

**Report to:** Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC)

**Date:** 26 January 2023

**Title:** Report of the Scrutiny Emergency Climate Change Panel

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Head of Democratic Services

**Ward(s):** All

**Purpose of report:** To detail the work of the Scrutiny Emergency Climate Change Panel to date and seek the view of Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC) on its terms of reference and direction.

**Recommendations:** That PPAC considers the report and recommended options:  
Namely:

- 1) That the Panel continues as a standing panel with the same terms of reference, but with reduced frequency of meetings, and report back for a review in 1 year (*the Panel's preferred option*); or
- 2) That the Panel continues with a revised terms of reference, and review after a year; or
- 3) That the Panel's work be incorporated into the Work Programme of the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee with regular officer updates to the committee on the delivery of the strategy and action plan and make recommendations to Cabinet.

**Reasons for recommendations:** To meet the requirement of the Panel's Terms of Reference, which is for the Panel to report on its work to the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee, and for the Committee to regularly review the Panel's role.

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## 1 Introduction

1.1 In a motion to Full Council in July 2019, the Council declared a Climate Change Emergency and agreed a number of actions, including:

- *To request Scrutiny Committee to set up a Climate Change Scrutiny Panel that receives progress reports on the policy and actions enacted by the Council to address the 'Climate Emergency'.*

When the Scrutiny Committee next met, in September 2019, it determined the membership of the Panel, comprising 5 members from the Scrutiny Committee, and agreed a set of tasks for this Panel.

- 1.2 The Panel met for the first time in January 2020 and reviewed and confirmed its purpose from the six tasks set by Scrutiny, namely:
- a) To scrutinise both the progress of work being undertaken by the council in tackling climate change, and the effectiveness of the outcomes of that work.
  - b) To receive progress reports on the strategy, policy and actions enacted by the council to address the climate emergency, including measurements and data to evidence progress.
  - c) To monitor the implementation of recommendations made by the Climate Action Group, agreed by Cabinet on 1 July 2019 (see appendix 1 below – Motion to Full Council).
  - d) To undertake policy development activities assisting in the formulation of climate change mitigation and adaptation proposals.
  - e) To invite appropriate experts as and when necessary to provide advice and information to help inform policy development work in relation to climate change.
  - f) To promote the Council's work in this area, engaging with and building partnerships, alongside appropriate Cabinet Members.

## **2 Work to date**

- 2.1 The first 'action point' commitment made by the Council when it declared a Climate Change Emergency in July 2019 was to develop a "comprehensive Climate Change Strategy". Working closely with officers and the Portfolio holder, the Panel focussed its first year on supporting that commitment.
- 2.2 The Strategy was to be largely informed by a collection of 'Expert Panels' and the work of the Climate Action Forum's website and consultation activities. The Panel provided oversight of the formation and outputs of the Expert Panels and provided recommendations for improvements to Forum engagement activity.
- 2.3 The Panel also reviewed, commented and offered suggestions for improvements for the Strategy Framework document and the associated Action Plan during its development and reviewed and offered suggestions regarding the communications plans for the Strategy Framework, including the mix of channels being used.
- 2.4 Following approval of the Strategy Framework by Cabinet, the Panel focussed on providing scrutiny to the progress of the Action Plan. It has done this by:

- **Establishing a regular reporting format for the Action Plan**, and made it a standing item for all Panel meetings in order to monitor progress effectively
- **Seeking officer reports on key areas in the Action Plan**, particularly where progress was noted at risk. Report topics to date have included the issue of unfilled posts, an update of the Green consultancy project and progress on the de-carbonisation of our Housing stock and electric vehicle charging points.
- **Reviewing new policies and strategies being developed in support of the Framework and Action Plan** - for example, the Biodiversity Strategy.
- **Providing early review and input to the Annual Strategy Update reports** (last taken to PPAC Nov 2022) and making recommendations and suggestions regarding areas of focus, presentation of information and balance for level of detail.
- In addition, at the request of PPAC, the Panel has provided oversight, pre-planning, of the Solar Farm project, including scrutiny of community engagement activity.

### **3 Panel meetings**

- 3.1 The Panel is made up of Councillors Adrian Ross (Chair), Nancy Bikson, Robert Banks, Isabelle Linington and Milly Manley. Each year, in May, Council has reappointed the membership unchanged to retain consistency.

The Panel met 8 times in the first year, in support of the development of the Strategy Framework and Action Plan.

The Panel has continued to meet regularly, though less frequently, thereafter, with four meetings in municipal year 2022/23.

- 3.2 With the Strategy Framework firmly established and completion of the recent additional role to provide oversight to the initial development of the solar farm proposals, the Panel felt it was timely to review its role, in line with the Panel's Terms of Reference.

- 3.3 The Panel considered its work to date, and the views submitted by Officers and the Lead Member for Sustainability and, on balance, felt there was value in continuing to have a small, dedicated monitoring group, especially given PPAC's already full Work Programme.

Ideas for future tasks which the Panel considered of benefit included issuing a request to each department to present an update of their carbon net zero plans to the Panel, as a way of encouraging awareness and activity on the matter through the organisation as a whole.

