

HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 April 2022

Present

Councillor Lloyd (Chairman)

Councillors Francis (Vice-Chairman), Crellin, Hughes, Sceal and Stone

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor(s):

33 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Briggs, Kennett and Weeks.

34 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interests relating to matters on the agenda.

35 Climate Environment Action Plan

The Committee was given an opportunity to review the recommendations set in the Cabinet Report “Climate Change And Environment Plan Initial Action Plan 2022-2023” prior to its submission to Cabinet.

The Committee examined, via a question and answer session with the relevant Cabinet Lead and officers, the following aspects of the draft plan:

- The aims, ambitions, and objectives of the plan
- The timing of the implementation of the plan
- The design and complexity of the plan as submitted
- Organisations/bodies that had been consulted when developing the plan as submitted
- Details on how it was proposed to change the culture of the organisation with carbon literacy awareness at all levels
- How the plan would relate to the to the Council’s Local Plan (“Local Plan”)
- The feasibility of setting climate impact standards within the Local Plan
- The feasibility of engaging community groups and national projects to help the Council achieve it targets

(Details of the questions and answers are set out in an appendix to these minutes)

During the question and answer question, the Cabinet Lead and officers agreed to:

- (i) simplify the format of the plan; and
- (ii) extrapolate Hb1i and HB2i into separate headings

The Committee acknowledged the plan is a living document and supported in principle the aims of the plan. It was particularly pleased to see that it was proposed to incorporate policies within Havant Borough Council's revised Local Plan to ensure energy hierarchies and energy efficiencies would be delivered for development in new housing in the Borough. However, the Committee considered that:

- (a) the plan, in the format submitted to the Committee, was too complex to enable the Council to track and monitor achievements;
- (b) the plan should be revised to identify 4 key areas to make it more manageable; and
- (c) the report did not fully recognise the opportunities available to the Council by working with local community groups.

RESOLVED that Cabinet be recommended that, where possible, the action plan be amended to include more tangible targets for individual targets with a simplified numbering system of these targets.

36 Report of the Overview And Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel on Paperless Meetings

The Committee considered the recommendations of the task and finish panel, which scrutinised how best to proceed towards sending agenda papers and supplementary papers to members by soft copy only.

The Committee examined, via a question-and-answer session with the relevant Cabinet Lead and officers, the aspects of the Panel's report set out below:

- a the costs of providing a laptop to all members of the Council and the methods of financing this provision;
- b the security reasons supporting the provision of a laptop, supported by the Council, to all members of the Council;
- c the use of all or part of the Members' modernisation allowance, to help finance the recommendation in 2.1.1 and point 3.2.1 of the report; and

- d The savings that would be realised if the recommendations set out in the submitted report was adopted.

It was acknowledged that, in the absence of the author of the report, the officers and Cabinet Lead could not comment on whether the members of the Council were asked to identify the equipment they wished to be supplied with.

The Committee acknowledged that the Panel's recommendation (recommendation 1 or another version of 1, meaning a laptop owned by HBC would be lent to the Member) would improve security, but it considered that the insignificant savings that which would be realised by this recommendation could not justify the provision of a laptop to all Councillors.

Instead, the Committee supported an option whereby members were given the choice of having a standard laptop, provided and supported by the Council, in lieu of all or part of their modernisation allowance, to help pay for the equipment, software and support.

However, the Committee accepted that this preferred option would need to be fully costed and compared with the costs of the current system before a final decision could be made. The Committee also considered that the default position for receipt of committee papers be that Councillors do not receive paper copies of agendas unless they specifically request a paper copy.

RESOLVED that:

- 1 the option of offering all councillors the opportunity of giving up all or part of their modernisation allowance to finance a new laptop provided and supported by the Council be explored
- 2 the current cost of supporting councillors using their own IT equipment be explored and
- 3 the default position be that councillors will not receive paper copies of agendas unless they specifically request them.

37 Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel on the Council's Business Grants Support During the Covid 19 Lockdown

The Committee considered the recommendations of the task and finish panel, which reviewed the Council's response to C19 regarding the disbursement of government funds to businesses as grants.

