

Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2023 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. McArthur (Chairman)

Cllr. Roy (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Alger, Clack, G. Darrington, Shea, Varley and White

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Barker, Kitchener and Cathy Morgan

Cllrs. Paul Darrington and Manston were also present.

15. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held 13 June 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

16. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

17. Actions from Previous Meeting

The Action Sheet was noted.

18. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder, and Chairman, gave an update on the services within her portfolio. Work on the Mill Pond site had been finished, following investment of over £80,000 to regenerate the pond. The Direct Services Team would work with residents and the Sevenoaks Society to create information boards to explain what had changed, and how it will develop in the future.

The Enforcement Team had signed up to the Alliance to Reduce Heritage Crime, a national network which worked to tackle heritage crime and support local action. This would help to protect the over 1700 heritage assets within the district.

Large sinkholes had appeared at the Otford Chalk Pit. Security fencing had been installed, and a geophysical survey had been commissioned to inform further action.

Progress had been made to catch up to the targets for refuse bag delivery, meaning delivery was now only two weeks behind schedule.

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The Licensing Team were working with the police on several investigations of suspected criminal activity at premises in the district. They further worked with license holders to address complaints of noise and anti-social behaviour.

Recruitment to replace the outgoing Environmental Health Manager was underway. The advert closed on 9 October and applicants were being reviewed. The Chairman thanked the Manager for their hard work over the years. A Technical Administrator in the Environmental Health Team had started an MSc in Environmental Health.

100% of inspections on both High- and Low-risk food hygiene establishments were completed. The average time to respond to service requests within the service was now two days. The team had observed increasingly poor compliance within food services, resulting in increased regulatory activity for the team.

50 stray dogs had been received into kennels in 2023, of which only 15 had been reunited with their owners. There was an ongoing dog welfare issue at a site in Horton Kirby. There had been 58 complaints in 2023 regarding dangerous dogs, with 16 in September alone. An ombudsman inquiry into a noise complaint regarding a parakeet had recently been received. The Environmental Health team worked with partners to identify the cause of the suspected outbreak of norovirus at the Hever Castle triathlon.

In response to questions, it was clarified for members that the Environmental Health team worked with charity partners to rehome dogs that were not reunited with their owners into suitable homes.

19. Referral from Cabinet or the Audit committee

There were none.

20. Climate Change Update

The Chairman introduced the report, which updated the Committee on the council's work to address climate change within the district. This was a two-part strategy to reduce emissions from both the council and the district as a whole.

The Principal Infrastructure Delivery Officer explained that the council's buildings and fleet accounted for less than 0.5% of emissions within the district. This meant that community engagement and leadership were critical to combatting climate change. The officer highlighted some ongoing projects that aimed to achieve this. Almost £1.5 million of external funding had been secured for the delivery of a walking and cycling network across Sevenoaks and Swanley, to encourage greener modes of transport. The council had launched a workplace travel plan that incentivised staff to travel to work more sustainably. The demand for Electric Vehicle charging points across the district was being assessed, to inform future provision through the Local Plan and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. More than £1.5 million of external funding had been

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secured to provide energy efficiency upgrades to low-income households and help households install solar panels.

The council's emissions had reduced slightly this year, due to new efficiencies in the waste and recycling services, use of electric vehicles, and a reduction in the council's gas and electricity usage. The council had commissioned an energy consultant to prepare a Carbon Reduction Plan, and this was nearing completion. Officers were developing a Climate Change Strategy, through the Climate Change Officer Working Group, which would identify a set of principles the council would work to. These could be shared with communities, schools, and other key partners.

In response to questions, the officer explained that a policy within the emerging Local Plan supported proposals to improve the energy efficiency of Historic Buildings, where they were informed by an understanding of the significance of the heritage asset and the building's performance. The council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030 had not changed. The action plan for this commitment remained in place, and would be supported by the Climate Change Strategy. The Policy Officer outlined the background of the Climate Change Officer Working Group. It was formed in November 2019, and helped develop the initial action and implementation plan for Net Zero. Their work to reduce emissions across the district would be focused on areas within the council's influence. A majority of emissions within the district were from transport or domestic gas and electricity. Outreach projects would thus be critical to these efforts. Data was not available for a direct comparison to be drawn between local authorities regarding emissions, but the council made up a smaller proportion of the district's overall emissions than the public sector did nationally.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

21. Annual Review of Parking Fees & Charges

The Chairman introduced the report, which set out the review of parking fees and charges for 2024/25. The review proposed changes to the hours of operation and charges in on- and off-street parking schemes, to support the local economy and services for residents. Increases were required to address rising operational costs, such as insurance and non-domestic rates. These increases would also be reinvested in the Council's car parks to ensure the assets remained safe and fit for purpose.

