

Executive

Excerpt of the minutes of the meeting held remotely on Thursday 10 December 2020 at 6.00pm, which was broadcast live via the Council's YouTube Channel.

Present: Councillors Day (Leader), Cooke, Falp, Grainger, Hales, Matecki and Rhead.

Also Present: Councillors: Boad (Liberal Democrat Group Observer), Davison (Green Group Observer – late arrival), Mangat (Labour Group Observer), Milton (Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee) and Nicholls (Chair of Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee).

62. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made in relation to the Part 1 items.

Part 1

(Items upon which a decision by the Council was required)

63. **Council Tax Section 13A(1)(c) Policy**

The Executive considered a report from Finance seeking approval for a policy to be introduced, in order to provide clear instructions and guidance when dealing with an application for discretionary relief to Council Tax, and to satisfy the Council's requirements to hold such a policy for Section 13A(1)(c).

Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 allowed a billing authority to reduce the Council Tax payable, after taking into account any discounts, disregards, reliefs and exemptions. It could be used for individual cases, or the Council could determine classes of case in which liability was to be reduced.

All billing authorities were required to have a policy for this scheme and Warwick District Council did not hold a policy for this. The proposed Policy looked to support only the most vulnerable and those in severe financial difficulties. This was proposed recognising not only the current financial challenges faced in the community, but also those faced by the Council, because any relief awards would be at a cost to the Council.

In the absence of a policy previously, requests for support had been minimal. These were considered on their own merits, and where necessary, a report was taken to the Executive for approval. This had only happened once and WDC never had any other cause to award or consider relief using this discretionary power. However, it was felt that it was appropriate to set a clear policy to guide decisions, should they be required.

Recommendation 2 in the report was included to ensure that explicit authority was in place for the scheme to be implemented.

In terms of alternative options, there were none because under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, it was a statutory requirement for the Council to have a Council Tax Discretionary Reduction.

There was the option to change the wording on the policy, however, the policy designed was in line with those of other Councils and provided the ability for the relevant officers to make a sound decision when considering any applications.

Councillor Hales, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business, thanked the Exchequer Manager for his time and effort, and he proposed the report as laid out.

Recommended to Council that

- (1) the Council Tax section 13a Discretionary Relief Policy Statement, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved; and
- (2) authority be delegated to the Head of Finance to provide discretionary relief, as set out within the Council Tax Section 13a Discretionary Relief Policy Statement at Appendix 1 to the report.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Hales)
Forward Plan Reference 1,155

66. Climate Emergency Action Programme (CEAP) Review 2020

At the beginning of this item, the Leader informed Members that, following advice from officers, this report was, in fact, a Part 1 item, because any changes to the Procurement Code of Practice needed to be considered by Council.

The Executive considered a report from the Programme Director for Climate Change. In light of the fact that circumstances had prevented the Council Tax referendum taking place in May 2020, the report reviewed the Climate Emergency Action Programme (CEAP) and specifically established the short term priorities for the Council in response to the Climate Emergency. It also set out the process for establishing the pathway to achieve a carbon neutral District by 2030. Linked to the CEAP, the report also sought agreement for the principle of working jointly with Stratford District Council on the response to the Climate Emergency. Finally, it sought approval for some amendments to the Procurement Strategy and Code of Practice and agreement to support the ADEPT blueprint.

Following the Declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019, the Council considered and, subject to a successful Council Tax referendum, unanimously supported a Climate Emergency Action Programme (CEAP) in February 2020. As the Council Tax referendum did not take place in May 2020, it was necessary to review the CEAP proposals. Appendix 1 to the report set out proposals for the priority actions through until June 2021. This ensured momentum continued with regard to the Council's climate change ambitions, and in particular, included the programme of work that was required to establish the Council's and District's carbon reduction pathway and the detailed Climate Change Programme for the period 2021 to 2025.

As part of the priority actions set out in Appendix 1 to the report, there were a number of proposals that would require funding during the current financial year. Recommendation 1 sought agreement to utilise up to £60,000 from the contingency reserve to support that work. The focus of this funding was for two proposals:

- 1) Appointing consultants to utilise the SCATTER carbon emissions tool to undertake an analysis of the District's carbon emissions to develop a detailed carbon reduction "pathway", to help the Council identify which interventions would have the greatest potential to reduce carbon emissions by 2030, in line with the Council's ambition for the District to be "as close as possible to carbon neutral by 2030". It was anticipated that this would cost up to approximately £20,000. Subject to Stratford District Council's agreement and funding, there was potential for this study to be undertaken across the whole of South Warwickshire to inform a joint work programme.
- 2) Undertaking a high level feasibility study to assess the potential to invest in low carbon energy generation infrastructure in the District (or more widely across South Warwickshire) such as a hydrogen hub, solar farm and/or district heating. It was anticipated this would cost in the region of £40,000. Depending on the extent to which the study would encompass and benefit Stratford District, it was possible the costs to Warwick District Council would reduce if Stratford District Council were able to make a contribution to the study.

