

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC)

held on Thursday, 7 December 2023 at 6.00 pm
This was a virtual, online meeting.

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Hayleigh Gascoigne (Chair), Eric de la Harpe (Vice-Chair), Robert Clegg, Scott Houghton, Sarah James and Sally Povolotsky

Officers: Emily Barry (Democratic Services Officer), Chloe Bunting (Senior Climate Action Officer), Jessie Fieth (Senior Climate Action Officer), Dominic Lamb (Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader) and Ben Whaymand (Leisure Facilities Team Leader).

Guests: Councillor Bethia Thomas (Cabinet Member for Climate Action and the Environment)

51 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor James Cox.

52 Declaration of interests

None.

53 Urgent business and chair's announcements

There was no urgent business. The chair noted this was the first meeting of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee since the election in May. She set out the amended format to CEAC where there would only be two formal meetings of the committee each year but that this would allow the flexibility to have task and finish groups where topics could be looked into in much greater depth to then make comments to cabinet. The chair also highlighted she had recently attended a brilliant event at Abingdon and Witney College showcasing their programme focused on retrofitting and upskilling those within the trade to retrofit homes. She was pleased to see this as much of the reason for lack of uptake of retrofit was a lack of skills in the market.

54 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record, and the chair shall sign them as such.

55 Public participation

John Salmons addressed the committee.

He asked, "How can the public have any confidence in a Climate Emergency Advisory Committee if it cannot even advise against tarmacking over land designated for a wild flower meadow?"

The chair thanked Mr Salmons for his question and committed to providing a written response to his question.

56 Update from Cabinet Member for Climate Action and the Environment

The Cabinet Member for Climate Action and the Environment updated the committee. She began by noting that this was the first time there had been a dedicated cabinet member for climate action and the environment as previously this had always been combined with other areas. The Cabinet Member highlighted this would support the committee in getting the serious focus they deserved.

The Cabinet Member reflected that the climate action team had been working hard on a number of projects since the committee last met including the electric vehicle community micro hub projects in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council. The project was aiming to deliver EV charging points in market towns and larger villages. The grant process for this was set to open in early 2024.

Decarbonisation assessments and reports had been completed for The Beacon and Abbey Meadows Pool and included recommendations for works to reduce carbon emissions. Officers would then look at options for implementation and obtaining external funding for this.

The Cabinet Member also informed the committee that the climate action team had been working with colleagues in the strategic property team to identify land owned by the council which might be used for the development of a solar farm. Work was at an early stage with further work under way to understand constraints with the sites and the costs associated.

The Cabinet Member noted that the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy was well under way and officers were involved in many of the associated working groups. She highlighted there would be workshops to allow members to have an input into defining the priorities for nature that would be included in the strategy.

The Cabinet Member informed the committee that the Annual Greenhouse Gas Emissions report for 2022/23 had been published on the council's website. She went on to highlight that this was just a snapshot of the work the climate team had completed in recent months.

In questions to the Cabinet Member the committee commented that they had understood land was leased for the provision of solar farms and wondered if it would be more beneficial to site solar farms on Council owned land. The committee were advised that this would be the most beneficial arrangement and that options were being considered in sequential order with the most beneficial being considered first. The committee went on to comment that solar energy was one form of energy production and enquired if other options such as onshore wind farms or green waste had been looked at. Whilst these specific types of

power generation had not been looked at officers went on to confirm that nothing was being ruled out. Officers went on to comment that previously government legislation had prevented wind farms but all options were being investigated as and when appropriate. The committee went on to query whether any consideration had been given to the logistics of utilising hydro power. The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader advised that Thames structures were all owned by the Environment Agency and they had therefore been taking charge of any projects that they would allow investigation on for the installation of hydro energy production.

57 Progress report on Leisure Centre Decarbonisation

The report was introduced by the Leisure Facilities Team Leader. He began by outlining that when the climate emergency was declared in 2019 the leisure centres were contributing to 51 per cent of the council's carbon emissions across the estate. He went on to set out that when leisure centres closed as a result of lockdown joint facilities remained open for the purposes of providing education and whilst the temperatures on pools were turned off they were not emptied due to safety reasons and therefore energy was still required to maintain stabilisation. The Leisure Facilities Team Leader went on to inform the committee that it had not been possible to carry out a comparison to measure the reduction in emissions until comparable data for 2022/23 was available. This comparison showed that there had been a significant reduction in emissions. He went on to confirm that whilst there had been a deed of variation to amend the opening hours of some leisure centres this had only had a small impact on the reduction in emissions as the heating and ventilation requirements had remained the same.

