

Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 9 December 2021

Present: Councillor Igbon – in the Chair

Councillors: Flanagan, Foley, Hassan, Holt, Hughes, Jeavons, Lynch, Lyons, Razaq, Sheikh, Shilton Godwin and Wright

Apologies: Councillor Chohan

Also present:

Councillor Rawlins, Executive Member for Environment

Councillor Nunney, Ward Member for Woodhouse Park

Neil Robinson, Group Corporate Social Responsibility & Future Airspace Director
Manchester Airports Group

Katie Rice, Public Affairs Officer, Manchester Airports Group

Andy Clarke, Head of Public Affairs, Manchester Airports Group

Richard Elliott, Interim Policy and Strategy Advisor, Manchester Climate Change Agency

ECCSC/21/32 Minutes

A Member noted that the information previously requested in relation to those businesses and organisations that were not formally engaged with the Climate Change Agency had been circulated with the offer of a further meeting with the Agency to discuss the content further if required. A Member requested that this meeting be convened with the date and time circulated to all Members of the Committee.

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2021 as a correct record, noting the above request.

ECCSC/21/33 Aviation and Carbon Emissions

The Committee considered the report of the Manchester Climate Change Agency and Manchester Airports Group (MAG) that provided an overview of the relationship between aviation and the city's carbon emissions. It set out how, as previously agreed, aviation related emissions needed to form part of a nationally agreed carbon budget for aviation, which should be compatible with the Paris Agreement, rather than being accounted for directly in the city's own discreet carbon budget. The report contained information on the work that Manchester Airport had been doing to reduce the ground-based carbon impact of their activities and the work that Manchester Airport Group were involved with to ensure that the aviation sector played its part in working to reduce its carbon impact.

The report was accompanied by a presentation that summarised the key points within the report.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background, including a description of the economic benefits of the airport;
- Recognising that the airport and aviation did make a contribution to carbon emissions;
- Recognising the importance that both ground emissions and emissions from aviation were considered in the overall strategy to limit overall carbon emissions;
- The Manchester Climate Change Framework included a specific sub-objective for aviation which would be updated in the Framework refresh;
- An overview of the Manchester Airports Group, including information on their Corporate Social Responsibility;
- Information in relation to carbon reporting;
- Information in relation to carbon neutral airports and those activities to address indirect emissions; and
- An update on the work of the Sustainable Aviation Coalition to address aircraft emissions and the Sustainable Aviation Decarbonisation Road-Map.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committee's discussions were: -

- Supporting a call for a frequent flyer tax to be levied;
- Calling upon MAG to exercise its influence both nationally and internationally to address the emissions caused by the aviation industry;
- Any land used for the development and delivery of Sustainable Aviation Fuel should not be at the expense of land that could be used for food production;
- Alternative methods of travel should be promoted by MAG, especially in relation to internal flights;
- More investment was required in sustainable transport to access the airport site rather than rely on car parks, adding that a stop to car park expansion at the site would provide a significant message of intention to address emissions;
- Consideration should be given to adopting an alternative carbon calculation method as recommended by the Tyndall Centre;
- Who established the carbon budget for the airport and how was this arrived at;
- What was MAG doing to attract and adopt green skills and jobs at the airport;
- The need to review the Manchester City Council Staff Travel Policy and the policy that was applied to Executive Members to ensure that it was consistent and not contrary to the Climate Emergency;
- The call to minimise or stop aircraft engines revving when on the airfields with consideration to be given to electric ground vehicles manoeuvring aircraft into their holding position ahead of take off;
- Noting that aircraft engines emitted carbon and harmful particulates that could have an adverse effect on a person's health;
- Consideration needed to be given to free parking for electric vehicles and the installation of electric vehicle charging point to be installed at the airport;
- The Government should be lobbied to support and finance electric vehicles that don't access the highways but were used to service major infrastructure sites, such as airports and ports;

- Requesting that the views of the Committee were relayed to the Aviation Sub Group established by the Climate Change Partnership; and
- Members would welcome the opportunity to understand the options being discussed by the Aviation Sub Group.

The Committee heard from Councillor Nunney, Ward Member for Woodhouse Park who had requested to address the Committee. Councillor Nunney stated that he had concerns in regard to the air quality surrounding the airport and the impact this had on the health outcomes of those residents in the local vicinity. He stated that there was far too much focus and discussion on growth and expansion at the expense of the immediate climate breakdown. He further made reference to the report produced by Climate Emergency Manchester (CEM) on the subject of the airport and aviation emissions and stated that he endorsed their conclusions and recommendations. He concluded by saying that he supported the introduction of a frequent flyer tax, arguing that further analysis was required to fully understand the benefits that could be realised by adopting such an approach.

