

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

7th June 2022

Present: Councillor Andy Stafford in the Chair

Councillors Altaf, Bisset, Cleary, Cookson, Cronin, Lewing (Vice-Chair), Mitchell (in place of Councillor Hassan), Norfolk, Roberts and Udall

Officers: Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities
David Sutton, Deputy Director – Corporate Policy and Strategy
Sandra Green, Head of City Services
Tim Allen, Environmental Operations Project Manager
Claire Neville, Environmental Sustainability Officer

Apologies: Councillor Hassan

1 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor Mitchell for Councillor Hassan.

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Public Participation

None.

4 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th March 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5 Progress Update for the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Action Plan

The Committee received an update report on the Environmental Sustainability Action Plan. The action plan overview was attached as appendix 1 to the report, which provided further details.

The Environmental Sustainability Strategy for the City of Worcester was approved by the Committee in October 2020. The Committee then approved the Action Plan for the first phase of delivery of the strategy in March 2021. It was agreed that the Committee would receive progress reports on the delivery of the action plan twice yearly. This is the second of these reports.

The Deputy Director – Corporate Policy and Strategy, in presenting the report, informed Committee Members that this was an ambitious strategy and there was a lot to do over the longer term. He highlighted the progress made so far.

The Committee’s attention was drawn to paragraph 9.1 of report for clarification stating that 2,573 is a percentage figure and not the number of vehicles.

Following a motion to Council on 30th November 2021 the Action Plan was to now include an objective to encourage and support the introduction of car clubs in Worcester. This will be incorporated into the action plan update due to be considered by the Committee in the Autumn. Meetings have taken place with Enterprise Cars who are keen to set up a car club in the Arboretum. Once established officers will work with Enterprise Cars to identify other locations in the City.

A joint publicity campaign was developed to highlight Government proposals and to encourage more Worcester businesses to become Plastic Free Champions. Committee Members were informed that to date 39 businesses have signed up.

Committee Members were also informed that the Council plan to host an Environment Summit at the Guildhall on Friday 30th September. Representatives from local businesses, community groups, organisations and educational setting will be invited. The event will focus on the five priorities in the Environmental Sustainability Action Plan.

The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities, the Deputy Director – Corporate Policy and Strategy and the Environmental Sustainability Officer responded to questions and comments from Committee Members, in particular the following:

- The plan to roll out EVCP’s across the city, not just the Council but other stakeholders/partners/businesses need to be involved – this needs to be built into the strategy;
- Carbon emissions savings as a percentage – a more statistical report to a future Committee;
- Numbers of staff who have taken up the cycle to work scheme – written answer to be circulated;
- Installation of gable gullies to enable vehicle charging at home – awaiting street charging information from the County Council;
- Success of the ebike trial scheme for businesses data of usage and take up – a response was provided;
- Any data on the potential to have electric turbines at Diglis Weir, which had been muted some while ago – nothing in the pipeline at the moment
- Paragraph 16.6 of report - Plastic Free Champions how many businesses have signed up for this – agreed that the list of 39 who have signed up will be circulated;
- Paragraph 7.5 Act on Energy scheme 200 expressions of interest but only 28 applications successful, why was this? – agreed a definitive answer to be circulated;
- No reference to measuring of particulates in the report, monitors at the moment do not measure particulates– a report to Licensing and Environmental Health Committee on Air Quality will cover this;

- Investment of £200k on EV charge points what impact does that have on the total number to be provided – technology changes rapidly, cost per charger can vary by a factor of 10 depending on the rate of charge, analysis needs to be carried out;
- Type of chargers for EV's at different locations;
- Influencing developers/builders in the city to encourage the installation of bird/bat nesting boxes – information and guidance has been provided, can look at more biodiverse measures. Officers to follow up;
- Water quality testing and equipment – the Environment Agency are the lead authority on this, officers have not looked into investing time and money on this but can raise with the Environment Agency.
- The Chair stated that this subject matter links up to other services /committees of the Council and it would be useful to have any links highlighted in future update reports to this Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the content of the report.

6 Public Bin Investment Programme

The Committee received an update report on the Public Bin Investment Programme.

The Environmental Operations Project Manager presented the report and provided Committee Members with an overview of Phase One which was now complete.

Phase 2 of the project planning commenced in February 2022 to produce the work programme for the installation across the City which was highlighted in paragraph 3.2 of the report.

The Council's Minor Works Team were undertaking the project and commenced the bin foundation work for Phase Two in May. Procurement of bin cabinets has commenced with a planned delivery date set for July 2022.

Committee Members were informed that they would be notified as and when the work will commence in their wards. Further public communications will be carried out before Phase Two bin cabinets are installed, which will include schools and other educational establishments.