The Leisure Facilities Team Leader went on to highlight the project milestones to the committee. Officers had completed a number of smaller projects across the leisure centres carrying out LED upgrades to the lighting in and around the leisure centres. In addition to this experts had been brought in to carry out flow testing on the swimming pool treatment systems. The reports had allowed for adjustments to be made to the circulation pumps for instance previously they had been operating at 50 per cent overnight but the report showed this could be reduced to 33 per cent. In addition to this destratification fans had recently been installed at White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre which push warm air back down preventing it from being lost. The Leisure Facilities Team Leader advised this had made a saving of 108,000 kwh and was being looked at for Faringdon Leisure Centre as heat was being lost there.

The Leisure Facilities Team Leader informed the committee of future projects the team would be working on. He advised they had been working with consultants to progress projects related to the Salix grant which had been successfully secured. Applications had also been made for the government's Swimming Pool Support Fund which had been successful.

The Leisure Facilities Team Leader concluded by informing the committee that completed decarbonisation works would ensure a 72 percent carbon reduction by 31 March 2025. He also informed the committee there would be a focus in new contracts on what measures they will be required to deliver and work towards for reductions in carbon emissions.

The committee noted they had been unaware of how much work was going on. The committee asked if as a result of the Joint Use Agreements Oxfordshire County Council would be claiming some of the emission reductions therefore reducing the headline reductions in the officer report. The Leisure Facilities Team Leader confirmed that yes they

would be claiming some of the reductions and therefore the overall reductions achieved were higher.

The committee noted there were no figures in the report for oil use at Abbey Meadows pool for summer 2023 but information had been provided on savings which had been made from the pool cover. The Leisure Facilities Team Leader advised that they were waiting for a report from GLL (Better) on the oil consumption which would be shared once received. He informed the committee that the pool cover meant there was no temperature change overnight.

The committee asked the officer if alternatives to chlorine had been used. The Leisure Facilities Team Leader advised that sodium hypochlorite was already being used and White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre already used UV reducing the need for chemicals. Officers were also looking at other options to ensure the reduction in chemical use such as ensuring pool users shower before entering the pool.

The committee further noted that water usage was not shown in the report. The Leisure Facilities Team Leader advised that the reports were produced quarterly and this was something that could be provided moving forward.

The committee asked for specific information on what the Salix grant would achieve. The Leisure Facilities Team Leader advised that at Wantage Leisure Centre installation of brick slip cladding, solar panels on the roof and ground source heat pumps were being looked at. He then advised that at the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre installation of ground source heat pumps and solar panels on the roof were being investigated.

58 Report on Progress with Retrofit Activities

The report was introduced by the Senior Climate Action Officer. She advised on a number of activities that the team had been engaging in to promote retrofitting in the district which included the promotion of grants schemes available, training for champions which would be delivered in January 2024 to assist residents and the development of calculators for town and parish councils to assist them in calculating their emissions. There had been high demand for the thermal imaging cameras which people were able to use free of charge. The committee asked if it would be worth investing in another camera and the Senior Climate Action Officer advised that whilst demand was high they had not yet reached full booking. She did reflect that once full booking was reached then it would be worth considering this. The committee also asked if officers were aware of how the camera was being used by town and parish councils. Officers advised that this had been dependent on who had borrowed the camera but largely it had been used to start conversations with residents about retrofitting. Officers advised that information was provided on the support available when the camera was loaned out. Finally, the Senior Climate Officer advised that the team were working in producing case studies of retrofitted homes in the district to raise awareness of how this can be done. The committee reflected that informing people of the cost savings to be had through retrofitting may be a more powerful tool in light of the cost of living crisis.

The committee went on to reflect that retrofitting was a huge part of achieving net zero but was something that there was very limited control over. It asked if there was anything that could be done to require private landlords to do more retrofitting. Officers advised that EPC rating E was the standard they were required to achieve and that any change to this would have to be a central government decision.

The committee asked if holding a retrofitting technology showcase had been considered. Officers advised that they had attended these kind of events and there were groups who do this but that capacity was limited. It was suggested this could be considered at the task finish group in January.

59 Proposed Revisions to the Climate Action Fund

The report was introduced by the Senior Climate Action Officer who advised that the fund was designed to bring people together to deliver shared action and had a wide focus which had welcomed many projects across a broad spectrum. She informed the committee that the team had showcased projects to provide learning for others and that via the delivery of three rounds of the fund a total of £149,000 had been awarded to 42 projects. The projects ranged from small scale projects such as fitting LED lights to larger scale projects such as the installation of solar panels.