The Chair informed the Committee that she had agreed to read out the questions submitted by Climate Emergency Manchester (CEM), in advance of the meeting and requested that a written response be provided by the report authors to CEM and a copy circulated to Members of the Committee for information. She thanked CEM for submitting their questions.

Neil Robinson, Group Corporate Social Responsibility & Future Airspace Director, Manchester Airports Group, in reply to the comments and views expressed by the Committee, said that he recognised and acknowledged the strength of feeling expressed by the Members. He said that the relationship between the airport and the city's carbon reduction ambitions was understood. He described that the importance of addressing climate change had been acknowledged by the airport for many years and the site had responded to this issue by introducing many carbon efficiencies across the airport estate, including the operational efficiencies of the airfield. He said that MAG airports were already carbon neutral, and MAG was committed to a transition to net zero carbon by 2038.

Mr Robinson advised that MAG sought to exert influence to achieve improvements in emissions from the aviation industry both at a national and international level. He stated that the need to address carbon emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change was understood. He advised that MAG were represented on the Jet Zero Council, a partnership between industry and government to bring together Ministers and Chief Executive Officer level stakeholders, with the aim of delivering zero emission transatlantic flight within a generation, driving the delivery of new technologies and innovative ways to cut aviation emissions.

In reply to the discussion on levying a frequent flyer tax, Mr Robinson stated that MAG did not support this approach, arguing that stimulating innovation and challenging the industry itself would deliver the required technological improvements to reduce carbon emissions from aviation. He further stated that aviation was already substantially taxed higher when compared to other industries.

Mr Robinson advised that the development and investment in sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) would stimulate and innovate green technologies, support a circular economy and deliver green jobs and skills in the North West, recognising the comment on the appropriate use of land. He further commented that the delivery of SAF would also reduce the particulates emitted from aircraft engines. He also advised that all ground support vehicles across the site would be ultra-low emission vehicles by 2030.

Mr Robinson advised that a common global standard was required in relation to SAF, adding that there was a global United Nations conference planned for 2022 that included this issue amongst others relating to the aviation industry.

In response to the discussion regarding calling for a reduction or end to internal domestic flights, Mr Robinson advised that the majority of those flights included crossing a body of water making any alternative methods of travel, if available, both costly and time consuming for the customer. With regard to access to the airport he referenced the Metrolink extension to the airport site and in response to the car park issue he commented that providing car parking was preferable to 'kiss and fly' arrangements which would result in double the number of journeys to and from the site. He added that MAG would welcome Government funding to deliver electric charging points, however this was currently not forthcoming and he recognised that work was ongoing across Greater Manchester on the issue of electric car charging infrastructure.

In reply to the comments regarding air quality, Mr Robinson stated that this was regularly recorded, and the results reported to Environmental Health Officers within the Council.

The Executive Member for Environment stated that the staff travel policy was being reviewed and she noted the comment regarding the need to ensure the policy that applied to Executive Members and flying was consistent. She described that the Government continued to be lobbied for funding to deliver improved connectivity and active travel across the city. She further advised that as part of the Greater Manchester Clean Air Plan funding was available for taxi drivers to retrofit or upgrade their vehicles. She commented that Members would be invited to sessions that had been arranged to explain the carbon budget setting process as requested by the Committee at a previous meeting. In conclusion she stated that the Leader was committed to working with both herself and MAG to progress the issue of reducing carbon emissions associated with the aviation industry.

The Chair concluded this item of business by thanking all of the guests present for attending the meeting and allowing the Committee the opportunity to scrutinise this important subject matter.

Decisions

The Committee recommend;

1. That the Executive Member for the Environment convene a meeting with Members of the Committee to discuss further the issues raised at the meeting.

2. That the Chair discusses with the Chairs of the Economy Scrutiny and Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee the request for the consideration of the issue of the airport within their respective remits and focus.

3. That a report on both Staff Active Travel Plans and Member Active Travel Plans be submitted for consideration at an appropriate time.

4. That the Executive Member for Environment lobby Government to appropriately fund and incentivise electric vehicle parking and charging at all airports.

