

Minutes of a meeting of the Climate and Environment Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Tuesday 11 June 2024

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Committee members present:

Councillor Kerr (Chair)

Councillor Harley

Councillor Hunt

Councillor Miles

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)

Tina Mould, Environmental Sustainability Lead

Juliet Nicholas, Energy and Sustainability Manager

Chris Leyland, Tree Officer

Giles Mercer, External Consultant

Dealga O'Callaghan, External Consultant

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer

Also present:

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies

Councillor Anna Railton, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management

Apologies:

None.

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Chair's Announcements

None.

3. Notes of the previous meeting

The Panel agreed the notes of the meeting held on 20 March 2024 as a true and accurate record.

Cllr Miles joined the meeting.

The Panel agreed to consider items 7 (Tree Management Policy 2024-2032), 8 (Framework for the installation of renewable technologies in Council owned properties) and 9 (HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2024/25) next on the agenda, followed by items 5 (Climate and Environment Panel Work Plan), 6 (report back on recommendations) and 10 (dates of future meetings).

4. Tree Management Policy 2024-2032

Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies introduced the report. The report set out an updated Tree Management Policy which detailed the Council's policy regarding management of its tree stock and sought to align the Council's approach to tree management with current standards and good practice.

Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development) added that this policy formed part of a wider ongoing piece of work around the Council ensuring it had a clear clienting position with Oxford Direct Services.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- The policy aimed to emphasise the need to maintain trees at all costs, however the wording could be reviewed to see if it could be strengthened. Cllr Hunt had some suggested amendments to the wording which would be sent to the Cabinet Member and officers after the meeting.
- The decision as to whether to grind a tree stump out would be down to the contractor (ODS) on a case-by-case basis; there was not a standard approach set out in the policy.
- When surveys were undertaken on City Council owned trees, consideration would be given as to the impact of the tree on hard surfaces (e.g. pavements).
- Replacement trees could not always be planted in the exact same location as trees that had been felled.
- Trees with a circumference of 16-18cm established more quickly than more mature trees, which was why smaller trees were planted to replace mature trees.
- Oxford Direct Services was contractually required to care for new trees which it planted.
- Oxford Direct Services needed to be commissioned by the relevant body (namely Oxfordshire County Council) to plant trees in empty tree pits; it could not plant trees of its own accord.
- The Tree Management Policy was designed to have a very narrow, specific scope.
- The Cabinet Member and officers could further consider how the previous recommendation of the Panel could be further embedded into the policy. The previous recommendation was *'that the Council, when it reviews its policies, explores how it could incentivise, promote and encourage the planting, retention and renewal of trees through those policies – particularly within Planning and Licensing'*.
- In relation to the recommendation: *'that the Council, when it reviews its policies, explores how it could incentivise, promote and encourage the planting, retention and renewal of trees through those policies – particularly within Planning and Licensing'*, this would be considered at the next review of the Urban Forest Strategy; it would not be considered through the Tree Management Policy as the draft Cabinet response suggested.

- In the event that an individual/group was dissatisfied with tree management activity, the usual Council complaints process should be followed.
- The relevant Cabinet Member would be kept apprised of reporting on tree felling and maintenance; other Members could ask questions related to tree management at Full Council meetings if they wished.
- The Tree Management Policy could not supersede Planning documents such as the Local Plan.

The Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. The Council makes an explicit commitment within Policy ST8 of the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032 that it will plant replacement trees in the same location as the tree that was felled wherever possible and/or practicable to do so.
2. The Council ensures clarity within the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032 on why it plants trees in the way that it does – including cross-referencing with other documents to ensure the broad rationale is articulated within the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032 for context.
3. The Council, within Policy TP5 of the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032, clarifies its approach to managing conflicts between existing trees and hard surfaces (in addition to its approach to managing conflicts between new trees and hard surfaces), including specific reference to standard proactive methodologies used to address those conflicts.
4. The Council explicitly recognises the need to work in partnership with the County Council and/or Highways on street tree issues and includes a reference to this within the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032.
5. The Council contextualises the number of street trees it owns within the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032.
6. The Council expands section 6 of the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032 (communication with the public, stakeholders and Members) to set out the Council's commitment to encouraging local residents and groups to come forward with proposals related to tree planting and maintenance and the Council's approach to facilitating and responding to such proposals.
7. The Council explores how other local authorities have sought to incentivise, promote and encourage the planting, retention and renewal of trees on private land through their policies, particularly in relation to HMOs and Selective Licensing, to inform future updates to the Council's Urban Forest Strategy.
8. The Council explicitly recognises the importance of mature trees within the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032 and highlights the need for the Planning process to be sympathetic to mature and existing trees.

Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies, Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development), Chris Leyland, Tree Officer, Giles Mercer, External Consultant and Dealga O'Callaghan, External Consultant left the meeting and did not return.

