

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Climate Emergency Advisory Committee



held on Monday, 11 July 2022 at 6.00 pm
as a virtual meeting

The meeting was live streamed, and the recording can be watched here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Dem1nP5ySU>

Open to the public, including the press

In attendance:

Councillors: Hayleigh Gascoigne (Chair), Eric Batts, Eric De La Harpe, David Grant, Alison Jenner and Bob Johnston.

Officers: Chloe Bunting (Senior Climate Action Officer), Candida Mckelvey (Democratic Services Officer), Michelle Wells (Insight and Policy Manager), Dominic Lamb (Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader), Harry Barrington-Mountford (Head of Policy and Programmes) and Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive – Place)

Guests: Cabinet member for Climate Emergency and Environment, Councillor Sally Povolotsky

97. Chair's announcements

Chair introduced herself as the new chair and thanked previous chair, Councillor David Grant. She congratulated Councillor De La Harpe on taking on the vice chair role, replacing Councillor Duveen.

Chair also welcomed the new Cabinet member for Climate Emergency and Environment – Councillor Sally Povolotsky (previously Councillor Webber).

98. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

99. Declaration of interests

There were no declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.

100. Urgent business

There was no urgent business.

101. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 April 2022 were reviewed and no comments raised.

Resolved:

Committee agreed the minutes to be a correct record.

102. Public participation

There was no public participation.

103. Update from task and finish groups

There were currently no updates from task and finish groups.

104. Update from the Cabinet Member for Environment

Cabinet member briefed the committee as follows:

At the end of June, we made some exciting awards to thirteen successful applicants of the Climate Action Fund. The Fund, which opened for the first time this year, was very popular and attracted a wide range of interesting and action focused projects.

The funding was aimed at projects which actively tackled climate change and/or enhanced biodiversity across the Vale, alongside increasing local communities' awareness and knowledge of the climate emergency. We particularly welcomed applications from those at the beginning of their climate journey, as well as established local groups. The Fund was oversubscribed this year, with a total request of £77,000 from applicants, with a £50,000 fund available.

Out of the thirteen successful applicants, three projects were focused on energy, five on lifestyle changes including food and five on biodiversity and wildlife. The organisations that received funding will now also be invited to join a network to share experiences, highlight the success of schemes that received funding and potentially collaborate on future projects. Cabinet member was very pleased to have visited the Abingdon Carbon Cutters / Abbey Buildings event on Saturday called 'Plot to Plate' around food, food waste reduction, and composting. It was inspiring and look forward to seeing what our other award winners do with their funding. Round two of the Fund was anticipated to open in Autumn later this year.

FOP/EAG feedback meeting

Cabinet member had also assumed the position as the Vale's representative on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's Environment Advisory Group. She attended her first meeting on 21 June, where the group received an update on the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PAZCO) route map. Consultants had been appointed to take forward the work (City Science) and stakeholder workshops were being planned to take place during July. The five themes were:

- Freight
- Rural travel
- Finance and Local Models of Finance
- Domestic retrofit
- SME support to decarbonise

The thematic workshops will focus on developing some of the longlist of actions needed to achieve the route map. The draft route map will be reviewed in draft by the EAG at their next meeting in late September.

The EAG also received a presentation from Good Food Oxford and the Food Strategy they have developed for Oxfordshire. There was clear alignment to climate change, and we know through the IPCC report this year that food systems contribute 40% of greenhouse gas emissions. Notably, the strategy having a whole theme on “Food for the Planet”. The strategy will be coming to Councils in Oxfordshire for endorsement.

We also agreed given the CCC and IPCC recommendations we needed to review our language within local authorities and start to stress the emergency we do face.

Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund

Cabinet member was pleased to update the committee that the Climate Action Team were working in partnership on an application into the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund which was designed to provide financial support to increase the capacity of specialist skills within local authorities enabling them in turn to accelerate the delivery of tree planting and woodland creation commitments. The ultimate goal of the fund was to enable more trees planted particularly in winter seasons 2023/24 and 2024/25.

