

# **Environment, Climate Change and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee**

## **Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 20 July 2023**

### **Present:**

Councillor Shilton Godwin – in the Chair  
Councillors Chohan, Collins, Holt, McCaul, Wiest and Wright

**Apologies:** Councillors Ilyas and Razaq

### **Also present:**

Councillor Rawlins, Executive Member for Environment and Transport  
Councillor Foley, Deputy Executive Member for Environment and Transport  
Councillor White, Executive Member for Housing and Development

### **ECCNSC/23/38      Minutes**

#### **Decision**

To approve the minutes of the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 22 June 2023 as a correct record.

### **ECCNSC/23/39      MCC Climate Change Action Plan - Quarterly Progress Report: Q1 April - June 2023**

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that provided an update and overview of progress made in delivering the Council's refreshed CCAP during Quarter 1 2023-24 (April – June 2023).

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background;
- Key messages from the Quarter 1 Progress Report, noting that since 2020 the Council had remained within its carbon budget each year and the Quarter 1 report showed continued progress was being made with the Council on track to meet its 2025 target;
- Information in relation to CO2 Emissions, reporting that the Council had used 88.5% of its 2022-23 carbon budget during the year (April 2022 – March 2023) and was therefore on track to remain within its carbon budget for this year; and
- Key achievements.

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

- Noting that the current Climate Change Action Plan ran until 2025, and asking had the worked commenced to plan for beyond April 2025;
- Clarification was sought as to the carbon budget;
- Further information was requested on the project delivered in partnership with Wenta and how this was promoted to small businesses;

- More information was sought on the Refill Scheme, commenting that water filling stations needed to be provided to support this scheme, especially in those areas of high footfall; and
- An update was sought on the actions in relation to Clean Air.

The Zero Carbon Manager stated that the carbon budget that had been set for the city was a science-based budget and had been calculated by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. She described that the Council's biggest source of carbon emissions were related to the estate and that a lot of work had been done to address this, adding this activity had been regularly reported to the Committee. She acknowledged that reducing carbon emissions going forward in future years would be a challenge and the team were constantly reviewing progress against this work. She further commented on the reliance on grant funding which was often piecemeal to deliver this important programme. She commented that all opportunities to access additional funding were explored and work was underway to understand and unblock the barriers to attracting private finance to deliver this work at the scale required.

The Zero Carbon Manager further made reference to the ongoing current national conversation in relation to alternatives to gas. In response to a comment regarding a risk register she advised that all associated projects had a corresponding risk register.

The Zero Carbon Manager advised the Committee that planning work had commenced for the Climate Change Action Plan beyond April 2025 and this would be reported to the Committee at the appropriate time prior to its submission to Executive for formal adoption.

The Zero Carbon Manager advised that she would liaise with the Work and Skills Team to provide information on the Wenta project and this would be circulated following the meeting. In regard to the Refill Scheme, she commented that an exercise was underway to obtain base line data to understand the current provision across the city and to explore all opportunities to increase these.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport described that all opportunities to improve air quality were being utilised, including school streets and the use of green screens. She described that work was ongoing at a Greater Manchester level in relation to clean air and monitoring data was being submitted to the government. The Chair stated that a report on this work would be scheduled for consideration by the Committee.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport stated that regular updates on the range of associated activities were provided to Members via the Zero Carbon Quarterly newsletter that was circulated to all Members. In conclusion she stated that the Council remained committed to the City Council becoming a zero carbon organisation by 2038.

## **Decision**

To note the report.

## **ECCNSC/23/40      Local Area Energy Plan - Progress Update**

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Growth & Development) that described that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) was the first city region in the country to compile and complete Local Area Energy Plans (LAEP) from street to network level. LAEPs had been produced at both the regional level and also for each of the 10 districts. The Greater Manchester and Manchester LAEP were adopted in September 2022. This report provided Members with an overview of the Manchester LAEP and how this would be used to meet our target to be a zero carbon city by 2038.

Key points and themes in the report and accompanying presentation included:

- Providing an introduction and background;
- Discussion of the opportunities and challenges;
- Priority areas and challenges;
- Discussion of the sphere of influence, noting the council's main role in taking the LAEP forward is that of facilitator and enabler rather than as a main delivery agent;
- Progress to date; and
- Next steps.

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

- Information was sought on the progress to decarbonise the electric national grid;
- The need to lobby government for regulation of the domestic heat network;
- Discussing the national debate regarding the viability of hydrogen as a viable alternative to gas;
- The need to provide information to residents and homeowners to make informed, positive decisions in relation to alternative domestic heating options; and
- Was the data referred to throughout the report open data and available to residents, commenting that these were very informative.

The Chair commented that the Committee would be receiving a substantive update report on the Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy at the next meeting and questions and comments on this subject would be reserved for that meeting. The Committee further noted that an update on the Local Plan would be submitted for consideration at the November meeting.

The Principal Policy Officer stated that lobbying of government continued in relation to regulation of the domestic heat network and that any available information in regard to the decarbonisation of the electricity grid would be provided following the meeting. In response to the discussion regarding hydrogen as a viable alternative fuel for domestic boilers she stated they were alive to the national debate on this issue, commenting that direction from government was required on this issue. The Interim Head of Infrastructure and Environment commented that in the absence of any direction from government a position would need to be adopted locally.

The Principal Policy Officer commented that the data that was referenced within the report was available for members of the public to access.