An additional £140,000 is required from parking fees following the 10-year budget agreed at Full Council on 9 February 2023, and recognising the current income levels. The Head of Direct Services outlined the options presented within the report. He corrected an error within Appendix B; Blighs car park charges were £1.00/30 minutes, £2/1hr, £4/2hr, £6/3hr, and £10/4hr.

In response to questions, the officer outlined the changes in the parking demand. There were fewer commuters parking at sites every working day, as hybrid working arrangements have become more widespread. Premium parking was busier in the week than it had been previously. The options presented were data-based and aimed to minimise the impact of increases on local businesses, staff, and residents.

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Members discussed the balance between the Council's Net Zero ambitions, which would encourage other forms of travel, and budget considerations. It was noted that the Sevenoaks District Council's Argyle Road car park would remain free to park in at weekends.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

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Resolved: That

- a) the parking management proposals be considered; and
- b) That it be recommended to Cabinet that Option 3 be considered as the preferred option, prior to consultation.

22. Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) Fees Report

The Chairman introduced the report, which updated Members on the changes from a Statutory Instrument issued by the Government to increase on-the-spot fine levels for littering and fly tipping. The report proposed setting the maximum fixed penalty notice (FPN) levels issued by the Council to these new maximums, to deter waste crime.

The Head of Direct Services explained that the Government had increased the maximum levels for several FPNs to assist Council's in combatting littering and fly tipping. FPNs provided a quick and effective way of dealing with low-level environmental crimes, and were an alternative to prosecution. Members were advised that non-payment rates were reasonably high, and those that did not pay were still prosecuted. It was further highlighted that FPNs were only issued for smaller, one-off instances of fly tipping; large and commercial fly tips were immediately prosecuted. The discount offered for the first 10 days of the fly tipping FPN being would encourage people to actually pay, and would meet the Home Office guidance of giving consideration to the ability of people to pay fines.

The maximum amount for being caught fly tipping would increase from £400 to £1000, reduced to £300 if paid within 10 days; the maximum amount for littering would increase from £150 to £500.

In response to questions, the officer advised that littering FPNs were rarely issued, as they required uniformed officers to see the act. Only 3 had been issued in the 12 months prior. A high fee level with no discount was thus required as a strong deterrent. Serial fly tippers were uncommon within the district, and were prosecuted rather than fined. The changes would be communicated across the district, with updated signage, and through the Council's social media, website, and InShape.

Members discussed the discounted rate offered for fly tipping.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that:

- a) the maximum FPN for being caught fly tipping be increased to £1000, and if paid within 10 days be reduced to £300; and
- b) the maximum FPN for being caught littering be increased to £500.

23. Future Demand for Electric Vehicle Infrastructure in Sevenoaks District

The Chairman introduced the report, which updated the Committee on the future demand for Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Points across the district. A company were commissioned to create an evidence base for EV demand in the future, which informed the creation of a demand profile.

Drivers with dedicated off-street parking were largely anticipated to install personal chargers, as it was the most cost-effective and convenient for them. The district was divided into zones between where this was expected, and where future public EV infrastructure would be critical. Mapping tools were used to quantify the impact of installing a charging point in any given location. The Council would be unable to meet the future public demand for EV charging, so the evidence base would be used to help persuade commercial partners to install charging assets for communities. The Air Quality Promotions Officer had started this process and was writing to key partners in the areas already identified, which were largely rural areas.

In response to questions, the Environmental Health Manager explained that discussions were ongoing with Kent County Council regarding forms of EV charging, such as Oxford's Gul-e system, which would fall under their remit as the highways authority. Officers from KCC regularly presented to the Sevenoaks Joint Transportation Board on this subject. The Council were further discussing with organisations such as Connected Kerb options for EV charging on land owned by the council on the street. The delivery of EV charging across the district would be multiphased; the evidence base constructed would allow for site-specific options to be considered.

Resolved: That the contents of the report and the associated infrastructure study be noted.

24. Food & Safety Team - Gain or Retain a 5

The Chairman introduced the report, which set out a proposed charging scheme for advice provided to food businesses before they receive food hygiene inspections. The Food & Safety Team inspected around 1000 food businesses each year, and scored them on a scale from 0 – 5. A score of 0 – 2 would invite further regulatory

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intervention to the business, and could have negative financial and reputational impacts. These ratings were fixed until the next full inspection.

