

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY WORKING GROUP

6 September 2023

Commenced: 4.30pm

Terminated: 6.10pm

Present: Councillors Naylor (Chair), Axford, Boyle, Ferguson, Jones, Mills and Pearce

In Attendance:

Ben Middleton	Assistant Director, Strategic Property
Graham Holland	Planning Policy Team Manager
Nicky Marshall	Greenspace Development Manager
Jo Oliver	Head of Waste Management and Fleet Services
Luke Mirfin	Market Events and Communications Manager
Christina Morton	Environmental Development Officer
Richard Hooton	Senior Communications Officer

Apologies for Absence: Councillor S Homer

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

11. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Climate Emergency Working Group held on 14 June 2023 were approved as a correct record.

12. GREATER MANCHESTER GREEN CITY REGION UPDATE

The Chair, Councillor Naylor, gave a verbal update in respect of the August meeting of the Greater Manchester Green City Region Partnership. Members were informed that:

- There had been focus on the terms of reference and review of the Five Year Plan;
- Retrofitting of Greater Manchester's public transport fleet continued at pace and 95 percent of the fleet were now meeting the required standard;
- A presentation was provided by the Swift and House Martin Group, outlining the threat to the species from house building practices and insulation. The Chair would request information from the organisation relating to Tameside so that this could be shared with officers.

13. CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The panel received an update from the Assistant Director, Strategic Property in relation to the Council's Climate and Environment Action Plan. The five priority areas of the Action Plan were greenspace & biodiversity; homes, workspace & council buildings; influencing others; reducing consumption & procuring sustainably; and travel & transport.

Members were informed that the Strategy and accompanying Action Plan was adopted in 2021 and took its lead from the Greater Manchester Five Year Environmental Plan.

Each priority area, along with how each would be achieved, was detailed and a RAG rating had been provided indicating the level of progress against each area. Those areas rated as red were experiencing delays in being completed and colleagues had identified the barriers to completion.

Areas coloured in amber faced delays but were being managed and green areas showed those which had been completed. It was explained that the document was a working one and actions would be both removed and added as time progressed.

A number of the actions were achievable now whilst some were aspirations for the longer term.

RESOLVED

That the content of the update be noted.

14. CARBON LITERACY TRAINING UPDATE

The Environmental Development Officer provided an update in relation to carbon literacy training. The mandatory course had been uploaded to My Learning for all Tameside staff to complete by the end of December 2023.

Members were informed that the course was designed to assist all colleagues in gaining an understanding of the challenge faced and how our everyday actions could affect the climate. The course would provide an awareness and starting point to making real change in the way we all tackled the climate emergency and covered everything from an overview of the causes of climate change to looking how climate change would affect us all locally, nationally and globally.

It was then highlighted that the course went onto provide information about what was being done across Greater Manchester. This started with the Greater Manchester Five Year Environmental Action Plan at a GMCA level, down to the Climate Change and Environment Strategy and Action Plan at a Tameside level. Details of Tameside's role would be provided, including what had been delivered so far and what still needed to be done.

The 'What Can You Do?' section of the training examined the carbon footprint of a number of key areas such as transport, waste and energy, to provide a clearer picture of how our everyday behaviour used carbon and contributed to the challenge of climate change. A number of solutions and areas to consider were then provided to help us reduce our carbon footprints.

Each section of the course had a knowledge check to test understanding and ensure clarity of learning.

Whilst the training and knowledge checks were designed to be introductory, it was important that all staff had a greater understanding of how their actions could have an impact on climate change and the environment.

A discussion ensued regarding expanding the training course to both Members and partner organisations. The Environmental Development Manager advised that there was the potential for the training to be adapted and the Chair was keen that all Members had to access to the training module.

RESOLVED

That the content of the presentation be noted.

15. WASTE / GREENING THE FLEET UPDATE

Consideration was given to a presentation of the Head of Waste Management and Fleet Services providing an update on waste and greening the fleet.

Members were informed of a number of updates in relation to government policy, including extended producer responsibility for packing waste, the deposit return scheme and waste and recycling collection consistency.

In relation to extended producer responsibility, it was explained that packaging producers would be charged according to the amount of packaging material they placed on the market. This would generate a fund that would be allocated to local authorities. Local authorities would receive financial support for collection, recycling, treatment, and disposal of packaging with payments being based on modelled costs. It was expected that basis payments would begin in Spring 2024 and had previously been delayed due to the cost of living crisis and pressure from industry.