The Strategic Director Development discussed the role of the Council in relation lobbying and influence. She stated that the Council was proactive on a range of issues, drawing down funding wherever possible to help resource the Council's response to the LAEP, and made reference to the work in relation to housing retrofit and Electric Vehicle Charging. She stated that the LAEP would assist with highlighting priorities for the Council to focus a response.

The Chair requested that any future update report included consideration and data in relation to demand management and energy generation when discussing the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport stated that the Local Area Energy Plan provided an evidence-based tool on which to continue to lobby government. She stated that reflection and review of this area of activity was regularly undertaken and conversations with other cities were convened to share learning and experience.

## **Decision**

To note the report.

## **ECCNSC/23/41      Integrated Water Management**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Planning, Licensing and Building Control that provided a summary of the Council's approach to slowing water flow and water capture, with a particular focus on nature-based solutions and consideration of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background;
- Information on the outcomes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Report on Integrated Water Management that was presented to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) in May 2023;
- Describing the draft Integrated Water Management Plan; and
- Discussion of nature based solutions.

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

- There was little or no reference within the report to the canal network, recognising the complexities relating to the diverse ownership;
- What was the approach to Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS);
- What was the approach taken to new developments to ensure they were sustainable and how was this monitored and enforced;
- The need to communicate to residents the risks of flooding and mitigating actions that could be taken, in particular in regard to paving over green space; and
- The need for developers to consider water capture and storage.

The Director of Planning, Licensing and Building Control stated that she had welcomed the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Report on Integrated Water Management for raising the profile of this important issue. She stated that canals were included in the open space audit and were included in the green and blue infrastructure strategy and action plan. She acknowledged the challenge of waterways and the need to engage with all relevant partners, neighbouring authorities and those beyond Greater Manchester on the issue of waterway management and she made reference to the Greater Manchester Integrated Water Management Plan that was currently subject to consultation.

The Director of Planning, Licensing and Building Control stated that SuDS would be included in Local Plan and stated that it was anticipated that these would be mandatory from 2024. She commented that in anticipation of this, dialogue and work was currently underway locally with developers on this issue and colleagues in the Highways Department had produced guidance for developers.

The Director of Planning, Licensing and Building Control commented that flood zones were mapped across the city and this intelligence informed how all proposed developments were assessed. She commented that the Local Plan would strengthen the control in regard to sustainable development standards, however pending finalisation and adoption of the Local Plan proactive dialogue and conversations were undertaken with developers to push for sustainable buildings, including discussions on water capture and storage.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport acknowledged the importance of communications with residents on the issue of flooding and the promotion of actions that residents could take to mitigate risk. She stated that this would be included in the city-wide communication programmes.

## **Decision**

To note the report.

[Councillor Shilton Godwin declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as she chaired the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Report on Integrated Water Management.]

## **ECCNSC/23/42      Update on the Manchester Biodiversity Strategy and the Open Space Study**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Planning, Licensing and Building Control that provided an update on delivery of the Biodiversity Strategy that was endorsed by Executive in October 2022.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Providing an introduction and background;
- Describing the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy; and

- Information on the findings of the open space audit that would inform the development of the emerging Local Plan.

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

- The need to communicate to residents those areas of land designated to be areas for meadows and wildflowers, as the perception was often that the Council had failed to cut the grass;
- Enquiring where the 344 sites referred to in Recommendation 3 being rated as below quality and/or value thresholds were;
- Would the Local Plan increase biodiversity;
- The need to ensure green space was maintained, including those associated with the highways network;
- Noting that the focus of the study referred to was on sites with public access that were larger than 0.2 hectares and the need to acknowledge the importance of smaller green spaces, especially in the city centre;
- Recognising the importance of access to quality green space for residents;
- Noting the impact of the urban heat island effect.

The Director of Planning, Licensing and Building Control acknowledged the comment regarding the importance of communicating with residents the approach to meadows and wildflowers and stated that she would discuss this further with the relevant Executive Member. She said that an exercise was underway to provide a visual aid that mapped the 344 sites referred to in Recommendation 3. She stated that the Local Plan would make it mandatory for 10% increase in biodiversity associated with all new developments and this would be regulated through the establishment of long-term management plans to be formalised through legal agreements and conditions.

In response to a specific question regarding the location of the Tiny Forest and data relating to training referred to in the report that had been delivered by partners and the cohorts of people involved she advised that she would follow that up outside of the meeting.

The Director of Planning, Licensing and Building Control noted and agreed with the comment made regarding the importance of smaller green spaces. She advised that the ambition was to increase Sites of Biological Importance and there was a pipeline of work at pace to increase the number of nature reserves across the city.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport responded to a comment from a Member regarding the communication with Councillors regarding events by stating that this would have been done using the usual channels.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development reiterated the importance of accessibility to quality green space to local residents and stated that he welcomed the introduction of the Local Plan as means to increase biodiversity and mitigate issues such as the urban heat island effect.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport acknowledged the discussion regarding grass cutting, meadows and the use of verges to promote and encourage biodiversity and encouraged Members to pursue this with their respective

Neighbourhood Teams. She concluded by thanking all of the officers involved in this important area of work and acknowledged the importance of this work for the city. She stated that this work had been recognised nationally as a model of good practice.

### **Decision**

To note the report.

[Councillor Weist declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest as she had previously been an employee of Groundwork.]

### **ECCNSC/23/43      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 notes the report and agrees the work programme.