NORWICH City Council

MINUTES

Climate and environment emergency executive panel

09:00 to 10:10 **18 February 2021**

Present: Councillors Maguire (chair), Stonard (vice chair), Carlo, Giles, Lubbock, McCartney-Gray and Osborn

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes held on 17 December 2020.

3. Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Report 2021

The chair introduced the report which cabinet would consider at its June 2021 meeting. Councillor Davis, cabinet member for social inclusion, was unable to attend this meeting, but had approved the report and would receive a copy of the minutes of this meeting.

The affordable warmth officer gave a presentation on the report. (A copy of the presentation is available on the website.)

The chair started the discussion by referring members to the panel's terms of reference in relation to identifying what the council was doing, what more it could do and what could be done with sufficient support from central government. The affordable warmth officer said that she would like the government commit to long term funding. The problem of short term schemes was that installers brought in staff to implement measures and then had to make them redundant when the funding ran out. A member commented that the Local Government Association's Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport board was lobbying for such long term funding. The report referred to government funding but it was not clear what other sources of funding were being considered, whether it was from working with the private sector, the Local Enterprise Partnership, community groups or providing training for people to retrofit properties.

The director of place said that the environmental strategy team was a small team and that it did not have the resources to make constant bids. The problem of short term funding was that it was for a short period with strings attached. He suggested that the panel considered in its recommendations to cabinet that when submitting the HECA report, a covering letter should be attached asking central government to support long term funding to ensure continuity of these activities. There were other

funds available. The New Anglia LEP had provided information on its schemes and funding to support a green economic recovery to the scrutiny committee (17 September 2020) and members had been impressed by the plan. The city council was the local housing authority and the report under consideration was on home energy conservation, which a primary function of this council as the housing authority and that it should be the focus of funding, either through its own resources or government funding that the council was able to deploy. A member pointed out that the report looked at all tenures of housing and that there was funding from the LEP for community energy groups to get involved and provide funding for jobs.

A member said that the council should review the Norwich standard for upgrading the council's housing stock to allow flexibility to replace a bath with a shower. This would save energy and water, but also provide the social benefit of allowing older people to take a shower when they were no longer able to get into a bath and remain in their homes longer. It was something that the council could do. Installing baths was a waste of resources. In reply, the chair and vice chair commented that showers were available over baths and that consideration of the HECA report was not the place to consider a change to the Norwich standard.

In reply to a question the affordable warmth officer explained that the council worked closely with the private sector housing team and the enforcement officers to reduce the levels of houses with excess cold; targeting cold houses in general where the level of hazards had been identified, rather than on a ward by ward basis. The officer confirmed that the wards with the highest levels of fuel poverty were targeted to provide interventions to assist residents.

A member asked about the proposal to install gas boilers into the relatively new housing development at Templemere. She asked why this decision had been made when gas boilers would ultimately need to be replaced to achieve a reduction of carbon emissions, boilers would no longer be installed in new build and fossil fuel sources of heating would need to be replaced. The affordable warmth officer explained that this scheme was funded by Warm Homes funding, awarded to the council and Broadland District Council, specifically to provide gas central heating to reduce the cost of fuel. The decision was taken because of the knowledge of the area and, on balance, consideration was given to the opportunity this funding presented to help residents out of fuel poverty over reduction of carbon emissions. Members were advised that wall and loft insulation had been installed as part of the scheme to improve the general energy efficiency of the scheme.

The vice chair asked how the council compared with other local authorities nationally in terms of its performance on home energy conservation. The environmental strategy manager said that the council performed well in the review of its work by OFGEM Innovations Fund. The council was the first to hold a collective switch over campaign (to help people save on fuel prices) and the Solar Together scheme, and was actively seeking to be involved in pilot projects behind the meter services monetising energy efficiency. The team investigated funding when it was not delivering services. The vice chair said that it was important to benchmark performance against other like-minded and similar urban authorities, rather than the neighbouring rural district council, and consider what actions or schemes these authorities were implementing.

In reply to a question, the environmental strategy manager said that the take up of ROAR power was lower this year. This could be attributed to the fact that the council had taken the decision not to distribute the Citizen magazine because resources were focussed on Covid-support and recovery. Publicity for the scheme would be considered later in the year.

The officers confirmed that the use of solar panels in domestic use was addressed in the HECA report and confirmed that other work was being undertaken to look at community solar power schemes, such as at Swindon and Warrington. The council had tried twice to promote the use of solar panels but the government had reduced the feed-in tariff making the schemes unviable.

Discussion ensued on improving the energy efficiency of housing and a member asked if there was a roadmap that set a target to for all houses to reach a certain standard of efficiency to ensure that the city achieved net zero carbon emissions by 2040, and suggested that this was added to the letter to the government. During discussion the director of place said that this was not directly related to the HECA report but was part of the council's environmental strategy and work with the City Vision group to achieve carbon neutrality in response to the climate emergency by 2040 if not sooner. There would need to be a national scheme and government funding to deliver the retrofitting of the domestic housing stock, including the replacement of gas boilers. The environmental strategy would then be reviewed to reflect this but at the moment there were no targets for the housing stock to deliver net zero carbon emissions. The HECA report reported on the council's performance to address excess cold in homes and provide affordable warmth, whilst introducing environmental efficiency measures when there was sufficient funding. In reply to the member's suggestion that the government should be prompted by a roadmap to achieve carbon neutrality, the environmental strategy manager said that he would use the scatter tool to identify the amount of emissions and assess the reduction by a certain time if measures were in place if members wanted to include this in the letter. In reply to another member's question, the environmental strategy manager confirmed that officers worked closely with the University of East Anglia (UEA) on the environmental strategy, although not specifically on the HECA report. The vice chair confirmed that the council was working in partnership with the UEA on the Good Economy and that environmental matters and sustainability was a key part of that work.

In reply to a question, members were advised that information on the government's Green Homes Scheme was available on the Cosy City page of the website and provided advice for private owner occupiers to apply for funding to improve home energy assistance.

In reply to a member's question about the One Planet Norwich relating to promoting home energy efficiency, the environmental strategy officer said that all events had been postponed to 2022, but there was an active webpage.

A member expressed concern that 1,676 homes were categorised as being in excess cold. The environmental strategy manager said that the data was used by private sector housing teams and enforcement officers to target properties in excess cold, and it was not acceptable. Some homes were not suitable to install energy efficiency measures and in some cases, where the tenant had hoarding issues or did not want to engage, it was not possible. A member congratulated the officers

concerned for the work that had been done to address excess cold in homes. The director of place thanked members for a helpful debate. The council had to provide a balance its resources. The HECA report demonstrated the breadth of the work that was being undertaken to improve energy efficiency in homes.

RESOLVED to:

(1) thank the affordable warmth officer for the report;

(2) recommend the HECA report to cabinet for approval and ask the cabinet member for social inclusion to write a covering letter to be attached to the submission to central government asking for long term funding to ensure continuity of these activities.

CHAIR