

Minutes of Climate Change Working Group

Meeting Date: Thursday, 11 April 2024, starting at 3.00 pm
Present: Councillor D Birtwhistle (Chairman)

Councillors:

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| J Alcock | G Hibbert |
| S Atkinson | G McCrum |
| S Fletcher | A Wilkins-Odudu |

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Community Services, Principal Policy and Performance Officer and the Partnership Officer

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor L Edge.

2 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last working group meeting of 14 March 2024 were approved as a correct record.

3 ACTIONS ARISING AND UPDATES SINCE THE LAST MEETING

The Director of Community Services reported the actions arising from the last meeting and provided Members with updates:

Action 1 – Climate Change Action Plan – the plan was approved at Economic Development Committee on 4 April 2024.

Action 2 – Renewable electricity – it was noted that the Head of Financial Services was in the process of enquiring with suppliers as to the cost of converting to a fully renewable electricity supply.

Action 3 – Community Outreach – Members were provided with a spreadsheet outlining the government grant schemes and the Council's Community Partnership Officer attended the meeting.

Action 4 – Declaration of a Climate Change Emergency – Members had submitted preferred wording to officers and the item was to be discussed during the meeting.

4 COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Members were provided with a spreadsheet outlining the grant schemes available. This summarised what each grant covered, the amounts available, who could apply and how each grant had been promoted.

Concerns were raised that the Cosy Homes in Lancashire (CHiL) initiative / Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) was not being made available in the Ribble Valley, and it was agreed that the Housing Strategy Officer would look into this and prepare a position statement.

Members agreed that it would be beneficial if there was an easily accessible way for members of the public to ascertain what grants are available and whether they would meet the eligibility criteria. It was agreed that it would be helpful to put all the information into one flow diagram and have it on the Council's website.

The importance of publicising grants was emphasised and discussion took place as to how this could best be achieved and what was already being done. The Community Partnership officer outlined her role in this regard and how organisations such as the Foodbank, the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), the Community Action Network and landlords generally could be better utilised. The role of the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) was felt to be important and a suggestion was made for them to attend a future working group meeting to elaborate on what they offer in terms of support.

The Director of Community Services highlighted that there are some grants that are currently undersubscribed, for example the First Time Buyer's Energy Efficiency grant. The idea that a particular scheme, thought to be underpublicised but important, could be highlighted each week received support from Members. The Communications officer would also continue to publicise individual cases where people have been successful in obtaining grants.

It was agreed that the circulation of a grants newsletter would also be seen as a positive step.

The ECO4 scheme was raised and there was a suggestion that a representative from Blackpool Council or ECO4 could be asked to attend a future Health & Housing Committee to advise on what steps are being taken to publicise the scheme.

It was agreed that the Housing Strategy Officer would prepare a summary of the number of people applying for the different grants and for her to attend a future working group meeting to answer any further queries that Members may have.

Officers would also write to the relevant government department to ascertain what grants are being offered on a national level. Investigations would also be carried out to see what schemes other local authorities (on a similar scale to RVBC) have and to investigate what energy companies are offering.

5 PUBLICATION OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

The updated Climate Change Action Plan is to be published on the Council's website.

6 MAKING A CLIMATE CHANGE DECLARATION

There was discussion within the group as to the exact wording for the climate change declaration and differences of opinion were voiced.

Councillor McCrum suggested that prior to deciding on the climate change declaration, Members of the Working Group could commit to undergoing training in relation to climate science. It was agreed that if Members had a better understanding of each other's concerns and obtained a similar level of knowledge on this issue, it may help them reach a common position going forward.

Discussions took place regarding what training was potentially available. Councillor McCrum had brought some literature regarding a carbon literacy programme that has been designed for elected Members and senior officers. The Principal Policy and Performance Officer outlined some alternatives, including training offered by the LGA. She also highlighted that there was free training available to Council officers under the new ME learning system.

It was agreed that further enquiries would be made as to the possible training schemes and approval would thereafter be sought from the relevant Committee. Once the training has been undertaken, further discussions could then take place with regards to the wording of the climate change declaration.

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PRIORITISATION AND DELIVERY OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

The Community Services Director canvassed Members views on the proposed prioritisation and delivery of the climate change action plan, which was as follows:

Stage 1 – Focusing on Council Emissions

Theme 1 – Understanding Our Emissions

- An audit of Council buildings
- Promote good housekeeping – engage and inform staff and Councillors
- Procurement plan revision – reviewed annually

Theme 2 – Minimising the Council's Emissions

- Ribblesdale swimming pool
- Replacement of petrol powered hand tools with battery powered units.
- Tree planting and woodland management Preparing for Stage 2

Theme 3 – Carbon reduction through Business / Partnerships

- Partnership engagement plan
- Promoting grants

Theme 4 – Mobilising the Community

- Campaign to promote, reduce, reuse and recycle messages
- With LCC to creatively involve young people in climate change activities.

With regards to the audit of council buildings, it was noted that some of the work had been undertaken but it wasn't yet completed. Once all the information has been collated, further discussions could take place as to reducing emissions.

General discussion took place as to the energy efficiency of the main Council office building and an update was provided with regards to the installation of solar panels. It was noted that the necessary electricity system needed to be installed and the Council don't have the in-house expertise for this. It was hoped that the panels will be installed in September 2024.

With regards to Ribblesdale pool, Members were advised that it was over 40 years old and suffering from significant and more regular mechanical and electrical failures. An update was provided regarding the feasibility study that was carried out. There were over 2100 responses, which was very encouraging. A lot of people were satisfied with the pool and the vast majority felt that it was in a good location. Some suggestions had also been put forwards regarding having additional facilities at the site e.g. a café or soft play area.

It was noted that no firm decisions had been made and the Council were still exploring all available options. However, it would be a major decision for the Council, and would have implications for other services that the Council provide.

The possibility of having a community bond for raising funds was discussed and some pitfalls associated with this were highlighted. A suggestion of building a crematorium next to the pool was also canvassed.

With regards to tree planting, it was confirmed this was progressing well with Lancashire County Council and they are funding the project.

It was also noted that the Council aimed to plant 50 Redwood trees across the Borough to commemorate 50 years since Ribble Valley Borough Council came into being under the re-organisation of local government in 1974. It was hoped that a Redwood could be planted in each of the parishes.

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ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE MEETING

The actions arising from the meeting were as follows:

1. Community Outreach

- a. That officers are to create a flow diagram as to the grants available, which is to be made available on the Council's website.
- b. That the Housing Strategy officer prepare a report clarifying the position with regards to the ChiL initiative in the Ribble Valley which is to be considered at a future meeting.
- c. That the Housing Strategy officer to attend a future meeting to provide details of the numbers of people applying for grants in the Borough.
- d. That officers circulate a grants newsletter.
- e. That officers start promoting a different grant each week.
- f. That officers write to the relevant government department to ascertain what grants are available on a national level.
- g. That enquiries are made as to whether a representative from ECO4 / Blackpool Council can attend the next Health & Housing Committee to advise on what steps are being taken to publicise the scheme.

2. Climate Change Training

That officers investigate and identify appropriate climate change training for Members to undertake. The recommendation for training and the suggested course will be submitted to the appropriate Committee for approval. Subject to this being granted, officers will arrange for the training to take place.

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DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting would comprise of climate change training.

The meeting closed at 4.26 pm

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact the committee clerk Jenny Martin at jenny.martin@ribblevalley.gov.uk.