In response to a question raised by a member of the Committee, the Head of Customer Services reassured the Committee that the processes were in place for payments in the event of the Council facing a similar situation in the future.

The Committee expressed their gratitude to the way the officers had responded to a such a complex and unique situation.

RESOLVED that Cabinet be advised that:

- (a) Overview and Scrutiny notes the uniqueness and complexity of the situation the council with which the Council was faced;
- (b) Overview and Scrutiny notes that without the massive, personal effort made by the key officers in charge of working with Capita to disburse the funds to businesses, the Council would not have helped the Borough's businesses as it did; and
- (c) Overview and Scrutiny wishes to commend those officers who worked tirelessly to physically process those many cases which demanded further scrutiny at the time, under immense pressure, in order that Havant Borough Council incurred no penalty for any fraudulent activity being possible, within this unique process.

38 Annual Scrutiny Report

The Committee considered its annual report for the year 2021/22.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to note the submitted report

The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and concluded at 7.45 pm

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Chairman

Appendix to the Minutes

Item 4 – Climate Action Plan

	Question	Answer
Aims and Objectives of the Action Plan		
1	What are the key areas identified by the Cabinet Liaison Panel – Climate Change and Environment?	<p>The Panel identified the following key priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To incorporate climate change policies into the emerging local Plan (Policy HB2i) • To reduce carbon emissions from transport and travel (Policy HB1i) • To increase the carbon literacy awareness of staff and Councilors when making decisions through training (Policy HA1iii) • To amend templates and provide guidance for business cases and decision papers to ensure that these papers include an evaluation of the impact of the proposal on the environment and climate (Policy HA1iv) • To amend the pension investment appraisal to mandate inclusion of criteria to mitigate the climate crisis (Policy HA2iii)
2	Could the provision of a kerbside glass collection be investigated?	Under the Government waste recycling initiative and legislation, a twin scheme approach would be introduced which would cover the collection of glass

	Question	Answer
3	Should we not be conscious of waste miles when looking at recycling services?	Yes
Policy HA1iii: Amend the Constitution, procurement processes and investment appraisal tools to mandate inclusion of criteria to mitigate the climate crisis.		
4	Will future committee reports include a comment from the Climate Change officer?	Yes
5	Could the Council not hold all Committee meetings virtually?	Where appropriate, the Council holds virtual meetings. However, Full Council, Cabinet and the Council's Committees and Sub-Committees cannot be virtual.
<p>Policy HB1i: Promote climate messages to raise awareness and stimulate public engagement to foster change, including active travel, reducing energy demand, and looking after the natural environment. Also to improve recycling rates of all types of waste. Comms to promote the new glass recycling bins initiative</p> <p>and</p> <p>Policy HB2i: Minimise the climate impact of new development through our Local Plan policies and development management decisions. Embrace and enforce polices to reduce energy demand in dwellings such as the Future Homes Standard, Living with Beauty, and others as appropriate. Leading by example, minimise the climate and environmental impacts of Havant Borough Council's own projects.</p>		
6	Could these policies be extrapolated into separate headings as there a number of distinct areas included in these policies?	Agreed

	Question	Answer
7	To what extent could the Council insist on energy efficient measures in the Local Plan?	<p>The Future Homes Standard aims to make homes more efficient through revisions to the Building Regulations. The Planning Act enables the Council to impose more stringent requirements than those set out in the Building Regulations, but the Council needs to be mindful of the need to balance this against other factors such as social standards, infrastructure, and bio diversity. The higher the standard, the greater the cost to the Council</p> <p>The Future Homes Standard will go to zero carbon. However, this does not mean that all sites will be zero carbon as the scheme may allow off site payments. Legislation does not set constraints upon Council on what it can require but it is recommended that the Council should look to improve the energy efficiency of buildings before technological solutions are explored (fabric first method) which would place no additional levels of complexity on the owner.</p>
8	Do we have any opportunities to set standards for fabric first?	Yes, through the new Local Plan
9	Can we prohibit gas boilers in future homes?	If heating is to be provided by electricity only in a future development, it makes sense for electricity capacity to be provided during construction. However, Government advice is that Councils should not dictate the energy to be used. Needs to be explored further.
Policy HA1v: Change the culture of the organisation with carbon literacy awareness at all levels		

