

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 January 2024

Present:

Councillors Mitchell, M, Allcock, Asvachin, Branston, Ketchin, Knott, Moore, D, Read, Snow, Vizard and Williams, M

Apologies:

Councillors Atkinson and Leadbetter

Also present:

Director Corporate Services, Service Lead Net Zero & Business and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk	- Leader
Councillor Josie Parkhouse	- Portfolio Holder Climate and Ecological Crisis
Councillor Duncan Wood	- Portfolio Holder Leisure Services and Physical Activity

1 Chair

In the absence of the Chair, the meeting was chaired by the Deputy Chair, Councillor M. Mitchell, who on behalf of the Committee, expressed condolences to Councillor Atkinson on her recent bereavement.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2023 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the amendment that in Minute 71 (Questions from Councillor M Mitchell) and the response to the supplementary question should remove the second sentence and commence the third sentence with "The Portfolio Holder advised that"

3 Declaration of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

4 Questions from Members of the Public Under Standing Order No.19

There were no questions submitted by the public.

5 Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order No.20

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following questions were submitted by Councillor Moore in relation to the Portfolio of Councillor Bialyk who attended the meeting. The questions were circulated at the meeting to Members of the Committee. The response of the Leader is set out in italics below: –

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER SO20 TO CLLR BIALYK

Questions from Councillor Moore

1. The Exeter Development Fund (<https://www.globalcityfutures.com/case-study/next-phase-exeter-development-fund/>) no longer features in the Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan. Please can the Leader explain why this project is not included?

Work is in progress to explore how it could function, and should it come into being, which sites it could support. Until there is clarity on these matters, it is not necessary to include a reference in the plan.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question and referred to the Exeter Development Fund Task and Finish Group which had only met once to agree a set of terms of reference. She asked about their role and if there would be further involvement when the work was complete.

The Leader asked the Member to contact him in writing, so that he could obtain a response.

2. How much money has the Council secured and spent on the development of the Exeter Development Fund? How much staff time has been estimated to have been spent on the development of the Exeter Development Fund?

Exeter City Council had received £850k in total from the Government. To date £329,153 has been spent. The City Council has no data on officer time spent on this project.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question regarding the lack of outcome, despite the level of expenditure. She referred to the sum still to be spent and asked when further outputs from this work might be forthcoming.

The Leader undertook to seek a response to the question.

Councillor Moore asked an additional question in relation to flood mitigation measures which would come at the end of approved developments in the St Davids ward, and sought assurance that there will be more immediate measures before the Local Plan comes forward.

The Leader advised that he would seek a response as consideration of the appropriate flood measures and mitigation would be important as the future development in the Water Lane area of the city progressed. He reiterated that he would be happy to discuss this with Councillor Moore through the usual channels of discussion.

6 **Portfolio Holder report - Climate and Ecological Crisis**

Councillor Parkhouse reported on the Climate and Ecological Crisis areas of her Portfolio and detailed the issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities, major ongoing programmes of work, issues impacting delivery, financial performance, budget requirements and potential changes being considered.

The Portfolio Holder provided further updates on the key areas set out in the report which included:-

- the City Council taking on the co-ordination and facilitating role for city wide net zero, with a temporary two year Programme Manager post to coordinate activity and to work with existing structures across the city such as the Exeter Place Board. That person will also be the main point of contact for city businesses, and community groups as part of a collective effort to reach Net Zero 2030. Progress will be reported to scrutiny every six months, starting September 2024.
- highlighting the successful recognition of the internal Net Zero team following an independent review and being named as one of the top District Councils in the country for their work in net zero, as well team who oversaw the Water Lane Smart Grid and Storage (the Portfolio Holder would issue an invitation to visit the facility after the City Council Elections in May), and the Green Spaces team, who had also made great achievement in their work enhancing biodiversity within the city.
- a visit to Bristol City Council included meeting with colleagues from the Bristol City Leap initiative (a community energy proposition).
- the launch of the Exeter Innovation Hub in the city.
- the successful bid by 1Energy to the Green Heat Network Fund to install a District Heating network in Exeter.
- the South West Energy & Environment Group (SWEEG) will review the City wide Green House Gas report.