The Senior Climate Action Officer then went on to outline some of the proposed changes to the fund noting the largest of which was to increase the maximum amount organisations can apply for. Other changes were proposed to refine the scheme. The project examples had been updated to reflect the emerging priorities of the council and eligible project costs had been clarified. The Senior Climate Action Officer also highlighted that the sign off processes had been streamlined in relation to the sign off of changes to what had originally been applied for meaning that minor changes could be signed off by officers.

The committee reflected it was pleased to see the uplift and refinement of the fund. It was felt that case studies sharing the projects delivered was key to raising awareness of the fund. Officers asked that members encourage organisations they know have benefitted from the fund to contact officers and share their stories.

The committee asked if a higher uptake might be delivered by awarding smaller amounts over more application windows across the year. Officers advised this was something that had been considered but was constrained by resources and delivery of other grants projects across the council.

The committee also asked if there was any data on organisations who were unsuccessful initially but then reapplied later. The Senior Climate Action Officer advised that the first round of funding had been oversubscribed and feedback had been given to all organisations who had not been successful. Whilst the same project had not been reapplied for organisations who had previously applied had applied again for a different project.

The committee were supportive of the changes proposed changes as set out in the report.

60 Task and Finish Groups update

The chair introduced this item and advised that it would be taken with the Environment Act update and climate score cards update.

The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader informed the committee that the waste strategy had been the last task and finish group to be undertaken and advised that feedback from members on the session was requested. Members endorsed the new approach and appreciated that they were able to look at issues in greater depth. Members felt that the length of the sessions was correct but did appreciate that they could be given written feedback after the session as well.

It was noted that the next task and finish group would be held on the 15 January 2024 and the replacement climate action plan and corporate plan were the areas to be considered. Members were asked to consider what actions they wanted to see delivered through the plans.

61 Environment Act update

The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader advised this had been a standing item in the agenda for some time. He advised that the draft Regulations and guidance documents on Biodiversity Net Gain had been published which indicated that implementation would be anticipated. From January 2024 Biodiversity Net Gain would become mandatory for major planning applications with all other planning applications becoming mandatory from April 2024.

The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader advised the committee that a local nature recovery strategy was required for the area and this would be delivered at county level but that district councils were a supporting authority with a statutory duty. Work on this was well under way. Engagement would be a key part of the process and it was suggested that a task and finish group may fit with this.

62 Climate Score cards update

The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader advised the committee that the climate score cards were designed to hold Local Authorities to account for their actions towards climate change. Local Authorities were not given the choice as to whether they wanted to participate in this scheme. All the information required was taken from publicly available sources and was pulled together by volunteers. In the previous round in January 2022 the council did not score. The process was re-run in January 2023 and the council scored 42 percent with the average for a district council being 29 percent. The officer did highlight that there were anomalies in the process for instance, the council scored very differently to South Oxfordshire District Council despite the huge similarities.

The committee asked how often the scorecards were reviewed and officers confirmed this had not been stated. Officers advised they had provided feedback to Climate Emergency UK on how to make the process more useful. The scorecards had been changed to differentiate between different layers of governance. Members thanked officers for taking the time to feedback to Climate Emergency UK on this and were hopeful it would become a more useful tool in future.

63 Draft Climate Action Plan Q2 Performance report

During this agenda item, the meeting length had reached nearly two and a half hours. In accordance with the council's Constitution, the committee voted to extend the meeting length for no more than 30 minutes.

The chair introduced the draft report and asked if there were any questions for officers. One member asked if the climate training could be revisited as not many members had taken the training up and this may have been due to the volume of training taking place immediately after the election.

Members also noted that OP11 was useful information and enquired as to whether there were any timescales given and if it would involve collaborative working. Officers advised that a team were being brought in at Oxfordshire County Council to assist with the process and it had been indicated this would likely be a joint effort. The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader informed the committee that a paper was being drafted on how to take this forward at a district level.

A member enquired as to the performance update under SD7 as raised by Mr Salmons and what progress had been made on identifying a new site. The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader advised he was unsure of the current situation and that this would need to be raised with the relevant Cabinet member.

64 Future agenda items

The committee were asked for any suggested future agenda items. The following were identified

- Local energy plans
- Local nature recovery strategy
- Progress towards net zero
- Green finance

Discussion on potential maintenance depot location was raised but chair was unsure of how CEAC could input into this topic. Therefore the officer advised that firstly a discussion with the relevant Cabinet member was necessary to establish what was currently happening and if there was any need for CEAC input.

The meeting closed at 8.31 pm