

## **Minutes of a meeting of the Climate and Environment Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Tuesday 10 September 2024**



### **Committee members present:**

Councillor Kerr (Chair)

Councillor Harley

Councillor Hunt

Councillor Miles

### **Officers present for all or part of the meeting:**

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Pedro Rocha Abreu, Principal Air Quality Officer

Alice Jones, Carbon Reduction Project Manager

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer

### **Also present:**

Councillor Anna Railton, Deputy Leader (Non-Statutory), Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford

### **Apologies:**

No apologies were received

## **10. Declarations of Interest**

None.

## **11. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair informed the Panel that it was the Scrutiny Officer's final Climate and Environment Panel meeting before she left the organisation; the Panel thanked the Scrutiny Officer for her support and wished her all the best in her new role.

The Chair also informed the Panel that she had approved a request from a member of the public to address the Panel on the Net Zero Masterplan item later in the meeting.

## **12. Notes of the previous meeting**

The Panel agreed the notes of the meeting held on 11 June 2024 as a true and accurate record.

The Scrutiny Officer provided the following updates on matters arising from the previous meeting on 11 June 2024:

- Minute 4 – Cllr Hunt’s suggestions on the Tree Management Policy which were not formal recommendations were forwarded on to Cabinet Member/officers for consideration.
- Minute 4 (recommendation 7) – Planning & Regulatory Services had investigated how other local authorities had sought to incentivise, promote and encourage the planting, retention and renewal of trees through their policies, particularly in relation to HMOs and Selective Licensing. There were legal restrictions on what could be done in relation to licensing and no other authorities had been identified that implemented such policies.
- Minute 6 – the Scrutiny Officer provided the following update on behalf of officers in relation to the timetable for achieving a full set of EPCs for Council-owned properties: *There are currently 978 Oxford city homes (12%) that do not have a lodged EPC. From estimated data these are likely to be equally split between above EPC C and below EPC C. The plan is to survey around 200 of these properties per year between now and 2030, when a full EPC dataset is planned to be in place (subject to survey access); this will be linked to the stock condition survey programme where possible. Where properties are identified which are below EPC C, works will be programmed into a project to improve the rating. EPCs are also being updated following any planned works and projects to ensure EPCs are kept up to date going forward.*
- Minute 7 – the Scrutiny Officer had not yet received responses on the requests for items for the Work Plan on loss and damage or energy efficiency in Council’s commercial property portfolio/repurposing of car parks (asset management).
- Minute 7 – the Head of Corporate Strategy would provide a verbal update on County Council Climate Adaptation work later in the meeting.

*The Panel agreed to consider items 7 (Net Zero Masterplan), 8 (Annual Air Quality Status Report), 9 (Local Area Energy Planning and Mitigation Measures Regarding Local Grid Constraints) and 10 (Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) Expansion) next on the agenda; followed by items 5 (Climate and Environment Panel Work Plan), 6 (Report back on recommendations) and 11 (dates of future meetings).*

### **13. Net Zero Masterplan**

The Panel received a public address on this item from Dan Glazebrook, who addressed the Panel on the importance of calculating, evaluating and minimising embodied carbon in the construction of developments, and not only carbon output from completed developments; and protecting existing biodiversity and the failure of carbon offsetting schemes. The Chair thanked Dan Glazebrook for attending to address the Panel.

*Dan Glazebrook left the meeting and did not return.*

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy introduced 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. He outlined a number of key changes since the previous iteration of the document, including that the Council was intending to bring forward a report in early 2025 providing an assessment of the Council’s progress towards achieving its 2030 net zero targets.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- Reducing embodied carbon was a commitment set out in the Local Plan 2040, which was currently at the examination stage. Once adopted, the measurement and reporting of embodied carbon would be an integral part of developments.
- Building suitability for retrofit measures differed from judgements as to whether buildings remained fit for purpose in terms of their general use.
- The Council's Planning Policy Team consistently sought out best practice from other local authorities, including methodologies to assess whether buildings should be retrofitted or rebuilt.
- The delivery of action 1 within the document had been impacted by a lack of data and systems to capture information; it was clarified that the issue was around not having all of the data, rather than not having the ability to obtain the data.
- The Head of Corporate Strategy would seek an update from the relevant Licensing Team in relation to progress on delivering against action 21 in the document and report back to the Panel.
- Carbon literacy training would not be delivered to all staff, it would only be delivered to staff in relevant roles and senior managers (which was approximately 200 staff). There were discussions ongoing in relation to offering the training to Members. The Panel requested that this information be summarised in the Net Zero Masterplan (action 3) going forward to provide a more comprehensive update, alongside a clarification that the training would not be delivered to all staff.
- Action 1 in the document had 'low priority' status as the Council did not yet have all the information required to produce overall costings; it was anticipated that the report previously referenced (to be brought forward in early 2025) would help to progress this action.
- Action 4 in the document was being progressed; all baseline assessments for individual plots of land had been done.

The Panel requested that:

- The Head of Corporate Strategy seek an update from the relevant Licensing Team in relation to progress on delivering against action 21 in the document and report back to the Panel.
- A more comprehensive summary be included next to action 3 (related to carbon literacy training) in the Net Zero Masterplan going forward, alongside a clarification that the training will not be delivered to all staff.
- The date format under 'due date' for action 4 in the document be revised, as it was currently incorrect (stating '6/25/2025').

