

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Offices, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Tuesday, 13 August 2019 commencing at 4:30 pm

Present:

Chair
Vice Chair

Councillor K J Cromwell
Councillor J W Murphy

and Councillors:

G J Bocking, P A Godwin, H C McLain, P D McLain, H S Munro, P W Ockelton, R J G Smith, P D Surman, M J Williams, P N Workman, D W Gray (Substitute for J K Smith) and D J Harwood (Substitute for C L J Carter)

also present:

Councillors G F Blackwell, C M Cody, M A Gore, M L Jordan, E J MacTiernan, J R Mason, C Reid, C Softley and S Thomson

OS.29 ANNOUNCEMENTS

29.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was advised to those present.

OS.30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

30.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C L J Carter, J K Smith and S A T Stevens. Councillors D W Gray and D J Harwood would be acting as substitutes for the meeting.

OS.31 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

31.1 The Committee's attention was drawn to the Tewkesbury Borough Council Code of Conduct which was adopted by the Council on 26 June 2012 and took effect from 1 July 2012.

31.2 There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

OS.32 NOTICE OF MOTION - DECLARING A CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY

32.1 The Chair advised that, at the meeting on 30 July 2019, the Council had referred the following motion to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to consider the wording and make a recommendation back to the Council meeting on 1 October 2019:

Humans have already caused devastating climate change, the impacts of which are being felt around the world. Global temperatures have already increased by 1 degree Celsius from pre-industrial levels. Atmospheric CO2 levels are above 400 parts per million (ppm). This far exceeds the 350ppm deemed to be a safe level for humanity;

In order to reduce the chance of runaway Global Warming and limit the effects of Climate Breakdown, it is imperative that we as species reduce our CO₂eq (carbon equivalent) emissions from their current 6.5 tonnes per year to less than 2 tonnes as soon as possible

Individuals cannot be expected to make this reduction on their own. Society needs to change its laws, taxation, infrastructure, etc., to make low carbon living easier and the new norm;

Carbon emissions result from both production and consumption;

Tewkesbury Borough Council has already addressed the problem of single use plastics and has shown a strong commitment to recycling and sustainable transport but more needs to be done.

In Gloucestershire the consequences of no action include:

- Increased risk of flash flooding and the resulting damage to buildings, crops, farmland and infrastructure as a result of more extreme rainfall events.
- Health problems due to increased heat stress particularly for vulnerable adults and children.
- Increased costs associated with changes to crops and biodiversity.
- Higher energy costs.
- Crop failures associated with extreme heat, such as was experienced in 2018.

The County Council has already recognised more needs to be done and has created an additional cabinet role with responsibility for overseeing the authority's approach to prevention of, mitigation of, and adaptation of climate change.

The government believes that a shift to a very low carbon energy future represents the best course for the country's economic development while lowering the risk of fuel poverty and reducing air pollution.

In view of the above the Council is asked to:

- Declare a "Climate Emergency".
- Commit to doing all in its power to make Tewkesbury Borough Council carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions.
- Set up a Working Group consisting of seven Members of the Council (to be nominated at this evening's meeting) to prepare a long-term plan to achieve this, together with any initial budgetary requirements, to be reported back to the Executive Committee in October.
- Call upon central government to provide additional powers and resources to support local and national action towards the 2030 target.
- Commit to working with partners in Gloucestershire to achieve Countywide carbon neutrality aims.

32.2

The Chair invited the proposer of the motion to address the Committee. The proposer of the motion indicated that she wished to begin with a definition of a climate emergency which referred to catastrophic changes to the world's climate caused by human activity and resulting in the loss of a safe climate, which threatened all life on earth. Science demonstrated that the earth had warmed, and was continuing to do so, resulting in serious consequences for the atmosphere, weather systems, human ability to produce food and for all people and species. She advised that the response related to tackling changing climate – taking action at a scale and speed that would restore a safe climate with the target being to provide maximum protection globally for all species and people. A safe climate would allow

existing and future generations, communities and ecosystems to survive and flourish. She went on to explain that current climate conditions were increasingly unsafe for a huge range of species, including millions of humans, and rapid transition to zero emissions across all sectors was required with technical solutions and appropriate political action.