The Chair referred to the resolution at the September meeting of Strategic Scrutiny Committee, and the in principle decision to set up a Climate Change Sub Committee, subject to discussion with the Portfolio Holder, lead Members, officers and the Chief Executive on the best approach to progress city wide net zero without any duplication of work. The meeting in December, and report to Executive on 9 January proposed utilising existing structures within the City Council. A report would be made to this Committee every six months to provide a closer examination of the work undertaken, as well as the opportunity to invite speakers to contribute and focus on particular activity connected with city wide net zero.

Councillor Moore welcomed the planned work with the community, but considered the proposal for a Climate Change Sub Committee, which had been agreed in accordance with legislation had still to be addressed, and if the matter was not to be pursued, then it would have to be overturned formally at the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Knott indicated that he wished to make a proposal for the resolution made at the Strategic Scrutiny Committee in September to be rescinded.

Members made the following comments on the proposal:-

- of disappointment that the proposal for a Sub Committee was now the subject of further discussion rather than making time to discuss net zero. The Member supported the proposal to rescind the minute and move forward.
- this matter had been discussed on a number of occasions and the position had now changed, and any duplication of effort or calling on limited resources would not be helpful.

The Director Corporate Services referred to the previous conditional resolution made at this Committee requiring a meeting with the Chief Executive and others to agree the way forward. This meeting took place in December, and an agreement was reached and the detail was included in the Portfolio Holder's report. A proposal to rescind the previous decision would bring to an end the conversation about creating a Sub Committee.

Councillor Moore remained concerned over the lack of progress to form the Sub Committee, and the busy work programme of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee. The Chair noted the Member's concern on the workload of the Scrutiny Committees, which could be raised at the Scrutiny Programme Board.

Councillor Knott in conclusion, stated that the proposed recommendation was constructive and still offered clear scrutiny to the decisions that would be made. He proposed, and was seconded by Councillor Asvachin, that as Scrutiny of Net Zero progress would be dealt with appropriately and brought before this Committee on a regular basis, the proposal to establish any formal Climate Change Sub Committee be rescinded.

Following a vote, the recommendation was carried.

The Portfolio Holder and Service Lead Net Zero & Business responded to the following Members' questions and comments:-

Section 1 – Issues relating to achieving the council's published priorities:-

The Portfolio Holder responded:-

- the Public and Green Spaces Operations Manager worked to achieve how best to increase the biodiversity of all City Council owned sites despite the different competing priorities. Through the Public and Green Spaces Operations Manager, a draft Tree Strategy would be presented to Executive.
- planning considerations would continue to offer the most impact in improving biodiversity and ecology in the city's diverse sites, including the natural green spaces and the valley parks. She would work with the Portfolio Holder for Place and City Management and with the Net Zero biodiversity community group on what can be achieved, ward by ward, including the Clifton Hill site.

The Service Lead Net Zero & Business responded:-

- the spend of £1 million to deliver net zero both internally and externally is reported to Strategic Scrutiny Committee every six months, outlining where the money has been spent. For city wide net zero, approximately £155,000 was left from a budget allocation of £200,000 that will be earmarked for the Programme Manager role, with any money left over for delivery and redundancy payments.
- SWEEG would be commissioned to review the city wide Green House Gas report to establish areas of focus going forward. The Programme Manager would be focused on delivery and reducing city wide green house gas emissions across Exeter.

Section 2 Update or commentary on any major ongoing programmes of work

The Portfolio Holder responded:-

- the preference was for Exeter to benefit from the off site biodiversity net gain, radiating out to Devon, rather than further afield. She would ask the Services Lead Net Zero & Business to contact Planning colleagues to clarify the position.
- she would speak to the Public and Green Spaces Operations Manager regarding the budget spend for tree planting. The team was working with the Suitable Alternative Natural Greens Spaces (SANGS) and Planning to look at

capturing green sites across the city to improve biodiversity. In relation to a comment on the hills around the city, she was considering a watch and looking at all of the land that we own.

- the Council were not the transport authority, but the City Council's Transport Working Group, provided the opportunity to respond to consultations. A response had been made in respect of the transport section of the Exeter Plan. An invitation would also be made for transport colleagues from Devon County Council to attend a future meeting to continue some constructive dialogue.