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

## **14. Annual Air Quality Status Report**

Pedro Abreu, Principal Air Quality Officer introduced the report, which provided an update on air quality in Oxford in the past year. The Panel was informed that, overall, the report showed a positive position.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- There were no current plans to mitigate against a reversal in air quality improvements achieved as a result of the Botley Road closure when the road

reopened; however, the air quality before the road closure already did not exceed the legal and local annual mean target for NO<sub>2</sub>.

- The Air Quality Action Plan, which ran until 2025, set out detailed air quality actions.
- There were no community communications campaigns currently planned; a Community Engagement Officer was due to join the Council on 09 October 2024 who would support on communications campaigns, including in relation to boating communities and fuel poverty. The appointment of this new officer would increase capacity and resource to deliver community engagement activity.
- There were no limitations to the current air quality monitoring capacity on Hollow Way and the surrounding area.
- The Oxford Source Apportionment Study provided information as to where emissions came from.
- There had been a lack of funding from Central Government to support local authorities to deliver their air quality obligations.
- Pollution from lead (e.g. from light aircraft fuel) was not currently considered at the national level due to historic measurements after the EU ban on lead from petrol fuels in 2000 being consistently below the current legal limit for this pollutant; it was not determined that pollution from light aircraft fuel was a problem in Oxford.

The Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. The Council writes to Central Government to make representations in relation to securing future additional local government funding to adequately resource the Council's statutory air quality obligations.
2. The Council develops a clear plan to mitigate against reversing the improvements in air quality achieved as a result of the Botley Road closure, when the road is reopened.
3. The Council explores investment in air quality display boards to disseminate key messages to the public related to air quality.
4. The Council considers setting a limit for the number of vehicles it licenses in the city (i.e. Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles).

*Pedro Abreu, Principal Air Quality Officer left the meeting and did not return.*

## **15. Local Area Energy Planning and Mitigation Measures Regarding Local Grid Constraints [presentation]**

Alice Jones, Carbon Reduction Project Manager delivered a presentation on the topic of Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) and mitigation measures regarding local grid constraints. A copy of the slides is attached to the minutes pack.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- Oxford was impacted more than other areas in relation to grid constraints because Oxford's Building Regulations went beyond the national standards in terms of use of renewable energy sources.
- If successful, the District Heat Network bid would be considered through the LAEP process.
- LAEP was a voluntary process; national grid capacity forecasting was done through the DFES (Distribution Future Energy Scenarios) process.

- The Council had written to Central Government both pre-and-post-General Election in relation to grid constraints and the need to address this as a matter of urgency. A more detailed letter was due to be submitted to Central Government on behalf of all Oxfordshire councils in the near future.

The Panel noted the update; there were no recommendations.

*Alice Jones, Carbon Reduction Project Manager left the meeting and did not return.*

## **16. Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) Expansion**

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy introduced the report, which set out the work of the ZCOP and ambition of its corporate members to expand focus from a City to an Oxfordshire scale.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- There was an Oxford Carbon Roadmap to 2040 and an Oxfordshire Carbon Roadmap to 2050; surrounding District Councils had other net zero targets, some of which were currently being reviewed. Despite these differences, there was confidence that the ambitions, and timelines for those ambitions, aligned across the proposed members of an expanded ZCOP.
- Oxford City Council would continue to report on progress against its 2040 net zero timeline.
- Approaches had been made to larger carbon contributors in Oxfordshire to engage them in an expanded ZCOP.
- There was already engagement in the ZCOP from organisations which had an operational footprint in Oxford/Oxfordshire, even if they were not based in Oxford/Oxfordshire. The expanded ZCOP would allow for consideration to be given to membership of organisations to which this applied.

The Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. The Council works with the expanded ZCOP to explore the feasibility of there being a mechanism by which organisations that are not located in Oxfordshire, but that have an operational footprint in Oxfordshire, can engage with the ZCOP.

The Head of Corporate Strategy provided an update on the County Council's climate adaptation work, as requested by the Panel at its previous meeting on 11 June 2024. The work was underway and a series of workshops had been held in May 2024 to develop a climate route map. A survey had also been circulated to a wide range of stakeholders seeking their input on the route map. It was anticipated that an initial draft of the route map would be available for Members and officers to view around the end of September 2024, which was expected to be submitted to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership for final approval in January 2025.

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

## **17. Climate and Environment Panel Work Plan**

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the Work Plan, which was set out in the agenda pack. She reminded the Panel that she was still following up with officers in relation to scheduling in the requested items on:

- 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) – linked to the Council’s Asset Management Strategy

The Panel requested that the Scrutiny Officer seek to schedule in the item on Energy efficiency in the Council’s commercial property portfolio, including potential for repurposing Council car parks (e.g. as active travel hubs) – linked to the Council’s Asset Management Strategy before the end of the calendar year, as discussions would likely link in to the budget-setting round.

The Panel agreed the Work Plan as set out in the agenda pack, noting that the Scrutiny Officer would seek to schedule in the item above for the November 2024 meeting; and would continue to seek to schedule in the ‘Loss and Damage’ item at the appropriate point.

## 18. Report back on recommendations

*Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy left the meeting and did not return.*

The Panel noted the following Cabinet responses to its recommendations:

- Tree Management Policy 2024-2032
- Framework for the Installation of Renewable Technologies in Council-Owned Properties
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Citywide Retrofit Strategy
- Tree Planting
- Energy Generation/Solar Potential on Council Buildings

The Panel noted the recommendation tracker.

## 19. Dates of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates and times of future meetings.

**The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 7.07 pm**

**Chair .....**  
**2024**

**Date: Wednesday 20 November**

*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.*