- 32.3 She also wished to address carbon neutrality which related to zero carbon dioxide emissions via elimination or offsetting. She explained that carbon dioxide was released in processes associated with transport, energy production and agriculture / industry and, in order to achieve neutrality, this needed to be offset - for example, continuing to take the unnecessary flight but planting a forest in return - or eliminated - for instance, using renewable energy or greener modes of transport. Climate emergency declarations meant that carbon dioxide emissions would factor in all future decisions.
- 32.4 In order to combat the terrifying change of climate, everyone - both as individuals and as organisations, businesses, councils and governments - needed to make drastic changes but she pointed out that this did not have to be all about sacrifice, on the contrary, it could actually be a positive and wholesome realisation. The Borough of Tewkesbury was in many places exquisite, with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, rivers, hills and woods and offered unique market towns, villages and communities framed by farming, leisure, tourism and technology – there was so much to nurture, enhance and protect; however, there was also poor public transport, severe traffic congestion, flooding, pollution, terrible cycling provision, environmentally inefficient houses and an awful lot more building on its way. She was certainly ambitious and up for the challenge and she was not alone – she had done this with her home and in business so why not the borough? She had been at the forefront of an international technology company achieving the business environmental standard ISO14001 and this had been done properly, without greenwash – the company had frequently been cited as showing best practice and various organisations, including the NHS, had used it as a model for much larger institutions. Taking into account diverse challenges, the remit had covered buildings, energy, transport, chemical reduction, materials reuse, recycling and waste - landfill had reduced by 94% and she was pleased to say that many of the initiatives actually saved money too. This had been achieved by changing business as usual and thinking outside the box, through policy changes, education and training, with strong support from leaders and senior managers and, most importantly, by the simple will to do it. She was not saying it would be easy and it would take dedication from a team of Councillors and Officers, plus a borough of inhabitants, many of whom were asking for radical change including nine year old Noah who felt so strongly that insufficient steps were being taken to protect his world that he had contacted her and they had gone on a school strike for climate change.
- 32.5 She stressed that the five other district councils in Gloucestershire, plus the County Council, had already passed climate emergency motions. Stroud District Council had achieved carbon neutrality as long ago as 2015 and Tewkesbury Borough Council could, and should, be following its lead. There was also excellence in other areas; Nottingham Council, for example, and around the globe, communities, councils and countries were leading with exemplary, exciting practices. People often asked her what motivated her to be so 'green', or why she cared so much about the planet, and her simple answer was that she was a mother - surely everyone wanted a decent future for their children. The priorities of elected representatives should be to care for and protect their communities, families, futures and the planet. Only a couple of weeks ago, the UK had recorded its highest temperature ever so there was no longer room for climate change deniers. The desperation to carry on without making protective provision was in itself dying; the evidence was evident and constituents were rightly demanding a rethink of local authority processes and governance. She advised that more than half of the UK's principal local authorities had now declared a climate emergency, making it one of

the fastest growing environmental movements in recent history. In the past eight months, 205 of the UK's 408 principal authorities had declared a climate emergency, with widespread support across political groups, committing them to take urgent action to reduce their carbon emissions at a local level. Many had set 2030 as a target date for going carbon zero in their boroughs, districts and cities. A lot had already started work, switching to renewable energy suppliers on their estates, building more energy efficient homes, planting trees and decarbonising transport. In her view, three simple steps were required: political will; a carbon reduction plan; and fundraising - in theory, local authorities could make bids to a host of organisations for project funding such as electric vehicle charging grants, pollution levies etc.

- 32.6 At Gloucestershire County Council in May, Members had unanimously voted through their climate emergency declaration. Tewkesbury Town Council would be declaring a climate emergency in September and there was already a Climate Change Action Group which had discussed energy, solar, recycling, insulation, water fountains / fill-up stations, plastic-free, community engagement, no mow, wildflowers, compost, wormery, bees, tree planting and wildlife mapping – all at its first meeting. The Local Government Association had declared a climate emergency at its Annual General Meeting in July and agreed to establish the Climate Emergency Network Special Interest Group to support councils and lobby central government. Stroud District Council had declared in November 2018 that it would achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 and the Forest of Dean District Council had done the same in December 2018; Cotswold District Council and Cheltenham Borough Council had both committed to carbon neutrality by 2030 in July 2019 and Gloucester City Council had made a similar commitment, albeit with a target of 2050, so the question remained, what would Tewkesbury Borough Council do?
- 32.7 She reiterated that the planet was facing catastrophic warming within its children's lifetimes, with large parts of the world uninhabitable and major food growing regions ruined by drought or rising seas. Climate warming was an existential risk to human civilisation and, on the current warming path, it was heading towards outright chaos. The failure of community and political leaders to talk about such concerns left unspoken fears lurking just below the surface of public life and the response to the climate crisis must be having the courage to match actions to the size of the problem.
- 32.8 The seconder of the motion indicated that she had little more to add but felt that everyone could agree that climate change was bigger than party politics and they all had a role to play. Tewkesbury Borough Council would be the last district council in Gloucestershire to declare a climate emergency but it still had an opportunity to lead the way. She was proud to second the motion and hoped the Committee would give it their full support.
- 32.9 In the absence of any questions from the Committee, the Chair indicated that he wished to propose an amendment which had been discussed with the proposer of the motion and aimed to provide clarification and a clear direction on the way forward as follows:
- The Council is asked to:
- Declare a “Climate Emergency”.
 - Commit to doing all in its power to make Tewkesbury Borough Council **offices** carbon neutral by 2030 ~~taking into account both production and consumption emissions.~~