	Question	Answer
10	When is this training due to commence and how will it be provided?	Online and face to face training has been prepared and will be delivered to all officers and councillors
<p>Policy HB1i Promote climate messages to raise awareness and stimulate public engagement to foster change, including active travel, reducing energy demand, and looking after the natural environment. Also to improve recycling rates of all types of waste. Comms to promote the new glass recycling bins initiative</p>		
11	Have we engaged with Hants and Wildlife Trust project on the mudbank project in Langstone Harbour?	Members are involved with the Harbour Boards and the information received from these Boards could help inform the Action Plan
12	Has the Council engaged with the national Plant Britain and Beach Watch programmes?	<p>A lot of trees are planted across the Borough and County and the Council work closely with Norse and the tree wardens on this matter. Happy to look at additional areas and ensuring those trees protected by TPOs are maintained.</p> <p>There was an established beach clearing programme in place. Happy to investigate both this further.</p>
13	Has the Council considered using the data on all community litter groups to organise a combined Borough litter picking event?	Cllr Bowerman Agreed to discuss at next Panel Meeting
14	Could the Council investigate allowing verges and roundabouts to grow wild?	Already undertake a “no mow” programme in May to allow wild plants to grow on verges where the site lines will not be interfered. There is also the opportunity for community groups to take over the responsibility for maintaining open space.

	Question	Answer
		The Council would be exploring the potential opportunities through the requirements of the Environment Act and the emerging Local Plan for bio diversity net gain to be provided on Council land together with third party mitigation schemes, which would be embedded in a bio diversity policy and the emerging Local Plan.

Item 5 - Report of the Overview And Scrutiny Task Force on Paperless

Questions

	Question	Answer
1	Meetings Devices - £24,474 Is this based on 38 councillors making £644 * per device?	Yes
2	Support FTE - £18,464 ** Is this one officer working full time on supporting members to use the new device?	It is proposed that an additional post be provided in the Democratic Services Team, who will lead on Digital Democracy, to provide IT support to Councillors
3	What is the current cost of providing IT support to Councillors using their own devices?	There is currently no provision for supporting the members' own devices. The aim is to get to a position where the Council can provide this service.

	Question	Answer
4	<p>Modernisation Allowance</p> <p>If the cost of a device for a four-year term as an elected councillor is £644 *, why is the so-called Modernisation Allowance of £461 per annum, per councillor, proposed to be withdrawn for each of the four years?</p>	<p>It is recommended to use the allowance to cover the ongoing costs of CAPITA support, inhouse support to Councillors and the improvement to the current committee system software</p>
5	<p>Why does the Council finance the costs of IT equipment provided to officers but not to Councillors?</p>	<p>The two roles are different; Officers are paid employees and Councillors are elected. The options set out in the report will get to a position whereby the Council can provide the necessary equipment to its members.</p>
6	<p>Was a survey of members undertaken to identify what information they needed and how best to supply this information?</p>	<p>In the absence of the author of the report, the officers and Cabinet Lead could not answer this question</p>
7	<p>Could the Council not give the members their modernisation allowance as a lump sum to enable them to purchase the necessary equipment?</p>	<p>If the members bought their own equipment, the Council could only provide a specification but beyond this no other support</p>
8	<p>Would it not be more secure, if the Council provided new Councillors?</p>	<p>Yes. A device supplied by the Council would be more secure and supported by CAPITA</p>

	Question	Answer
9	Could you explain the conflicting figures in the report for the savings that could be made?	The taskforce report uses a range of figures including non-cashable items.
10	Why can the Council not just stop issuing paper copies of agenda papers to members?	Legislation, as set out in the report, does not permit this

Item 6 - Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Force on the Council's Business Grants Support During the Covid 19 Lockdown

Questions

	Question	Answer
1	Does the Council have the processes in place should this kind of event happen again?	Yes