The programme of work set out in Appendix 1 to the report was designed to maintain momentum until a more detailed and resourced Action Programme was put forward. It was expected that this would be reported for consideration in the first quarter of 2021/22. However, in the event that the Action Programme was shared with Stratford District Council, the exact date for this was dependent on agreeing timescales with Stratford District Council. This longer term action programme would draw on four key elements to ensure it was effective in delivering carbon reduction. Specifically, the Carbon Reduction pathway to 2030 for the District (and potentially, subject to the outcomes of recommendation 4, the whole of South Warwickshire) and the associated 2021 to 2025 Action Programme would respond to:

- 1) the level of resource that was established through a Carbon Action Fund, including any funding directly agreed by the Council in its 2021/22 budget, funding that may be provided from Stratford District Council in the event that joint work arrangements for the Climate Emergency were agreed and any external funding such as grants and other funding mechanisms such as Community Municipal Investment Bond;
- 2) the recommendations of the SCATTER pathway study would show the interventions which would most quickly and most effectively achieve carbon reduction in the District (and potentially South Warwickshire) to get as close as possible to zero carbon by 2030;
- 3) the recommendations of the People's Inquiry into Climate Change would provide valuable insights into how people from across the District thought climate change should be addressed; and
- 4) the potential for joint working with Stratford District Council, providing opportunities to develop a South Warwickshire Climate Emergency Action Programme and to invest in projects which would have an impact

across the whole of South Warwickshire with the potential for improvements in economies of scale and funding opportunities.

It had been agreed in principle to explore closer working with Stratford District Council across a range of services. There was potential to apply that principle to the work associated with the Climate Emergency declarations that both Councils had made. Recommendation 4 proposed that the Programme Director for Climate Change was shared across the two Councils, and that a joint strategic plan should be developed to address climate change across the whole of South Warwickshire. Discussions with Stratford District Council had started and there was emerging agreement to the principle of this arrangement. This recommendation sought to formalise that principle, and Stratford District Council would take a report to their Cabinet in January 2021, seeking a similar agreement in principle. Having established the principle, more detailed work was undertaken to put in place the financial and practical arrangements to enable this to happen. This included arrangements to:

- 1) share the costs of the Programme Director role and any other costs that were agreed to be within the scope of the joint arrangements. It was noted that discussions to date suggested Stratford District Council were in a position to commit financial resources to the shared work, although the scale and nature of this was the subject of the detailed discussions;
- 2) coordinate how financial resources for the Climate Emergency (such as the Climate Action Fund) were utilised to achieve maximum benefits;
- 3) adopt a shared Climate Emergency strategy or action programme in line with recommendation 3; and
- 4) put in place the political and management structures to support the delivery of the ambitions of both Councils in relation to climate change.

To enable momentum to be maintained, it was proposed that the detail of the arrangements set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report should be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Leader of the Council to agree. It was noted that the shared arrangements may include a joint Members Advisory Board, similar to that proposed for the South Warwickshire Local Plan. As a result of recommendation 4, the role and membership of the Climate Emergency PAB would need to change. At this stage, no other changes to the responsibilities and powers of formal Council Committees were proposed. In addition, a meeting of the Employment Committee was arranged in early 2021 to put in place the necessary employment arrangements.

The CEAP that was considered by Executive in February and proposed that the Procurement Strategy and the Code of Procurement Practice were updated to reflect the declaration of a Climate Emergency. These proposed amendments to those documents were shown in Appendices 2 and 3 to the report.

Proposals to develop a Climate Action Fund (CAF) were brought forward as part of the 2021/22 budget setting report. The CAF was used to support the delivery of priority initiatives proposed in the CEAP refresh. The scale of the proposed fund was determined in the context of a full understanding of the budgetary position and other demands on the Council's finances. Given the inability to hold a Council Tax referendum in May 2020, the scale of the CAF was likely to be significantly smaller than had been anticipated when

the CEAP was considered in February 2020. Therefore, as part of the CEAP refresh, proposals were developed to utilise the CAF in a way that had the potential to lever additional sources of funding and/or generate an income that would enable the fund to grow over time. Crucially, proposals focused on projects that had the potential to deliver significant carbon savings, in line with the People's Inquiry recommendations and the preferred carbon reduction pathways. In the event that recommendation 4 was supported, discussions would take place with Stratford District Council regarding the potential for similar contributions to be made by them.