5. That the Executive Member for Environment lobby Government to fund and incentivise the conversion to electric vehicles for those industries and business whose vehicles do not access the public highways.

[Councillor Flanagan declared prejudicial interest in the subject of the Airports Group so took no part in the discussion relating to the airport and restricted his contribution to the issue of emissions and carbon reduction.]

ECCSC/21/34 Grounds Maintenance Update: The Use of Pesticides

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) that provided an update on the approach to the use of pesticides when delivering Grounds Maintenance.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- The usage of herbicides as part of a citywide grounds' maintenance weed control programme;
- An update on the works to reduce the City's dependency on herbicides and in particular Glyphosate as the primary weed control method;
- The use of Glyphosate as a standard weed treatment having ceased altogether in parks and gardens, and the use of alternative herbicides significantly reduced to spot and targeted treatments;
- No general Glyphosate based treatments had been used by the Grounds Teams to manage weeds in either Manchester Parks and Gardens, Street Scene, or Northwards communal areas and incidental green space since 2019;
- Describing that in other parts of the public estate the approach had been to reduce use of glyphosate;
- Noting that alternate methods of control were being explored, including organic herbicides, vinegar solutions, mechanical clearance, hot water and hot foam;
- An update on the approach to weed control in cemeteries;
- An update on the approach to weed control across highways and the public estate;
- Describing the work in consultation with landowners and those responsible for maintenance of land to understand the current approach to weed control; and
- Conclusions and next steps.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committee's discussions were: -

- Reiterating the call previously expressed by the Committee for an immediate end to the use of Glyphosate as a means of weed control across all settings;
- The need to use the imminent contract re- negotiation as an opportunity to insist the Biffa also stop using Glyphosate;
- The use of Glyphosate was contrary to the ambitions of the Climate Emergency, commenting upon the need to support biodiversity;
- The need to educate residents and manage their expectations in relation to weed control and emphasise the environmental benefits of these;
- What was the approach and guidance as to the use of Glyphosate in allotments;
- Was Glyphosate injected or sprayed to tackle Japanese Knotweed;
- The probation service should deploy those offenders undertaking Community Payback sentences to manually remove weeds where required;
- Recognising the work delivered by the Cemeteries Teams, adding that the Committee should endorse a recommendation to increase the numbers of staff in the teams as part of the budget considerations;
- That a briefing note be prepared for information to the Committee that described the actions taken by other Local Authorities to eradicate the use of Glyphosate and the alternate measures introduced;
- Information was requested on the approach and alternatives to weed control adopted by Registered Housing Providers across the city; and
- Noting that residents could collectively opt out of having Glyphosate used on a specific residential street and more should be done to publicise this to residents.

The Strategic Lead, Waste Recycling and Street Cleaning, acknowledged the comments from the Members and responded by saying that the UK Health and Safety Executive had extended the use of Glyphosate until December 2025. She stated that Glyphosate is acknowledged as an efficient means of weed control, however the Council had reduced its use as described within the report. She acknowledged the point regarding the need to educate residents in regard to weeds by stating this could be included in individual ward plans. She described that Glyphosate was administered via injection rather than spraying when dealing with cases of Japanese Knotweed, and in regard to Allotments this was not within her remit however a response to the question would be requested following the meeting.

The Strategic Lead, Waste Recycling and Street Cleaning, advised that discussions were ongoing with Biffa and a range of stakeholders regarding the use of Glyphosate and the adoption of alternative methods of weed control. In response to points raised regarding a cost benefit analysis, the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) stated that this analysis would inform part of the budget setting considerations that the Committee would be invited to consider and comment upon.

In regard to cemeteries, the Bereavement Services Manager described that specific designated areas within Southern Cemetery areas had been left to grow, however in those areas where new plots were located a degree of sensitivity was required and accepting that there was a need to balance the environmental needs and those of bereaved families.

Decisions

The Committee recommend;

1. That a briefing note be prepared by Officers that describes the approach taken by other Local Authorities to stop using Glyphosate and the alternate methods of weed control adopted.

2. That a briefing note be prepared by Officers that describes the approach taken by local Registered Housing Providers to reduce their use of Glyphosate and the alternate methods considered to control weeds.

ECCSC/21/35 Overview Report

The report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which contained key decisions within the Committee's remit and responses to previous recommendations was submitted for comment. Members were also invited to agree the Committee's future work programme.

Decision

The Committee note the report and agree the work programme.