

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Strong & Resilient Communities Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday, 16 July 2019
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Meeting Room 11 - Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bowler, Carr, Felton, Fielding, Gollick, Daniel Griffin, Hayward, Higginbottom, W. Johnson, Leech, Lodge, Lofts, Mitchell, Phillips, Smith, Tattersall, Wilson, Wraith MBE and Wright.

1 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies were received in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

2 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillor Tattersall declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute 4 due to her position as Cabinet Support Member for Place (Environment and Transportation).

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th June, 2019 were noted by the Committee.

4 Energy Efficiency and Pollution Reduction

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:-

Councillor Tim Cheetham – Cabinet Spokesperson for Place (Regeneration and Culture)

David Shepherd – Service Director Regeneration and Culture

Richard Burnham – Head of Housing and Energy

David Malsom – Group Leader Housing and Energy

George Lee – Project Manager Housing and Energy

The Service Director Regeneration and Culture introduced the item and gave thanks for the ability to inform Members about the current Energy Strategy 2015-2025 and associated targets for reducing carbon emissions.

Members noted that this had positive benefits, such as a cleaner environment, more active lifestyles, and reduced heating costs. In addition, there were opportunities for business, and jobs in new technologies.

Barnsley Council's position to lead this change, becoming an exemplar in this area was noted, with the opportunity to encourage others. This responded to a national and international agenda to reduce carbon emissions and limit temperature rises.

The Energy Strategy set out plans for Barnsley Council to be zero carbon in its operations by 2040. Transitioning the borough to the new national requirement to be net zero carbon by 2050 will be much more challenging.

Examples of improvements already implemented and those planned were given, which included the installation of Solar PV as part of the Glassworks development, and plans for a combined heat and power installation at the Metrodome. It was noted that work to recommission biomass across the school estate is also underway.

Members noted the Energise Barnsley scheme, which had installed Solar PV in over 350 properties, and had the benefit of reducing emissions but also benefitting residents financially.

Air quality was also a consideration, and Members heard of the planned gyratory, which had been through robust processes and had been shown to be beneficial in this Air Quality Management Area (AQMA).

The need to consider emissions from vehicles was noted, with the Council working with partners to improve active travel, however it was noted that some private car travel will remain. Electric vehicle (EV) charging was being considered as part of the investment in car parks and EVs were being considered as part of fleet renewal.

In the ensuing discussion, and in response to detailed questioning and challenge, the following matters were highlighted:-

Berneslai Homes tenants report issues with ground source heat pumps and air source heat pumps, including with usability and costs associated. It was noted that these do operate in a different way to conventional heating, and can be ineffective if not used correctly. Installation also needs to be carefully considered, as buildings need to be carefully insulated.

With regards to engineers having the appropriate skills to repair heat pumps, this was thought to be the case, but Members heard that assurances would be sought. In addition Members noted that the repairs contract was in the process of being re-let and appropriate skills to repair all types of heating systems would be a prerequisite. In the discussion around using heat pumps, Members heard of plans to explore the use of old mine workings, and the ability to take advantage of the heat contained within the water.

Questions were raised in relation to air quality, and whilst plans were to improve this there was the potential to build more housing in areas known to be of poor air quality. It was acknowledged that these issues would be taken into account as part of the planning process, and relevant consultees would be engaged in the matter.

Members discussed the potential improvements in air quality through the development of the recently proposed gyratory scheme, with some differences of view on the matter.

It was recognised the air quality may be improved through national drives to move to electric vehicles, though other issues associated such as increased particulates were also noted. Members noted that air quality was only monitored in fixed Air Quality

Management Areas, and though this could be extended, resources were constrained and therefore did not currently allow this.

Members discussed the use of biomass, noting that there were wider considerations such as the transportation of fuel and dealing with emissions. However it was suggested that this had a role to play in the short term, being a better alternative than fossil fuels, but not being preferable to renewable sources of power.

Those present discussed the previous encouragement to change from petrol to diesel cars, which has subsequently been withdrawn. The push towards EVs was noted and Members questioned whether this advice would be maintained in the longer term. Questions were raised as to whether driverless cars would be the preferred option in the future.

The impact of transport on carbon emissions was noted and in response Members heard that people will have a number of choices regarding their movement, and this may include EVs, the use of hydrogen and also active travel and public transport. Noted was the work with Transport for the North (TFN), Sheffield City Region (SCR) and Barnsley Bus Partnership (BBP) to improve public transport. Members noted the work of the Council in promoting salary sacrifice and cycle to work programmes to help assist the use of public transport or active travel. In addition to providing incentives, Members also suggested disincentives such as an increased use of residents parking, or lowering speeds in certain areas.

Members noted that many taxi drivers had switched to hybrid and electric vehicles, and those present discussed the plan to improve the current infrastructure for charging electric vehicles in the town centre and principal towns with 45 dual charging points at 16 locations.

Emissions from residential properties were discussed, together with the costs associated of improving properties and the support from central government. It was noted that houses will be required to have a reasonable level of energy efficiency by 2035, and estimates were that this would equate to around 50,000 properties in the borough. Difficulties in improving much of the current housing stock were noted, with some requiring overcladding which can be in the region of £13-15,000. The need for further support nationally on this issue was acknowledged. Members heard of the planned refresh of the Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey, which would provide a wealth of information on housing in Barnsley, and enable the Council to be best placed should any finance be forthcoming.

A debate was had regarding the energy tariff endorsed by the Council. it was noted that this may not be the cheapest for some residents. It is a product that aims to assist those who currently use pre-payment meters and are less likely to switch giving them access to fair rate, but which would not be subject to unreasonable rate rises, it aims to offer a longer term pricing position together good with customer service and green energy.

Members discussed the impact of farming on the emission of greenhouse gases, with feed stocks impacting on levels of forestation, and eating habits ultimately impacting on demand.

Attention was drawn to the patterns of excess winter deaths and Members noted that meetings were being organised with relevant partners at a high level to understand the issue in more detail.

Members heard how the Council focuses a great deal of effort in its attempts to reduce fuel poverty both in relation to the energy efficiency of their homes and what they pay for their energy. However, at times there is a duplication of resources and an affordable warmth strategy would allow us of the stakeholder to better understand their role and deliver a better programme to its residents.

In conclusion it was acknowledged that it was imperative that work on the agenda continues despite economic constraints, difficult decisions will be required but this was the right thing to do.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution; and
- (ii) That consideration be given to the costs and benefits to more widespread monitoring of air quality.

Chair