

CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 23RD JANUARY, 2023

A MEETING of the COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the on MONDAY, 23RD JANUARY, 2023, at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Gemma Cobby
Vice Chair – Councillor Nigel Cannings

Panel: - Councillors Emma Muddiman-Rawlins, James Church, Tracey Moran, Julie Grace, Deborah Hutchinson

DMBC

- Dan Weetman - Resilience & Emergency Planning Manager
- Dan Swaine - Director of Economy & Environment
- Richard Smith – Head of Sustainability
- Karen Ratcliffe – Assistant Director of Housing

EXTERNAL

- John Billings, Group Manager from South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue

Cabinet Member:

- Councillor Mark Houlbrook
- Councillor Joe Blackham

9 Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barry Johnson and Gary Stapleton.

10 To consider the extent to which the public and press are to be excluded from the meeting.

None

11 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest made.

12 Public Statements.

There were no public statements made.

13 An overview of the Council's plans and arrangements for responding to the heatwave experienced in 2022

The report provided the Panel with an overview of the plans and arrangements that Doncaster Council had in place to respond to the heatwave experienced in July 2022. Information was provided on how the Council helped partner agencies and the welfare arrangements in place to ensure responding staff were kept safe. It also outlined how the Council and its partners supported vulnerable residents and presented recommendations for future preparedness and response.

John Billings, Group Manager from South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue attended the meeting to provide further details on their response to the heatwave.

A discussion took place that included the following areas;

Council's plans and arrangements for responding to the heatwave in Summer 2022 - It was explained that the Council had a duty of responsibility for civil contingency and therefore provided a co-ordination role. Reference was made to what had been learnt within communities from the floods experienced in 2019.

In terms of the heatwave, it was explained that forecasts from the Met Office had been closely monitored alongside any alerts that came through. It was explained that there was a heatwave contingency plan setting out actions at different levels of alerts. When alert level 3 and 4 were reached, a Tactical Co-ordination Group (TCG) meeting was called at an early stage, ensuring that arrangements were in place to provide an appropriate response. It was continued that the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) who had a coordinating function across South Yorkshire, also called a multi-agency meeting, which was fed into by Doncaster Council.

Council Staff - Members heard how the feedback from staff within the Council had been positive and that staff had been agreeable to the changes made. It was noted that services should already have risk assessments in place to take into account adverse weather. It was explained that such changes included minimised service delivery and back-up to cover shorter days, so that staff were not exposed to extreme heat. Members heard that reminders were sent to Heads of Services around reviewing risk assessments and work patterns for their staff. It was outlined that other options for staff to take, included booking annual leave, starting and finishing work earlier and working from an office base.

Provision of Water – Members were informed that there were 100 free refillable water stations across Doncaster. It was acknowledged that no further action had been required around access to water and if needed, the TCG and LRF could facilitate and co-ordinate that. Assurances were provided that the Council was aware of those residents who were vulnerable, had medical needs or access issues should they require further support.

Vulnerable Residents – Members questioned how Members were supported during the heatwave, particularly those receiving care in their own homes and across adult social care. It was explained that over 3000 additional deaths had been reported across the country during the 5 heatwave periods in 2022. It was recognised that the most vulnerable people included men, those with Dementia or Alzheimer's and over 70s. As part of a set of actions (dependent upon the level of alert), it was explained

that the Council had begun working with those at a higher risk which could have included checking up on those that were vulnerable to review their set up and reinforce advice. It was explained that where adult social care were involved, Council staff were asked to also check room temperatures and access to water. Members were told that the advice in a care home was to identify a cooler space to move residents to.

Wildfires – In reference to the wildfire incidents that took place across Doncaster (including Sprotbrough, Auckley and Clayton), it was noted, that the incident was an unprecedented event that took place across the country and sporadic where they were happening. It was commented that those wildfire incidents were not started deliberately but were taking place in areas near large standing crops in remote locations and was difficult to avoid in the future.

In reference to prioritising 999 calls during the heatwave, it was explained that priority would always be given to life risk as part of a tiered approach. It was outlined that at that time, robust protocols would have been put in place for when incidents may stack up. It was explained that if there had been no follow up calls, then that incident would be stacked, however, if there had, then that incident would be resourced appropriately. Members heard that during the heatwave, officers were mobilised to assess the incident before committing appliances.

Reference was made to mechanisms that could be implemented as part of planning policy, similar to those around flood zones, regarding separation distances close to crops or vegetation.

August Heatwave – An outline was provided around how the TCG had revised its preparations for the August heatwave (following the July heatwave). It was explained that learning implemented following the July heatwave included; improved communications with Managers and staff, signed advice from Action Deafness and finally, reviewing individual risk assessments and Well at Work statements.