The Vale had identified tree and woodland planting as a key part of their response to the climate change. A lack of capacity to develop and design planting proposals, to consult widely, apply for capital grants and organise planting had been identified as a key barrier to progress. This fund will help us to address this capacity barrier.

- All upper tier authorities (County Councils) had been invited to apply for the £8 million fund.
- Oxfordshire County Council, the City and all District Councils were working in partnership to pull together an application to this fund for the maximum grant of £300,000. The window for submitting applications was very tight with completed applications having to be submitted by 8 July.
- If successful, the fund will provide additional staff capacity to work with the partnership to look at opportunities for tree planting across public and private land throughout Oxfordshire.
- Cabinet member noted that Councillor Johnston was on the call and that he was keen to ensure we plant trees sustainably and this was something Cabinet member had been discussing with officers around Climate Appropriate and Resilient species, for example looking to the Southern Mediterranean Varieties.

Performance reporting on the Climate Action Plan

Cabinet member noted that the committee were receiving an update on the performance reporting approach to the Climate Action Plan (CAP) tonight. Each quarter the Committee will receive detailed narrative against each action in the climate action plan to help the committee provide advice and guidance to Cabinet on progress or lack of, or prioritisation so Cabinet member was looking forward to receiving member’s feedback at the next CEAC meeting where we will review the progress made in Quarter 1 of this year.

EV Waste Truck trial

Cabinet member updated the committee on the following progress:

- The EV waste truck was trialled across the district in a mixture of rural and urban areas.
- It was identified very early on that it was struggling to complete a whole round if doing more than one load of collected material. A vehicle would normally do two and sometimes three loads in a day.
- With the current depot infrastructure, charging would take too long so coming back to charge mid shift was not an option, the vehicle had to be charged overnight.

- The vehicle completed around 60-70% of the round depending on the distance from the depot.
- The feedback from drivers was very positive because of how quiet it was although some considered it was too quiet. There were no specific incidents but there was concern that it was too quiet and could be an issue for other road users who may be unable to hear it. Drivers were also anxious that they may run out of battery power during the day.
- Whilst electric vehicle technology was improving rapidly at the moment the commercial vehicle market doesn't seem to have an option for the type of work the waste service carries out. In our case mainly because of the round sizes and the distances needed to be covered in our rural districts. In a small urban area with less properties to cover then it might be a viable option.
- We need to be conscious of our decarbonisation plans, and finding the right equipment for the job, but also think of a full circle approach with purchasing.
- Cabinet member was pleased to see the advancement in hydrogen technologies which seeing now opportunities in engine conversions and government investment in low and no carbon hydrogen generation.

Committee were welcomed to ask the Cabinet member questions.

- A discussion was had regarding buying second hand Internal Combustion Engines (ICEs) from cities, for example, to reuse unneeded vehicles. Some felt the efficiency of second-hand vehicles was always declining, but ICE conversion was suggested as an alternative. Cabinet member added that HVO (from processing cooking oil) was being trialled at Drayton Depot. Hydrogen had been reclassified by carbon output, and Harwell Campus was one of the first in favour of decarbonise hydrogen.
- A member suggested that route efficiency was being looked at for waste removal vehicles by being set to only turn left where possible on new efficient routes. Deputy Chief Executive for Place confirmed there was plans in place to do this in autumn.

105. Environment Act update

There was no update for this standing agenda item, as confirmed by officers. Officers were waiting on further information emerging from central government.

106. Update on the climate action team

Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader updated the committee on changes to his team.

We had recruited Jessie Fieth, as Senior Climate Action Officer. One-year secondments for the same role had been filled by Chloe Bunting and Kim Hall, funded by South Oxfordshire, but due to areas of joint working there may be some crossover with Vale.

107. Tiny Forest update

Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader updated the committee on the early-stage development of Tiny Forest work in the district.

The aim of Tiny Forests was to raise awareness of tree planting and environment, especially in urban areas. Tiny Forests (Earth Watch) were 600 mixed species trees, covering the area of a tennis court – therefore ideal for urban areas and finding ways to increase tree cover in urban spaces, especially in areas of deprivation. We will have a team of “keepers” to monitor the areas, and gather data on carbon sequestering etc. We were still confirming a site, but likely Abingdon (Heron's Walk). Planting should go ahead between December 2022 and March 2023 with help of volunteers, so we can look forward to seeing progress in the coming seasons.