A national coalition of Council organisations, environment groups and others had been formed to make a concerted push to secure more powers and resources for local authorities to deliver on climate change. This coalition had developed a blueprint for the changes needed, drawing on inputs from Councillors and Council officers, gathered through conferences and seminars organised by the LGA and the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) and through other networks. The blueprint was not intended to be the final word, but rather, a starting point for constructive and meaningful discussion with the Government. Specifically, this coalition asked Councils to indicate broad support for five priorities as a good basis to hold discussions with the Government about the role of local authorities and other local actors. The five priority recommendations were:

- 1) invest in low-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure including public transport, renewable energy and electric vehicle charging;
- 2) support reskilling, retraining and research to accelerate the move to a net-zero economy;
- 3) upgrade our homes to ensure they were fit for the future;
- 4) make it easy for people to walk, cycle, and work remotely; and
- 5) accelerate tree planting, peatland restoration, green spaces and other green infrastructure.

Recommendation 7 sought agreement for the Council to formally support these.

In terms of alternative options, the possibility of not seeking agreement for an interim CEAP ahead of a full refresh was considered. However, this would mean that the Council's climate emergency work until June 2021 would be undertaken within an uncertain context. The proposals for an interim Action Plan to June 2021 provided clarity about the immediate way forward.

The possibility of not funding the studies proposed in paragraph 3.2 of the report until the 2021/22 budget had been approved was considered. However, the studies proposed were considered necessary in the short term to enable the development of a full CEAP refresh in the first quarter of 2021/22. The proposal to fund this now, reflected the emergency that had been declared, enabled progress to be made more rapidly during 2021 and also helped the Council to position itself better, should external funding opportunities become available over the coming months.

Whilst it was necessary to refresh the CEAP in 2021, it was possible to delay the date of this to allow more time, and this was necessary in the context of developing a joint approach with Stratford District Council.

However, efforts were made to avoid this as it was inconsistent with the declaration of a Climate Emergency. It was also possible to utilise inputs that were different from those detailed in paragraph 3.3 of the report, to inform the development of the CEAP. However, the commitment to place a strong emphasis on the People's Climate Inquiry was important as the CEAP needed to draw on a good understanding of the issues and barriers residents faced in changing behaviours associated with climate change. Furthermore, the People's Inquiry was likely to generate valuable ideas and recommendations for the Council which helped to shape our plans. The CEAP refresh also needed to draw on a detailed understanding of data and the resources available to deliver it. For these reasons, the inputs proposed in paragraph 3.3 of the report were considered to be necessary for the development of an effective CEAP.

The Council could choose not to work jointly on the Climate Emergency with Stratford District. This would have the advantage of being able to focus efforts specifically on Warwick District. However, this was not recommended as the proposal for joint working brought significant potential benefits in sharing resources, looking more widely and strategically (recognising that climate change impacts did not stop at District boundaries), increasing opportunities to attract funding and using synergies to develop interventions which had a greater impact. Furthermore, the joint approach proposed was entirely consistent with the already established ambitions of both Councils, and in that context it was expected that in working up the details, any issues around setting priorities could be managed.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee supported the Climate Emergency Action Plan being an item in the Council's proposed budget for next year. It suggested that a "Plan for Good News" should be established to ensure residents could appreciate achievements. There was a general desire that the Council aimed high at the start of new projects and this should be set out as an ambition from the outset.

Councillor Rhead thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their positive discussion during their meeting. He then proposed the report as laid out.

Recommended to Council that the Procurement Strategy, as shown in Appendix 2 to the report, and the Code of Procurement Practice, as shown in Appendix 3 to the report, be amended to reflect the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration.

Resolved that

- (1) the action plan set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed as the Climate Emergency Action Programme priorities for the period until June 2021 or until such time a full CEAP refresh has been agreed;
 - (2) £60,000 from the contingency reserve to support the CEAP priorities, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, and in paragraph 3.2 of the report,
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be agreed;

- (3) a further report will be considered by the Executive in the first quarter of 2021/22 setting out the pathway towards a carbon neutral District by 2030 and a carbon neutral organisation by 2025, along with a resourced action plan for the period 2021 to 2025, be noted;
- (4) working jointly with Stratford District Council on a programme of work to address the Climate Emergency across the whole of south Warwickshire, including sharing the post of Programme Director for Climate Change, and that joint structures to bring forward the shared programme of work are put in place alongside the practical, HR and financial arrangements required, be agreed in principle, and this authority be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Head of Finance;
- (5) proposals to create a Climate Action Fund (CAF), be included within the February 2021 Budget report, when there will be more clarity over the Council's overall funding and priorities to be met from the 2021/22 Budget; and
- (6) the Council formally supports the five priority recommendations calling for powers and resources to enable local authorities to address the Climate Emergency, as proposed in the ADEPT blueprint.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Rhead)
Forward Plan Reference 1,153

(The meeting ended at 7.22pm)