The Panel agreed that meeting 3 times a year was an appropriate level of frequency going forward, with timings set by Officers to ensure the Panel was used to best effect, and that Cabinet Member involvement was in an advisory capacity only, in accordance with the principles of Overview and Scrutiny.

The Panel felt it was important that any changes to its role should be devised to ensure that, going forward, the Panel would be valuable, effective, and avoid unnecessary additional work for Officers.

In conclusion, Panel Members came to an agreed view that option 1 of the recommendations would offer the best approach to ensure that appropriate levels of overview and scrutiny were maintained in support of the Council's long term ambition to achieve carbon net zero levels by 2030.

## **4 Consultation**

4.1 The Panel has sought the views of the Director of Regeneration and Planning, Lead Officer for Sustainability, and Cabinet Member for Sustainability as to its role going forward. The following suggestions were made to the Panel on how to structure its work going forward:

Officers noted that continued scrutiny of the work to make the Council carbon net-zero by 2030 was important and that:

- There is a potential role for a Panel, but now that the strategy is well established, it need meet less regularly, perhaps 2-3 times a year.
- PPAC should consider re-aligning the Panel's focus, to become more 'forward-looking'. For example, noting red and amber flags on the action plan and identifying the potential issues and challenges that projects are facing.
- Officers were supportive of the Panel's suggestion to ask each Department to report on its plans and actions to help the Council meet its net-zero carbon ambition
- It was noted that improved effectiveness relied on more Officers making use of the Panel
- That PPAC consider how it could make better use of the Panel as a supporting resource for overview of any new policy developments that contribute to the Climate Change Action Plan delivery.

4.2 The Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Councillor Mathew Bird, commented that he would like to see the Panel stand (maybe re-named as the Sustainability and Climate Change Panel) with a slightly revised terms of reference and a clear schedule of meetings. It was his view and opinion that the Panel could:

- Play a valuable role in holding the sustainability and climate action plan to account and for the occasional deep dive into specific issues which it could continue to do.

- Have a role in asking external organisations and speakers to attend Council, although in these instances the scrutiny aspect of the subcommittee could be extended to the Lead Portfolio Holder or that questions be put through the Chair.
- Provide a more formal monitoring and evaluation role of the Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan.
- The Panel should not place any extra strain on resources, which it had occasionally to date. Although a sub-committee of PPAC, it was important there was a clear distinction between the two, to avoid filling the same role.

#### 4.3 **Consideration of the Panel**

The Panel considered the report of its work and the views expressed in the consultation regarding its role going forward and, on balance, felt there was value in continuing to have a small, dedicated monitoring group, especially given PPAC's already full Work Programme.

Ideas for future tasks which the Panel considered of benefit included issuing a request to each department to present an update of their carbon net zero plans to the Panel, as a way of encouraging awareness and activity on the matter through the organisation as a whole.

The Panel agreed that meeting 3 times a year was an appropriate level of frequency going forward, with timings set by Officers to ensure the Panel was used to best effect, and that it should be noted that Cabinet Member involvement was in an advisory capacity only, in accordance with the principles of Overview and Scrutiny.

The Panel felt it was important that any changes to its role should be devised to ensure that, going forward, the Panel would be valuable, effective, and avoid unnecessary additional work for Officers.

The Panel agreed to propose the following options to PPAC for its consideration:

- To continue as a standing panel with the same terms of reference, but with reduced frequency of meetings, and report back to PPAC for a review in 1 year.
- To continue with a revised terms of reference, following a review and amendments to bullet points a-f (Section 1.2) by PPAC, and review after a year.
- That the work of the Panel be incorporated into the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee's Work Programme, with officers providing regular updates on the delivery of the strategy and action plan to PPAC and make recommendations to Cabinet.

In conclusion, Panel Members agreed that, in its view, option 1 of the recommendations would offer the best approach to ensure that appropriate levels of overview and scrutiny were maintained in support of the Council's long term ambition to achieve carbon net zero levels by 2030.

**5 Financial appraisal -**

It is not envisaged that there will be any direct financial implications other than staff time involved in supporting the panel. *(nb: No change from the analysis reported at the time of the Panel's creation.)*

**6 Legal implications –**

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

*Date of legal review: 05.01.23*

*Legal ref: 011712-LDC-OD*

**7 Risk management implications –**

“A climate change panel will provide additional overview and scrutiny of actions being taken by the council to address climate change which may help to reduce the risk of the council's policy aspirations not being achieved.” *(nb: No change from the analysis reported at the time of the Panel's creation.)*

**8 Equality analysis –**

There are no direct equality implications arising from this report.

**9 Environmental sustainability implications -**

The establishment of a climate change panel will help the council to progress its commitment to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. *(nb: No change from the analysis reported at the time of the Panel's creation.)*

**10 Appendices**

- None

**11 Background papers**

The background papers used in compiling this report were as follows:

- [Printed minutes 12th-Sep-2019 14.00 Lewes District Council Scrutiny Committee Replaced by Policy and Performance Advisory Committee.pdf \(lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk\)](#)
- Minutes of Scrutiny Emergency Climate Change Panel, January 2020-October 2022.