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Agenda item

DECLARATION OF A CLIMATE EMERGENCY

- Meeting of Council, Wednesday, 17th July, 2019 6.30 pm (Item CO28)

The Leader to submit a report which considers the declaration of a “Climate Emergency” and to establish a Policy Development Group to develop an action plan for how the Council will work towards a carbon neutral target by 2030

Minutes:

Councillor Orson:

(a) tabled a paper, considering the declaration of a “Climate Emergency”, the establishment of a Policy Development Group (to develop an Action Plan, setting out how all Council functions and decision making would support the aspiration to become carbon neutral by 2030) and that the Council’s commitment to climate change be incorporated into the developing Corporate Strategy;

(b) advised that for clarity, recommendation 2.2 had been altered, by adding the following at the end of the recommendation:

‘and the Leader of the Opposition respectively’.

The Task Group could have been made up of all Conservative Members but Councillor Orson wanted it to represent the political balance of the

Council and so it would be made up of four Conservative Members and one Opposition Group Member;

(c) drew Members' attention to an article in the Melton Times, written by Sir Alan Duncan MP, which highlighted:-

- Since 1990, the UK had reduced emissions faster than any other nation in the G20 and last month became the first major economy to introduce a legally binding net zero target to end the UK's contribution to global warming entirely by 2050.
- The UK was set to host the 2020 United Nations climate change conference, with the hope of setting even more ambitious targets than in the 2015 Paris Agreement.
- Under the Clean Growth Strategy, £92 billion had been invested by businesses into clean energy over the past nine years. Renewables had gone from producing 6.1% of electricity to 37.1%, with low carbon energy now totalling over half of all electricity generation. Renewable energy was 13 times higher than coal output, which was being phased out by 2025.
- The renewable energy sector had increased six-fold since the Conservatives were elected to government.

He stated that:

(a) climate change experts advised there were only 12 years until emissions, if they continued at current levels, rose to a point where they would cause irreversible harm to the planet's environment;

(b) the Council needed to recognise this and had an important community leadership role to fulfil. Members needed to 'play their part' in making sure that Council operations became carbon-neutral by 2030;

(c) the Council should be an exemplar organisation, showing leadership. It needed to show others how progress could be made and work with people and organisations from every part of the Borough to make their contribution, not just through powers and duties but through persuasion;

(d) in order to make a zero-carbon Melton a reality, the Council must reduce, reuse and recycle more, cut the amount of plastic it used and reduce its carbon emissions;

(e) the paper before Members asked them firstly to recognise the terms of 'climate emergency' and secondly to consider what the Council was going to do about it. It was proposed to set up a dedicated Climate Change Policy Development Group to develop an action plan for how the Council would work towards ensuring its operations become carbon neutral by 2030. Appendix A of the report made some suggestions regarding the type of issues which could be looked at but this was not exhaustive. It was proposed that the Group report back to Cabinet in 12 months.

Councillor Orson moved the recommendations contained in the Order. The recommendations were seconded by Councillor Higgins, who reserved his right to speak after the debate.

During debate the following points were noted:-

- Members gave their views on climate change, nationally and within the Borough, agreeing that this was one of the biggest issues facing the modern world and supporting the recommendations.
- The Council was 'leading the way' on climate change in Leicestershire, along with Harborough District Council and Leicestershire County Council. The County Council had introduced lots of programmes to tackle climate change and consistently monitored air quality within the County. Focus should also be on plastic, fly tipping and waste. Educating people about climate change was important to help keep Melton clean and tidy and a great place to live.
- As one example of how climate change was having an impact on the UK's doorstep, it was highlighted that since the 1980s, Alpine glaciers had lost around 25% of their surface. Although the Council was a small authority with limited resources, it had an obligation to help combat climate change and continue to lead by example by encouraging local businesses and organisations to work towards reducing carbon emissions in the Borough.

The Council had already begun implementing a number of changes and had taken steps in policy and regulatory powers to influence others but

there was so much more that could be done within its financial constraints and its scope as a local authority.

- Attention was drawn to an email sent to a Member and officers from two members of the public, concerning the building of new homes in the Borough, in view of environmental sustainability. Members agreed that action needed to be taken without delay, noting that the Council's Planning Department would play a role in ensuring developers built houses for the future in Melton. It was important to be 'realistic' and manage expectations in the short term.
- Climate change required a holistic approach. Bio-diversity should be considered and it was highlighted that Councillor Hewson was already doing good work in this area. The Council needed to influence the community and make it clear that the Council promoted change throughout the Borough.
- Councillor Wood proposed an addition to recommendation 2.1, adding the following at the end of the recommendation:

'and further promote a cutting of emissions within the wider Borough of Melton.'

The addition to the recommendation was accepted by Councillor Orson.

- Community engagement was key, current national and local projects, such as HS2 in London and Melton's distributor road may send mixed messages to the public regarding commitment to tackling climate change.
- Environmental Services had identified land within the town to accommodate wild flower planting and there were also plans to plant at the new distributor road.

Councillor Higgins:

(a) noted that Members had held a very considered debate on this issue;

(b) highlighted the Local Government Association's 'Acting on Climate Change' workbook, asking that it be circulated to all Members;

(c) cautioned that the challenge element of decision making was vital in ensuring poor policy was avoided;

- (d) highlighted the need for people to consider how their travel affected climate change, disagreeing that Melton's ring road was 'a bad thing', as it would reduce congestion in the town;
- (e) agreed that a holistic approach was key to tackling climate change;
- (f) encouraged Members to ensure that action taken (i.e. to reduce plastic) would not cause food to spoil quicker and result in a greater amount of food waste at landfill sites.

Referring to the Policy Development Group's Action Plan (to be considered by Cabinet and determined by Council), referred to at recommendation 2.3, a Member asked that an interim report be submitted to Council within six months. The Chair of the Policy Development Group agreed that Members should have regular updates on the Group's work. The first update would be within the next six months.

In closing the debate, Councillor Orson thanked Members for their comments and highlighted the importance of undertaking thorough work on this issue



RESOLVED

- (1) To **DECLARE** a "Climate Emergency", with an aim to make Melton Borough Council activities as far as practical carbon neutral by 2030 and further promote a cutting of emissions within the wider Borough of Melton;
- (2) To **ESTABLISH** a Policy Development Group, comprising of the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Services, the Chair of Scrutiny and three other members, including one from the Opposition Group, as nominated by the Portfolio Holder and the Leader of the Opposition respectively;
- (3) To **AGREE** that the Policy Development Group's Terms of Reference include those items within paragraph 3.9 of the report and the Group provide a costed and affordable Action Plan, setting out how all Council functions and decision making support the aspiration to become carbon

neutral by 2030. The action plan to be considered by Cabinet and determined by Council by April 2020;

(4) To **AGREE** that Council's commitment to climate change be incorporated into the developing Corporate Strategy 2020-2024.

Supporting documents:

- Item 11 - Declaration of a Climate Emergency, item CO28  PDF 130 KB
- Item 11 - Appendix A - Steps Taken to Reduce Emissions from its Activities, item CO28  PDF 64 KB

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