- ~~Set up a Working Group consisting of seven Members of the Council (to be nominated at this evening's meeting) to prepare a long term plan to achieve this, together with any initial budgetary requirements, to be reported back to the Executive Committee in October.~~ **Expand the remit of the existing Flood Risk Management Group to deal with climate change matters with the following delegations to the Borough Solicitor in consultation with the Group:-**
 - i) preparation of revised Terms of Reference to include an audit of the Council's current position, an action plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, funding and promotion of good practice throughout the borough including buildings that provide a public service, such as the Tewkesbury Leisure Centre; and*
 - ii) membership of the Group, taking account of its wider role.*
- Call upon central government to provide additional powers and resources to support local and national action towards the 2030 target.
- Commit to working with partners in Gloucestershire to achieve Countywide carbon neutrality aims.

32.10 The proposer of the motion welcomed the suggestion to expand the remit of the Flood Risk Management Group and the inclusion of an audit of the Council's current position. Whilst she was disappointed that the remit had narrowed from Tewkesbury Borough Council to the Tewkesbury Borough Council offices, she believed it was important to make a start and she would be pleased if an agreement could be reached in order to enable that. A Member indicated that she understood the reasons for reducing the remit to the Council offices, notwithstanding this, she felt that 2030 was quite a long time to achieve carbon neutrality for one building. Whilst she accepted that it was unclear how long it would take, she felt that the timescales should be changed in order to do this as soon as practicable and before 2030. The Chair indicated that 2030 had been set as a target but he was sure everyone would strive to achieve this as quickly as possible. He clarified that the amendment to the motion would mean that the Flood Risk Management Group would look at the buildings where the Council had a direct influence, for example, the leisure centre and Tourist Information Centres as well as the Public Services Centre. In response to a query as to when the audit would be complete and a report taken to Council, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that, should the motion be agreed, a key role of the Working Group would be to look at the timescales based on what was achievable and to set out what the milestones might be in terms of delivery. The Member went on to question whether there were expertise within the Council to support the delivery of the motion and was advised that this would also be something for the Working Group to consider. Another Member queried whether the revised Terms of Reference for the Flood Risk Management Group would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and was advised that the amended motion proposed that the revision of the Terms of Reference be delegated to the Borough Solicitor in consultation with the Flood Risk Management Group so it would essentially be for that Group to agree its Terms of Reference. This method was considered to be the most timely and effective way to proceed.

32.11 A further amendment was suggested to include a report to Council by its meeting on 21 April 2020 at the latest with a detailed action plan for delivery, which both the proposer and the seconder of the motion were happy to accept, and, upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED

That it be **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the Council:

- Declare a “Climate Emergency”.
- Commit to doing all in its power to make Tewkesbury Borough Council offices carbon neutral by 2030.
- Expand the remit of the existing Flood Risk Management Group to deal with climate change matters with the following delegations to the Borough Solicitor in consultation with the Group:-
 - i) preparation of revised Terms of Reference to include an audit of the Council’s current position, an action plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, funding and promotion of good practice throughout the borough including buildings that provide a public service, such as the Tewkesbury Leisure Centre; and
 - ii) membership of the Group, taking account of its wider role.
- Call upon central government to provide additional powers and resources to support local and national action towards the 2030 target.
- Commit to working with partners in Gloucestershire to achieve Countywide carbon neutrality aims.
- Report to Council by its meeting on 21 April 2020 at the latest with a detailed action plan for delivery.

The meeting closed at 5:00 pm