Government was seeking agreement on a nationwide deposit return scheme following delays to the Scottish scheme earlier this year. Agreement was sought on which materials would be covered. Whilst local authorities had expressed some concern regarding the scheme, as they were able to generate income from high quality recycled material, Members welcomed the proposed introduction as a means to reduce litter on the borough's streets.

To date, the Council had not been provided with any further information regarding the consistency of collections, including frequency, items to be collected, weekly volumes and weekly food waste collections. The scheme was politically contentious but was needed to improved recycling rates. A consultation was also taking place on the removal of bulky waste charges in 2025.

Details of the borough's bio-waste tonnages were provided to the group and it was explained that there was a spike the week commencing 15 May following the King's Coronation bank holiday due to an increase in individuals undertaking gardening over the long weekend. Bio-waste rounds were also stood down during the bank holiday weekend to allow waste staff the opportunity to enjoy the festivities.

The Council had stopped providing caddy liners to residents in early July and any remaining stocks were currently available from the borough's libraries. Members were pleased to note that bio-waste tonnages had not decreased since the ceasing of free caddy liners.

A summary of complaints data relating to Waste Services was provided and it was explained that overall there had been a significant decrease in complaints, though there had been a slight increase to 24 complaints in August. It was explained that this coincided with bio-waste rounds being stood down due to issues with staff absence in August. Waste Services would work with HR to address this issue. Overall, the service undertook approximately 11 million collections per year.

Greening the fleet remained a key priority of the Council and it was advised that the authority had 146 vehicles or plant items, ranging from dumper trucks to mowers. This represented a reduction of a third from 2011.

The Council had approved a Seven Year Fleet Replacement Strategy in 2022 and approval was currently being sought to procure three replacement electric vans along with 23 other vehicles/plant. It was highlighted that options for other vehicles such as waste collection vehicles were limited, as they required significant investment in charging or alternative fuel provision. Vehicle prices had also risen significantly in recent times due to inflation, supply chain issues and the covid-19 pandemic legacy.

RESOLVED

That the content of the presentation be noted.

16. SINGLE USE PLASTICS BAN

Consideration was given to a presentation of the Markets Events and Communication Manager outlining the implications of a ban on single use plastics in the borough's markets.

Members were informed that currently it was estimated that England used 2.7 billion items of single use cutlery each year, and 721 million single-use plastic plates. Disappointingly, only 10 percent of these items were currently recycled.

From the 1 October 2023, the government had announced that it would be extending the ban on single use plastics, following a ban already in place on plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds. Items covered under the ban included single use plastic plates, trays, bowls, cutlery, balloon sticks and certain types of polystyrene cups and food containers. The ban also covered single use plastic items that were biodegradable, compostable and recycled including items wholly or partly made from plastic including a coating or lining.

Any business that continued to supply banned single-use plastic items following the introduction of the legislation in October could be liable to a fine.

Details of the impact upon businesses in the markets were outlined to the group:

- Swapping plastic for bamboo or wooden cutlery for takeaway food;
- Swapping plastic for metal cutlery for in-house guests;
- Swapping single use plastic plates or bowls for re-usable alternatives that could be washed;
- Offering paper plates instead of plastic;
- Offering to refill customers' water bottles or travel cups; and
- Encouraging customers to bring their own clean containers for takeaway food.

To ensure that market traders were able to adapt to the changes, details of the new legislation had been announced in January, which had given businesses time to plan, prepare and make changes. Suppliers had been active in contacting businesses and assisting with plastic free alternatives. In addition, there had been regular newsletter updates, promotional display materials and work with key services, including Trading Standards.

Whilst prices for plastic free alternatives were often higher, it was anticipated that once the ban was introduced that prices of these items would start to fall.

RESOLVED

That the content of the presentation be noted.

17. BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

Consideration was given to a presentation of the Greenspace Development Manager and Planning Policy Manager providing details in relation to biodiversity net gain.

Members were informed that the Environment Act 2021 legislated for mandatory net gains for biodiversity as a requirement of most new development consented to by a local planning authority. It was explained that biodiversity net gain was a significant part of the government's objective to improve the environment for future generations as endorsed by the 25 Year Environmental Plan. The intention was that it would contribute to the recovery of nature whilst developing land.