The Service Lead Net Zero & Business responded:-

- in referring a matter raised by a Member in improving the trains and frequency in the city and across our travel to work, this will form of the work programme for the Transport Working Group, in lobbying public transport providers across Exeter.
- the Group were revising their terms of reference.
- the scale of Bristol City Council's Leap Project included significant funding, for a very ambitious joint venture project with Ameresco. Any similar venture in Exeter would be on a much smaller scale.
- Exeter had made impact with retrofitting the Council's social housing , producing solar energy, plans for a District Heating Network, as well as decarbonising work on RAMM and the Riverside Leisure Centre. There may be future opportunities that can be explored, particularly once the Programme Manager for city wide Net Zero was in place.
- representatives from the Anaerobic Digestive Plant located just outside Exeter were keen to work with the City Council, ensuring renewable gas produced is used across the city. The Programme Manager will be able to develop that relationship with Exeter.
- the Local Electric Infrastructure Funding (LEVI) Bid funding was through Devon County Council, who had an allocation of over £7 million to install EV charging both off street and on street. The fund was aimed at residents rather than commuters or visitors. The Council had discussed the installation of EV charging in nearly all of the City Council's car park estate, but were mindful of ensuring there was still access to bays for disability, motor cycles or family bay use. A tendering process, managed by Devon County Council, would provide off street and on street charging points.
- 1Energy had received Government funding to develop a new District Heat Network for the city. The City Council are developing its own business case to determine a way forward, which would be subject to a procurement process.
- the next report on City Council Net Zero would be presented to the Committee in March and the first report on city wide net zero will be presented in September.

Section3 – Issues that may impact service delivery/financial performance/future budget requirements

The Portfolio Holder responded that:-

- she had confidence in the team that they were looking at all of the things that were immediately possible to ensure a gain. A key task of the new Programme Manager would be to identify the financial cost of achieving city wide net zero by 2030.

The Service Lead Net Zero & Business responded:-

- current resources were focused on delivering net zero for the City Council, and the new Programme Manager would focus on city wide net zero. The work with SWEEG to review the city wide Green House Gas report would help the discussion on the costs around achieving net zero by 2030.
- some projects funded through Shared Prosperity Fund supports city wide net zero, such as Community Energy Project, the Exeter College Retrofit Project and the Greening Your Business.

Councillor Moore referred to the review of City Council policies in respect of impact on city wide or corporate carbon emissions and in referring to Internal Audit, if there had been a review of the Service Plan policy. The Portfolio Holder stated that it was premature to ask for this action in relation to a review of City Council policies in relation to the impact on carbon emissions. The Service Lead Net Zero & Business has commenced discussions with the services and will provide an update in the future. The Service Lead Legal also suggested that the issue could be raised with Internal Audit in the meantime, and an update be provided to this Committee.

Section 4 – Potential Changes to Service/provisions being considered

The Portfolio Holder noted the request for a review on city wide net zero delivery be made in a year's time.

Section 5 – Other Matters the Portfolio Holder wishes to raise with the Scrutiny Committee

The Portfolio Holder responded that:-

- she would make enquiries about the point raised in relation to measuring air pollution from wood burners and bonfires.
- the comment made about co location of public sector accommodation were noted.

Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor Read, proposed that there be consideration of the investment in net zero in relation to the Community Infrastructure Levy and the Infrastructure Plan to include a detailed analysis of the level of carbon emissions including any offset and the impact to be clear on the carbon ramifications.

The Portfolio Holder advised that consideration of net zero was already included with an assessment of the carbon footprint in every Committee report.

Following a vote, the recommendation was lost.

After some brief discussion with Councillor Moore, the Service Lead Net Zero & Business agreed to speak to the planning team and raise the points made and report back to this Committee in March.

The Portfolio Holder report was noted.

7 Forward Plan of Business and Scrutiny Work Plan

Members commented on the work plan and topics of proforma submitted. The Democratic Services Officer responded to questions on the list of Scrutiny proforma submitted:-

- that two scrutiny proformas recently submitted would be discussed at the forthcoming Scrutiny Programme Board in March; and
- that a request for scrutiny of the strategic direction of the Local Plan, rather than just consideration of the consultation outcomes and to further scrutinise a number of aspects which related to the Air Quality Action Plan would be made.

Members noted the Forward Plan and draft Scrutiny Work Plan.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.00 pm

Chair

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