It was confirmed that the council was focussing on their own land for the time being, future work may look at other options for planting.

108. Climate Action Plan reporting

Senior Climate Action Officer briefed the committee. The committee can expect the first quarter of monitoring to be presented to the committee at the next meeting.

Quarterly reports on the Climate Action Plan will give a strategic overview of climate activity and performance, similar to that of the corporate plan. Data will be gathered from Heads of Service who will give narratives and updates on figures where appropriate. A RAG rating will accompany the narrative, and also short, medium and long-term project categorising.

CEAC, scrutiny and Cabinet will review the report, ensuring transparency, and publication on our website.

Members were encouraged to ask for further detail on projects of interest, by asking chair of committee to add it to the committee agenda (and in discussion with the relevant Cabinet member). The climate team can add a particular Climate Action Plan project to the work programme for further analysis.

109. Corporate Plan - Performance Report for Quarter 4 and annual report 2021-22

Committee were presented with the quarter four report and the annual report 2021/22. Officers were present to answer any queries, but members were encouraged to email the Cabinet member or officers with detailed questions, as the information may not be available in the meeting.

Committee were asked to focus on Theme 2: Tackling the climate emergency.

A member asked for more detail on the agenda regarding the requirement of the committee for this item, rather than standard wording "for noting". Democratic Services Officer confirmed that there was now a standard routine for reviewing the corporate plan performance quarterly reports at scrutiny and CEAC, where members ask questions or raise comments which are reviewed by officers and Cabinet members, therefore informing improvement of the plan and its outcomes. Democratic Services Officer will consider the wording on the agenda for this item to elaborate. Chair reminded committee that this was not a decision-making committee, and that all reports stated for noting, discussion would be expected as standard at CEAC.

A member asked about the carbon emissions reporting that was produced by the council – can we add this to the quarterly report? It was confirmed that the greenhouse gases report was in a separate format, but officer added they would consider adding this information to the annual performance report.

Another member suggested a deeper dive into leisure centre decarbonisation figures, costs, savings? Cabinet member for Environment informed committee that some work was being completed with other Cabinet members, it was being actively looked at. Solutions were being looked at, such as pool covers. Cabinet member hoped to bring some findings back to committee when possible.

To have a deeper dive, officers confirmed that committee would need to add items to their work programme, by notifying the chair, and the climate team would look into what can be achieved and when, for presentation at committee.

It was added by a member that decarbonisation of leisure centres was mentioned and a report expected in May. Not just outdoor pools, but the indoor centres. Officer updated that surveys had been commissioned for Wantage and White Horse Leisure Centres. We were now using these to compile new bids, expected in September. Insight and Policy Manager will consider what form the reports are in and how they can be presented to committee at a future date.

On page 24 – communication to the public – chair asked whether we have a wider strategy for communication of climate topics and advice? It was responded that the communications team meet with the climate team to discuss what should be pushed forward. There was a brand-new OCC website, in collaboration with local districts, to add case studies of what we were doing. The website was in its infancy, but a good way to avoid duplication and improve sharing and collaboration.

Tips and suggestions for the website were welcomed.

It was confirmed in response to query on bulky waste progress, that bulky waste was a priority for Cabinet member for Environment, and she informed committee that there was a repurpose and reuse initiative this weekend with OCC at the recycling centre. Cabinet member will report back on this.

110. Future items

Suggestions from committee were:

- Swimming pool and indoor leisure centre decarbonisation progress (from previous discussion in the meeting)
- Rewilding
- Biodiversity bank

Rewilding of verges was occurring with OCC, and Cabinet member did add that there was a trial site in Vale, and species enrichment was occurring. Post-October, there may be some development / policy after the trial run. Cabinet member welcomed other members to visit the site to see progress.

The meeting closed at 7.01 pm

Chair:

Date: