting with consultees, and it was hoped that the feedback received would be reported at the next CEEEP meeting.

The feedback from the CRN Programme consultation would be used to inform the “Net-zero pathway” plan being produced. The net zero pathway public consultation was taking place at the Norwich Science festival. The consultation had been undertaken by Opergy Net Zero ltd. Officers would provide more detail at the next meeting.

Officers confirmed that the carbon removal actions set out in the previous carbon footprint report had been implemented, with two tree planting schemes being invested in.

RESOLVED to:

(1) Thank the Environmental Strategy Manager for the presentation.

(2) Thank Asher Minns and John Moore for their presentations.

CHAIR