High Rise Flats – Members asked about the impact that the heatwave had on residents in flats on the top floor of a building, which was on the south facing side. Members were told that from a Council perspective, it was about issuing advice from local and national guidance. It was stated that the TCG or LRF had not been made aware of any particular issue raised by residents in those positioned flats. It was felt that such issues should be considered going forward as there were people who could be vulnerable in there for a sustained period of time.

The Assistant Director for Housing and Sustainability shared details of a pilot programme recently started with the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commissioner. The pilot involved all Yorkshire and Humber Councils coming together to work through issues in relation to climate change and to consider how services could be adapted. Members were informed that the Panel might wish to invite Officers back at a later date to update them on the learning that has taken place.

Road Conditions – Regarding the impact of the heat on roads, it was explained that the focus was about monitoring those roads repaired during the last 2 years, as this was where the biggest risk would be. Members were informed that there was now a binder top coat available that could be used as part of the surface dressing process, providing a greater resistance to high temperatures and reducing the risk of surface stressing on existing and new roads.

Role of Residents – It was explained by the fire service that when an incident was called in, operators would ‘challenge’ certain aspects of the call to assess whether it required a full response. Members were informed that there were small incident units to deal with more minor incidents, one of which was based in Rossington. It was acknowledged that in extreme circumstances members of the public may asked to become involved with an incident, although it was acknowledged that they would often assist without being asked. It was noted that the main driver around generating community involvement as part of the response was safety, although it was felt there was an opportunity for those considered as community advocates to become involved. It was commented that although there were nationally prescribed processes for Flood Wardens and flood plans, there was nothing similar in place for fire.

Resources – It was recognised that Emergency Planning was much wider than the Council and could always benefit from further additional funding and resources.

Risk of Open Water – It was explained that there was an ongoing process around swimming and the education of children swimming in open water (including making sure every child in the Borough could swim). It was noted that there was a whole set of media messages being used that were reinforced at a local level and in particular followed the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue media alerting approach. These also helped frontline Council and other partner teams to make them aware of the key locations.

Members heard that regular patrols took place in areas known to have open water swimmers and people were advised not to go into the water. It was explained that there were specialist response crews for those sites to make sure that any risk information was up-to-date so that any incidents could be handled quickly.

Animal Welfare – Members were told that there were no specific incidents reported in terms of either domestic pets or farm animals. Members heard that steps taken would include liaising with the relevant arm of DEFRA and receiving guidance. Reference was made to animal breeders and animal boarders who would have licensed conditions that needed to be adhered to. It was noted that the Council would not normally have any control in relation to domestic pets and any incidents would be addressed through liaison with the RSPCA. It was considered that in general, people were aware of the impact of the heatwave on their pets and responded accordingly.

Air Quality – It was shared that as a result of the heatwave and temperature build-up, evidence demonstrated that there had been an impact on air quality through particulates. It was explained that when air quality deteriorates it would cause a national alert and there were none during the heatwave and therefore no additional action needed to be taken.

What Had Worked Well - It was stated that from an employer perspective, this included flexibility around start and finish times, welfare checks, positive working between social care staff and better communication and engagement with Heads of Service and Managers with frontline staff.

It was noted that sharing information had been encouraging, although there it was considered important that the Council should be more involved with live data and understanding the true position of where we were and what realistically could be achieved. It was felt that overall the Council worked well with partners and blue lights with perhaps some learning to be taken around debriefs.

Members were informed that a debrief and an after action review was carried out by the Tactical Coordination Group (TCG) with recommendations being embedded into future preparedness and response. From an Emergency Planning perspective, it was explained that they were looking at reviewing the membership of TCG meetings to ensure that the right people were there, and to undertake some pre-emptive planning to make sure that they have the list of the people needing to be there in advance of an incident. It was added that they would also be reviewing the plans in place with a view to implement the learning from that.

Members heard that the severity of temperatures had been underestimated and going forward should now convince people to take the necessary action. It was noted that we needed to be aware of the increase in the number of places and people in temporary accommodation (such as through the dispersal of asylum seekers refugees), and to be aware of the locations of those buildings to ensure that the relevant agencies could be involved.

From a fire service perspective, it was felt that a great deal had been learnt such as the ability to handle 999 calls. It was continued that from a local perspective they had started to review their plans and ensure that there were specific ones for extreme heat and flooding.

RESOLVED that the Panel note the information provided.

14 Environment & Sustainability Strategy - Update

The purpose of the report was to share further information in the form of an update on activity around the Environment and Sustainability Strategy. A presentation was provided at the meeting, which covered the headlines from the last 12 months and challenges for 2023.

