

Minutes of a meeting of the Climate and Environment Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Tuesday 27 February 2024



Committee members present:

Councillor Hollingsworth (Chair)	Councillor Aziz
Councillor Dunne	Councillor Fry
Councillor Kerr	Councillor Miles

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Tina Mould, Environmental Sustainability Lead
Vikki Robins, Carbon Reduction Team Manager
Tristan Carlyle, Principal Ecology and Biodiversity Officer
Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer

Also present:

Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice

Apologies:

No apologies were received

28. Declarations of Interest

None.

29. Chair's Announcements

None.

The Panel agreed to consider the items in order up to and including item 6, followed by items 9, 8, 10, 7 and 11.

30. Notes of the previous meeting

The Panel agreed the notes of the meeting held on 29 November 2023 as a true and accurate record.

Cllr Aziz joined the meeting.

31. Climate and Environment Panel Work Plan

The Panel considered the Work Plan and noted that it had one meeting left during the 2023/24 municipal year. There were three items listed on the Work Plan for the Panel's meeting on 20 March 2024:

- Energy Generation/Solar Potential on Council Buildings [presentation]
- Tree Planting [presentation]
- 2023-24 Year in Review

The Scrutiny Officer advised that, of the Scrutiny-commissioned items agreed earlier in the 2023-24 municipal year, two were outstanding and would be carried forward to the list of suggested items for 2024-25:

- Tree Maintenance
- Waste

The Panel agreed the Work Plan as set out in the agenda pack.

32. Report back on recommendations

The Panel noted the following Cabinet responses to its recommendations:

- Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxford City Council Parks and Nature Areas – September 2023 Review
- Retrofit

In response to a question, the Panel was informed that the 'OCC/ODS Client officer review meeting' referred to in the response to recommendation three on the Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxford City Council Parks and Nature Areas – September 2023 Review was a monthly meeting attended by officers only; there was no Member representation at those meetings. The Head of Corporate Strategy advised that a review of the commissioning of services provided by ODS, linked to the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy, had just begun. In light of this, the Panel was of the view that the Cabinet should have perhaps stated that it agreed with the Panel's recommendation to review the Council's contracts with ODS, although the formal agreed response remained that the Cabinet did not agree the recommendation.

The Panel noted the response to recommendation one on the Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxford City Council Parks and Nature Areas – September 2023 Review, which related to data and mapping. The Panel agreed that a wider, more general data and mapping exercise across the Council would add significant value to the Council's operations and that this broader work may be of interest to the Scrutiny Committee.

33. Biodiversity Net Gain [presentation]

Tristan Carlyle, Principal Ecology and Biodiversity Officer delivered a presentation which set out an overview of Biodiversity Net Gain, including the statutory regulations and national guidance; monitoring arrangements; Biodiversity Gain Plans; and identification of Council land for Biodiversity Net Gain purposes. A copy of the presentation slides was included in the agenda pack.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- The offsite biodiversity offsetting market had developed slowly and in a patchy way as a result of the nature of biodiversity offsetting model required under the statutory regulations.
- There was no formal requirement for the Council to produce Biodiversity Net Gain monitoring guidance.
- The Local Planning Authority or Responsible Body securing offsite biodiversity units would be responsible for ensuring Biodiversity Net Gain delivery and monitoring; it was not clear how this would work in practice where offsite biodiversity units were located outside of the Local Planning Authority which provided consent for the development.
- Biodiversity and carbon offsetting could theoretically be 'stacked' at the same site, provided it could be demonstrated the units would deliver additionality.
- Biodiversity offsetting could be delivered anywhere in England as per the regulations.
- The Council's Corporate Assets team was determining which Council land should be considered for the provision of biodiversity units; larger sites were preferred initially.
- National Biodiversity Net Gain guidance stated that development boundaries should not be artificially amended for the purposes of ensuring certain habitats were out of scope for developments in terms of Biodiversity Net Gain; in practice, enforcement of this could be difficult.
- Providers of offsite biodiversity units were required to be registered with Natural England; this would help ensure transparency of spend on offsite biodiversity units.
- There were a series of exemptions in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain; two main exemptions were for householders and 'de minimis' applications.

The Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. The Council coordinates with the other Oxfordshire Districts to establish basic Biodiversity Net Gain monitoring guidance for certain habitats to ensure a consistent set of principles and processes across the county.
2. The Council, through its project to identify Council-owned land with the potential to provide biodiversity units, seeks to identify sufficient sites so as to establish itself as a key provider of biodiversity units locally, thus strongly encouraging the uptake of biodiversity units in Oxford or as close to Oxford as possible.

Tristan Carlyle, Principal Ecology and Biodiversity Officer left the meeting and did not return.

34. Citywide Retrofit Strategy [presentation]

Tina Mould, Environmental Sustainability Lead delivered a presentation which set out an overview of work to date in relation to the development of a Citywide Retrofit Strategy and Action Plan and sought the Panel's feedback. A copy of the presentation slides is included in the minutes pack.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- The Council's 2030 net zero ambitions included emissions relating only to non-residential Council-owned buildings where the Council paid the energy bill; non-residential buildings which formed part of the Council's commercial property portfolio were not in scope, but emissions relating to non-residential Council-

owned buildings were in scope of the 2040 net zero ambitions for the City more broadly.

- Social and behavioural considerations, including the retrofit 'efficiency paradox', would be considered under the umbrella of the strategy.

Vikki Robins, Carbon Reduction Team Manager left the meeting and did not return.

- Discussions had begun around developing expertise within Council service areas to work on areas of direct Council control, which would enable the Environmental Sustainability team to be freed-up to drive forward areas of work where the Council had influence, but not direct control.

The Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. The Council incorporates all non-residential Council-owned buildings within the scope of the Citywide Retrofit Strategy and includes an approach within the strategy and associated action plan to ensure improvements in energy efficiency of all non-residential Council-owned buildings regardless of whether or not the Council pays the energy bill.
2. The Council ensures appropriate internal expertise in relevant service areas to drive forward projects and actions to achieve the Council's net zero ambitions where it has direct control in order to release additional capacity and resource within the Environmental Sustainability team to enable the continuation of its transition towards driving forward areas of work where the Council has influence and can shape and enable collaboration across the City to facilitate the achievement of the City's broader net zero ambitions.

35. Net Zero Masterplan

The Panel considered the Net Zero Masterplan, which set out Oxford City Council's actions over the next two years to achieve its two carbon targets: a Net Zero Estate and Operations by 2030 and a Net Zero City by 2040.

Tina Mould, Environmental Sustainability Lead summarised the updates which had been included since the previous iteration of the document.

During discussion, the Panel noted:

- Actions assigned to Ian Wright needed to be reallocated as he had left the organisation.
- It was anticipated that local area energy planning would help alleviate some of the issues around local grid constraints; but there was still a significant amount of partnership working and collaboration required to address these constraints.
- It would be helpful for a more detailed item on local area energy planning and mitigation measures regarding local grid constraints to be submitted to the Panel at a future meeting at the appropriate time.
- The ODS GUL-e technology was ready to be commercialised, but not yet at the householder level; the County Council was about to procure a cable gully system as part of its LEVI programme and ODS was understood to be submitting a bid for that contract.

The Panel requested that:

- The Head of Corporate Strategy circulated an explanation to the Panel as to why the ODS GUL-e technology could not currently be commercialised and made

available to individual private householders who wished to pay for installation of the technology to enable home charging of their electric vehicle.

The Panel noted the Net Zero Masterplan; no recommendations were agreed.

36. Matters exempt or part exempt from publication and exclusion of the public

The Panel agreed, in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and the public from the remaining item of business on the grounds that their presence would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

a) Heat Network & Zoning [presentation]

Tina Mould, Environmental Sustainability Lead delivered a presentation on Heat Networks & Zoning, the content of which was commercially sensitive. The Panel received the presentation and held discussion in private.

The Panel agreed it would be worthwhile for this item to be brought back to the Panel once the project had progressed further.

The Panel noted the presentation; no recommendations were agreed.

Cllr Dunne left the meeting and did not return.

37. Dates of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates and times of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.07 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 20 March 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.

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