The net gain requirement applied from November 2023 for development under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, unless they were exempt, and to small sites from April 2024. The Council, as the local planning authority would be required to approve a biodiversity net gain plan, where this formed a requirement of an application for planning permission to ensure that a net gain would be achieved. Consultation would be undertaken the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) who provided specialist ecological advice.

Details of the requirements of biodiversity net gain for developers were highlighted to Members. Developers would be required to avoid the loss of habitats in the first instance and that net gain

should first be delivered on the development site itself, through avoidance, minimising loss, and seeking restoration of what already existed. In circumstances where this could not be achieved, a habitat had to be created either on-site or off-site.

In cases where gains had to be made off-site, the land either had to be within the developer's direct control or where a biodiversity unit had been bought from a third part land manager. Developers would be able to choose how to source off-site credits and there would be an open market for biodiversity credits with developers able to choose whom they wished to achieve their off-site credit with. Members were informed that there was expected to be significant demand for off-site credits.

It was highlighted that those units created closer to a development site would be weighted more favourably than those further away or of a lesser ecological priority. This would in effect incentivise a developer to shop closer to home when looking for off-site credits.

The Greenspace Development Manager explained the implications of biodiversity net gain for Council-owned greenspace. Tameside owned and managed a portfolio of greenspace sites with a diverse range of habitats and maintained these areas within the resources available through Operations and Greenspace staff and with the assistance of Greenspace volunteers.

Whilst the management of these sites was acceptable, and in some cases good, it was advised that resources did not allow the Council to enhance these habitats to their full potential. Consequently, biodiversity net gain presented a greater opportunity to receive external funding to enhance biodiversity standards on the land it owned. It was hoped that this would not only enhance Council sites but also assist in meeting its targets around sustainability and achieving net zero.

Land available for enhancement would remain in Council ownership and there would be a contract in place that committed the Council and its partners to carry out the enhancement work and then maintain the site for 30 years to the relevant standard as part of the Management Plan. Therefore, the Council had to carefully consider the land where it made units available for sale as once land was part of a biodiversity net gain agreement, it would not be available for sale or commercial/residential development for 30 years.

A discussion ensued regarding the Council purchasing land in the borough for biodiversity enhancement. The Greenspace Development Manager explained that this would present too great a financial risk for the Council. Members also queried if there was the potential to plant community orchards in each ward but it was advised this was outside the scope of what could be delivered through biodiversity net gain. The Greenspace Development Manager would have further discussions with Members outside of the meeting in relation to the proposals.

RESOLVED

That the content of the presentation be noted.

18. CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMUNICATIONS QUARTERLY UPDATE

Consideration was given to a presentation of the Senior Communications Officer outlining the Environment and Climate Emergency communication's strategy.

Members were informed that a one-stop webpage called 'Think Green' had been launched by the Council. The webpage brought together all elements of the Council's aim to tackle climate change, tips on being more environmentally friendly and access to information on public transport, walking & cycling and parks & countryside. Information on making homes more energy efficient was also available. The Communications Officer highlighted that between 1 June and 15 August, the Think Green webpage had been visited 1,589 times, with recycling the most visited page.

It was explained that there was a monthly focus on particular topics including Let It Bloom in June; Save Money, Save the Planet in July; and Get into the Garden in August. Each of these topics had

been promoted through Facebook and Twitter posts, and details of the posts and their reach were included for Members.

Media coverage continued to form an important part of the Council's communications' strategy. The Tameside Arts Awards had been featured in the Tameside Reporter and Tameside Correspondent as had work to introduce recyclable materials at the borough's markets and Active Tameside venues.

In addition to local campaigns, Communications had also been promoting national events including Love Parks Week between 28 July and 6 August and National Allotments Week between 7 and 13 August. Love Parks Week had received substantial coverage on the Council's social media channels. Specific day events had also taken place, such as World Environment Day on 5 June and National Re-fill Day on 16 June.

Communications for staff and partner organisations were also important and information could be accessed through email signatures, the Chief Executive's Weekly Brief, LiveWire Magazine and staff portal. Partners could access information through Community Champions, the Leader's Weekly Brief and Communications Network.

A summary of upcoming themes was outlined to the Group and Members were urged to contact the Communication's Team with any items that would generate good publicity for the Think Green campaign.

RESOLVED

That the content of the presentation be noted.

19. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

20. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Environment and Climate Emergency Working Group was scheduled to take place on 15 November 2023.

CHAIR