

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Environment Advisory Group

**HELD ON FRIDAY 28 JANUARY 2022 AT 10.30 AM
VIRTUAL VIA MS TEAMS**

Present:

Councillors: David Rouane (Chair), David Harvey, Tom Hayes, Andrea Powell, Pete Sudbury and Catherine Webber

Officers: Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Suzanne Malcolm, (Deputy Chief Executive - Place, South and Vale Councils), Mish Tullar, (Head of Corporate Strategy, Oxford City Council), Michelle Wells, (Insight and Policy Manager, South and Vale Councils) and Susannah Wintersgill, (Director: Communications, Strategy and Insight, Oxfordshire County Council)

27 Apologies for absence and notification of substitutions; declarations of interest and Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor Dan Sames, Cherwell District Council.

There were no declarations of interest or Chair's announcements.

28 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record.

29 Oxfordshire wide Climate action marketing and communications strategy and EAG communications

The advisory group considered a draft suggested Oxfordshire wide Climate Action and Communications Strategy.

Susannah Wintersgill, Director: Communications, Strategy and Insight at Oxfordshire County Council and Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy, Oxford City Council presented the draft and highlighted that the strategy was intended to offer a joint approach by the councils to communications around climate action when that represented the best way forward, whilst remaining flexible to allow for individual responses and actions from

the councils. An overall objective was to present a tailored approach to encouraging behavioural change from a positive and non-dictatorial position, particularly in respect of engaging with traditionally hard to reach groups.

The Chair commented that his understanding was the proposed strategy would sit alongside and complement separate communications relating to the activities of the Environment Advisory Group, (as a group reporting directly to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership). Suzanne Malcolm, Deputy Chief Executive, Place, South and Vale Councils added that the communications strategy formed part of a wider Oxfordshire piece of work that was aligned to the conclusions and next steps set out in the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire, (PaZCO) report. The advisory group might wish to undertake its own communications activity, but that the Oxfordshire strategy should be taken into account.

In discussion, members of the advisory group welcomed a climate action marketing and communications strategy as it was felt that the area of influencing behavioural change in support of climate change was an area where local authorities could collectively achieve a real impact. It was important to do this in a way which was not perceived as hectoring, but which recognised and reflected the need for serious action and which prompted positive, practical, individual steps. It was felt that there had been a shift in public opinion towards making changes, but that care had taken to ensure that messages were easy to understand as well as positive.

Advisory group members also felt that is important to seek to quantify and monitor the impact of any communications by developing a set of appropriate performance indicators, recognising that there would be challenges in demonstrating causal relationships between the activity and change. It was difficult to achieve sufficient scale in communications that would lead to change and the councils working together in this area when appropriate to do so could provide a way to achieve this and also potentially assist with lobbying. It was agreed that draft indicators would be considered by the council's communications lead officers and brought to the next meeting.

30 Delivering a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map and Action Plan Proposal - Update

Michelle Wells, Insight and Policy Manager, South and Vale Councils provided an update on the progress of the Delivering a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map and Action Plan following the support given to it at the informal meeting of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on 25 January 2022.

The advisory group was informed that the tender brief for the work required to develop the multi-stakeholder route map had been amended to reflect positive feedback from partners which included a clearer focus on the delivery of changes before 2030. It was expected that a formal tender document would be issued in February, subject to confirmation of budgetary provision being made available by each council, with a decision on the award of the contract in March and work to commence in April/May 2022.

The advisory group thanked officers for the work undertaken in developing and progressing the report and noted the update.

31 Discussion of COP 26 Implications for Local Government

The advisory group considered a briefing paper produced by the Local Government Information Unit on the outcomes of the COP26 conference which focussed upon the implications for local government and the actions the sector could take.

Councillor Harvey referred to work undertaken by the UK100 organisation of local authority leaders which had set out research into local authority powers relating to climate change in its 'Power Shift' document. It was agreed to circulate the link to the report at <https://www.uk100.org/publications/power-shift>.

Councillor Webber referred to a list of weekly tips for what individuals could do become more sustainable produced by Friend of the Earth and it was agreed that this would also be circulated to members of the group.

In discussion, members of the advisory group referred to the importance of HM Government granting sufficient powers to local authorities so that they could make real changes in their localities, but that it was also important for central government to show leadership and set a direction.

32 Balancing maintenance of cycle ways and foot paths with biodiversity

Kevin Jacob, Democratic Services Officer, Future Oxfordshire Partnership advised the advisory group that following a recommendation to it from the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership had asked the advisory group to consider adding an item to its work programme to explore how the tension between cycleway development and maintenance and associated loss of flora and fauna could be managed.

In discussion, all members of the advisory group acknowledged the overarching priority of ensuring that cycleways remained safe and attractive for use as alternatives to the car. It was also felt that there was a link between the safety and maintenance of cycleways and issues such as verge cutting.

A key issue and challenge was around the control of weeds. Whilst it was felt that the use of chemical weedkillers in keeping cycleways clear should be minimised as much as possible on environmental grounds, it was felt that use of weedkillers was currently the most effective method of weed control available at scale. Whilst it was noted that there were some alternative weed control methods available, these methods were often more expensive than weed killers and that in carbon emission terms, the relative pros and cons of the options were more complex than perhaps appeared at face value.

The Chair and members of the advisory group commented that they felt there had been sufficient discussion of the issue and that there would not be additional value to be gained by adding an item to the group's work programme at the present time.

33 Ideas and Innovation

The advisory group considered a list of high level suggestions made by members as to potential subjects for further work and deep dives by the group, as well as an opportunity for the sharing of new ideas and best practice. It was noted the item would be a standing agenda item in the future.

After discussion of the suggestions, it was agreed to ask officers:

- to investigate the issues around the promotion of solar use, including a) existing policies, use of council assets and potential opportunities for shared procurement of solar infrastructure and b) council encouragement of solar schemes for householders.
- to investigate the possibility of asking for of an update on lobbying activity by groups and organisations linked to concerns about water quality in the county. Suggested inviting Cllr Jo Robb to future meeting to discuss work of Thames River Valleys Network.
- to look at role of tree planting specifically in mitigating carbon emissions and what opportunities there might be for a countywide approach, considering work in this area by organisations such as the National Farmers Union and Woodland Trust.
- To look at the wider issues around climate impact of farming practices.

Consideration of a suggestion relating to carbon emission 'Insetting' was deferred to the following meeting.

34 Work Programme

It was agreed that the next agenda should include:

- an update on potential performance indicators for Oxfordshire wide Climate action marketing and communications strategy.
- An update on the implementation of the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map work.
- A presentation on work by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to promote ground source heat pumps as a form of heating including skills training.
- Items suggested by the officer group supporting the advisory group in consultation with the Chair.

35 Future meetings

The advisory group considered dates for future meetings up to April 2023, noting that the proposed date in July 2022 would be moved to a date in June 2022.

The meeting closed at 12.30 pm