Committee Members asked what research has been carried on how to manage odour from bins, is there any anecdotal evidence from other Councils about how they approach this problem especially as summer is approaching. The Environmental Operations Project Manager in response said he would do some research. Initially emptying and cleaning bins is important together with keeping the volume of waste down and by emptying regularly. The positioning of bins i.e. not too close to properties is also important.

Committee Members commented good feedback had been received on the bins in some wards, however some had already been subject to graffiti and could operatives report this. The Environmental Operations Project Manager stated that this had been noticed and was on the increase, Operatives are encouraged to feedback on this anti-social behaviour.

One of the new Members of the Committee asked if the ward plans and public bin information could be circulated to all new Councillors. The Environmental Operations Project manager agreed to circulate for information.

Congratulations were given to officers on the successful rollout of Phase One, positive comments had also been received by some Members on the location of the bins and thanks were given to all concerned.

In addition to the report the Environmental Operations Project Manager, for the benefit of new Members, informed them that use of the new style bins gives a significant increase in capacity for public use, which averts the need for multiple bins at single locations, a reduction in manual handling of sacks by the collection teams and the reduction in the usage of single use plastic sacks. The project will ensure that bins are in the right locations and will cover more locations when required. There will be better messaging on bins and there will be the phasing out of the old stock and the expansion of public recycling.

RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the content of the report, and in particular the completion of Phase One and commencement of Phase Two.

7 Management and Protection of Public Open Spaces

The Committee received a report on the management and protection of public open space.

The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities informed Members that the report intended to provide them with details of the remedies available to the Council to deal with instances where land used or intended for use a public open space is taken out of use without necessary permissions being sought.

Paragraph 3.3 of the report stated that open space is defined in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground. There is no universal definition of open/green space, in respect of size, quality or description.

The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities emphasised that the benefits of green spaces whether in public ownership, or private ownership but accessible without payment, have never been more important, which became evident during Covid-19 lockdowns.

Land cannot be disposed of unless the process under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1872 (as amended) is used. The disposal must be advertised and objections considered before any disposal can take place. Land may also be protected by legal covenants governing use of the land as public open space, as in the case with land that forms part of housing led planning applications.

It was pointed out that the Council has no formal policy on the disposal of land held as public open space and such a policy is not a legal requirement. Two cases where the Council has deemed it in the public interest to dispose of public open space was highlighted in paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9 of the report.

Paragraph 3.12 of the report highlighted cases where a third party has encroached on public open space within the Council's ownership without consent, then the Council will take appropriate action to remedy any unauthorised access, trespass or adverse possession.

The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities responded to questions from Members on points of clarification within the report. He reassured Committee Members that the Council does have planning powers and is committed to dealing with issues when brought to the Council's attention.

Committee Members welcomed the clarity that the report gave and did not at this stage feel it relevant to make any recommendations to another Policy Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the content of the report.

8 Annual /Quarter 4 Performance Report 2021/22

The Committee received a report on the Council's Annual and Quarter 4 performance for the Environment Committee for 2021/22.

The Scorecard has been refreshed for 2021/21 with projects completed in the last financial year replaced with new projects as previously agreed by the committee.

The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities in presenting the reporting was pleased to inform Committee Members that there were a lot of projects which had been completed and assessed green, and that generally projects and KPI's are on target.

The Deputy Director – Corporate Policy and Strategy referred to the end of the year report which shows an end date of 31st March 2022 and if that date has passed and the project has not been completed the performance management system automatically shows them as red, although progress is being made and the project is probably near completion. There will be a note made to suggest that the due date is to be amended.

There were no questions from Committee Members.

RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the Council's annual and quarter 4 performance for 2021/22.

9 Any Other Business

Ward Councillors/Neighbourhood Street Scene Team Site Visits

In January 2022 the Environment Committee had committed to visiting Laugherne Brook Nature Reserve, but due to Covid this had not taken place.

It was now proposed by Councillor Norfolk that a request be made to officers to arrange a series of on location meet the team/meet the Councillors get together, with each of the neighbourhood teams at pertinent locations. The invitation to be extended to all Environment Committee Members and for them to discuss with their respective groups to suggest 2/3 suitable locations.

These visits will result in a closer relationship and understanding between the Neighbourhood Street Scene Teams and their respective Ward Councillors and enable a broader understanding of activities across the city.

The Chair provided background for those new Members to the Committee and explained the work of the Neighbourhood Street Scene Teams.

The Chair and Vice Chair agreed to work with the Head of City Services to support this proposal.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. to 8.20p.m.

Chair at the meeting on
19th July 2022