The Team offered a chargeable “food hygiene rescore visit” service, through which a fresh inspection would be undertaken, without notice to the business, within three months. The demand for these visits had increased significantly.

The Environmental Health Manager explained that the proposed scheme would allow the team to charge for advice in advance of inspections, to help businesses achieve higher hygiene ratings on their first attempt. The scheme would not guarantee an outcome but would give businesses the best chance at achieving higher standards of hygiene. The scheme would not be mandatory, and businesses would still be signposted to readily available information. The proposed charge for the service was £210.76, which would recover costs and align with the pricing for rescore visits, providing customers with differing options.

Members heard that the current provision of advice was limited by the volume of statutory work the team had at any given time. Placing the advice within a cost-recovery priced service would thus enable the team to serve customers better, as it could then be given as needed. Limited advice would still be provided for free; the paid service would give businesses bespoke information regarding their circumstances.

Members discussed the report.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That

- a) The contents of the report, including details of the proposed scheme and the suggested fees and charges, be noted; and
- b) That it be recommended to Cabinet that the Gain or Retain a 5 scheme be adopted within the Sevenoaks District.

25. Air Quality Annual Status Report

The Chairman introduced the report, which updated the committee on the four Air Quality Management Areas within the district. The council were required to present an annual status report with data from the previous year to DEFRA outlining their monitoring results and the progress towards the action plan. No air quality monitoring site within the district exceeded national objective levels in 2022.

In response to questions, the Environmental Health Manager explained that the highest level detected within the district was still below the national threshold, and was not positioned in a site of relevant exposure. Residents were not exposed to the full level of emissions detected there as their properties were set back from the roadside, where the measuring device is set.

Resolved: That the contents of the Annual Status Report be noted.

26. Future of the Air Quality Monitoring Stations

quality monitoring arrangements in Bat & Ball and Greatness. The Air Quality Stations (AQS) in these locations were nearing the end of their operational lives, and would require considerable investment to maintain. The air quality in the district had been steadily improving, and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs had, in their response to Council's recent Air Quality Annual Status Report, advised the Council to consider removing its Air Quality Management Areas within 16 months. It was proposed that, unless a suitable management partner was found by April 2024, these stations be decommissioned and replaced with a network of portable AQS.

The Environmental Health Manager explained that the data analysis and operator duties costs for the sites had doubled, resulting in an in-year budget overspend. To keep the sites operational would incur significant immediate costs on top of this, as several analysers required replacing at once, and the shipping container which contained the Greatness site had deteriorated and needed replacing. Removing these stations would not impact the network of diffusion tubes which monitored nearly all of the district.

In response to questions, the officer explained that the portable AQS were indicative, and would not be the same standard as the sites they were replacing. Though this information would be less detailed, the sites would be easier to locate, and the data from them would be more easily shared with and understood by the public. These stations could be bought or leased as required.

The AQS at Greatness measured background levels of ozone, nitrous dioxide, and PM10, which allowed for more accurate readings at other sites, whereas the Bat & Ball AQS was a roadside measure. No sites were predicted to exceed the limit of 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, even in the worst case scenario that the AQS network measured.

Members discussed the impact of potential developments in the Greatness and Bat & Ball areas. They were advised that all planning applications were considered by the Environmental Health Team, during which they analysed the impact of the proposed development. Developers were expected to produce assessments of air quality impact for large developments, and could be requested to manage the monitoring of their impact before, during, and after construction. This would be facilitated by the proposed network of portable AQS. Conditions could also be imposed to mitigate the impact of new developments on air quality.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet:

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- a) That Environmental Health seek a partner to take over the management and operating costs of the Air Quality Stations (Bat & Ball and/or Greatness Park) from 1st April 2024;
- b) If a suitable partner cannot be identified as above; that on the 1st April 2024 the Air Quality Monitoring Stations at Bat & Ball and Greatness Park are closed and decommissioned; and that
- c) In replacement of the two existing Air Quality Stations; that the District Council seek to develop a network of portable Air Quality Analysers to be sited strategically in areas of poorest air quality. The scale and extent of this network will be subject to technical constraints and available funding from within existing Environmental Health budgets and or additional grant (or similar) funding if/ when available.

27. Work Plan

The Work Plan was noted.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8:39PM

CHAIRMAN