5. Framework for the Installation of Renewable Technologies in Council Owned Properties

Cllr Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management introduced the report, which sought Cabinet approval to establish a Framework for the provision and installation of renewable technologies to Council owned properties. The aim of the Framework was to ensure efficient procurement

processes which remained open and transparent, while enabling the Council to procure quickly.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- There was confidence that there would be enough interest from providers for the Framework; and the market continued to grow.
- The contract award criteria had not yet been finalised, consideration could be given to the weightings afforded to suppliers (e.g. for local suppliers versus national suppliers) in line with the legal requirements which applied to procurement processes.
- Existing HRA energy efficiency projects would not be delayed as a result of establishing the Framework; the Framework would allow for projects to be progressed more quickly.
- The Framework budget had an upper ceiling of £30m.
- The Framework proposal was effectively in response to a previous recommendation of the Panel: *'That the Council explores the full range of procurement options for the delivery of the projects, including alternative suppliers and the possibility of establishing medium-to-long term relationships with suppliers, contractors and sub-contractors.'*
- The Council was on track to achieve its aim of having 95% of Council housing stock at EPC C or better by 2030.

The Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. Through the Framework and more broadly across the Council's procurement processes, the Council encourages the submission of bids from suppliers which are representative of the local population of Oxford, particularly those with strong female and ethnic minority representation, to ensure that 'green growth' is as inclusive as possible.

Cllr Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management left the meeting and did not return.

6. HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2024/25

Cllr Anna Railton, Deputy Leader (Non-Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford introduced the report, which sought Cabinet approval for HRA Energy Efficiency projects for the 2024/25 financial year and delegated authority to award the necessary contracts. Juliet Nicholas, Energy and Sustainability Manager added that this report went hand-in-hand with the preceding report on the Framework.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- The timetable for achieving a full set of EPCs for Council owned properties was still under development; it was confirmed that an update on the timetable would be provided at the Panel's next meeting in September 2024.
- An Equalities Impact Assessment would be completed for each individual project; however the assessment would primarily consider the property rather than people. Where residents had particular vulnerabilities, these would be considered in the usual way.
- There had been instances of residents refusing access to their properties; it was hoped that these issues could be addressed by establishing show homes and via education and resident liaison.

- The additional budget required for ground source heat pumps in the additional block of flats would be funded by budget rollover from 2023/24.
- It was deemed that a risk register was not necessary for this report.
- The impact of installing energy efficiency on residents would be assessed through looking at the impact on their bills prior to installation; a monitoring mechanism would be installed when the energy efficiency measures were installed to ensure systems performed as they should and to inform advice to residents on usage.

The Panel requested that an update on the timetable for achieving a full set of EPCs on Council owned properties be provided at the Panel's next meeting in September 2024.

The Panel noted the contents of the report; no recommendations were agreed.

Cllr Anna Railton, Deputy Leader (Non-Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Juliet Nicholas, Energy and Sustainability Manager left the meeting and did not return.

7. Climate and Environment Panel Work Plan

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the item; a provisional Work Plan and suggestions for the longlist of Scrutiny-commissioned reports for 2024/25 were included within the agenda pack. A number of items from the longlist had already been scheduled into the Work Plan, along with a number of items arising from the Panel's work in the previous year.

The Panel requested that the Scrutiny Officer explore with officers the feasibility of scheduling in the following additional items to the Work Plan for 2024/25:

- Loss and Damage to the Council as a result of climate change (e.g. costs incurred by the Council as a result of recent flooding) and how this could be addressed/funded.
- Energy efficiency in the Council's commercial property portfolio, including potential for repurposing Council car parks (e.g. as active travel hubs).

In relation to the 'loss and damage' item suggested, Tina Mould, Environmental Sustainability Lead advised that the County Council was doing a piece of work around climate adaptation; when that had concluded then officers would do some work from a City Council perspective, however this was unlikely to be until 2025. The Panel requested that an update be provided to the Panel at its meeting in September 2024 as to the County Council's progress and a timeline for when a more detailed update including the City Council's work could be presented to the Panel as a substantive item.

The Panel was of the view that the 'loss and damage' suggestion was separate to the work being carried out by the County Council on climate adaptation and requested that the Scrutiny Officer still explore the feasibility of an item on this matter being considered by the Panel in 2024/25.

Tina Mould, Environmental Sustainability Lead advised that the energy efficiency in the Council's commercial property portfolio and potential for repurposing Council car parks would likely sit under the Council's Asset Management Strategy.

The Panel agreed the Work Plan as set out in the agenda pack, noting that the Scrutiny Officer would seek to schedule in additional items as detailed above.

8. Report back on recommendations

Cabinet had not considered or made responses to any Climate and Environment Panel recommendations since the previous report back on recommendations on 27 February 2024. All outstanding responses to recommendations would be reported on at a future Panel meeting.

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the recommendation tracker, which set out all Panel recommendations to date since the Panel was first established, Cabinet responses to recommendations and whether or not the Panel was continuing to monitor recommendations. The Panel noted that it may be necessary to move the recommendations which were no longer being monitored into a different tab within the document to avoid the tracker becoming too long, but the Panel agreed to keep this under review at subsequent meetings.

The Panel noted the recommendation tracker.

9. Dates of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates and times of future meetings.

The Panel agreed, subject to Cllr Harley confirming her availability after the meeting, to move the meeting scheduled for 05 September to 10 September and requested that the Scrutiny Officer make the relevant arrangements.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.44 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 10 September 2024

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.