A discussion took place that included the following areas;

111 Actions – It was clarified that the 111 Actions were developed in 2020 following the creation of the Doncaster Climate and Biodiversity commission (Chaired by Ed Miliband MP). It was explained that these actions had been proposed, as they were deemed essential for the delivery and progress of mitigating and adapting to climate change events.

It was outlined that the strategy and actions could be found on the Team Doncaster website under the Environment and Climate section. It was explained that many actions were difficult to monitor and activity was reported against those actions through the Council's performance monitoring system 'Pentana', which produced a quarterly report. Members heard that of the 111 actions, 54 were assigned to Heads of Service, 23 by existing and planned delivery and 39 actions to 4 thematic groups and involved Team Doncaster stakeholders.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Points – Members were informed that on the 15th March 2023, a recommendation would be presented to Cabinet to approve external funding for the installation of 100 charge points around 10/11 locations across the Borough. It was commented that the funding would complement the work being done around charging in public car parks. It was understood that 32-33,000 homes did not have access to off-street parking and presented a pressure in taking this forward.

Members were told how other Local Authorities were trialling alternative options so that more residents could have access to EV charging.

1 Million Tree Target – In reference to the 1 Million Tree target by 2031, it was clarified that this would mean planting 100,000 trees per year. It was explained that it had not been agreed where contributions would come from and it was therefore considered that a Doncaster wide approach was needed. It was explained that efforts would be made to work with as many stakeholders as possible, and by submitting a ‘call to action’ to businesses, residents and community groups to contribute where possible.

It was outlined that the Council had been successful bidding for funding and looking at building staff capacity to maintain new trees. It was clarified that the funding was only for new trees and not the existing tree canopy, which presented challenges in its own right. Members were assured that opportunities would be taken wherever possible.

It was explained that it was important when trees were planted that they were the right species and planted in the right places (to be as mindful as possible to reduce future maintenance requirements). It was therefore hoped that as part of the ‘call to action’, that contributors were able to plant on their own land, where they could manage the trees themselves. It was added that large-scale opportunities were being sought rather than smaller scale activity in urban areas, which would increase more pressure on Street Scene services.

It was continued that with regards to new developments, these were subject to biodiversity net gain improvements, an approach where a development needed to leave a natural environment measurably better than it was before the development. It was noted that whilst this could not always be achieved on site, there were mechanisms in place to ensure that developers financed improvements that could be achieved elsewhere. Members were informed that funding had been secured for the creation of two new posts in the Street Scene Team who would have the responsibility for the watering and maintenance of newly planted trees. Members were assured that the Council would take advantage of all opportunities such as funding, although it was recognised that existing pressures would always be there.

Balancing Economic Development and Aspirations within the Strategy – It was recognised that it was challenging to deliver the objectives of economic development whilst protecting and developing nature. An example was provided of a recent approach negotiated with three housing sites that included; Miller Homes, Keepmoat and Strata, which involved Rose Hill, Carlodge and Hungerhill sites, where the number of homes had been reduced to allow for more habitat and nature. It was hoped that such progress would influence how other developers would move forward in the future although it was recognised that this could impact the overall capital receipt.

Members were reminded that the Council was charged with the delivery of houses and land for housing, generating more financing for Council Tax through housing and Business Rates through employment sites, which was not always conducive with protecting the environment. It was felt that there needed to be some consideration of this at a national level, as the Local Plan target level was above the option that could have been taken. It was recognised that there was a drive to generate money shaping the local economy, which was a challenge to do so without impacting on the natural environment.

Legislation around Waste and Recycling Rules – It was explained that there were a number of local companies that would assist with waste and recycling, although costs had risen in line with demand. Members were informed that in respect of domestic collections, there were separate skips at the Household Waste Recycling Centres across the Borough that were still taking collecting those as bulky waste items. Members were informed that they were still able to collect fly tipping and that performance had improved. Regarding general or domestic waste, it was explained that there was a contract with SUEZ. It was felt going forward, that there was a certain responsibility on businesses and residents to assist to ‘reduce, reuse and recycle’, although this had been a challenge and had been impacted by Covid. In light of forthcoming changes to environmental regulations, it was noted that they could impact collections, for example, it was raised that there were some authorities that charged for green waste. Finally, it was stressed that behaviour and education (with residents and businesses) were areas that would be continued with in trying to influence change.

Supporting Businesses in this Agenda – It was explained that the Council was engaging with those businesses who had been awarded grants, in order to understand what their future plans were and provide support and encouragement. It was explained that the grants awarded ranged from seed and match funding to invest in developments such as installing solar pv panels on premises to improve the motors on shutter doors and initiating lease payments on new EV cars. It was hoped that an update could be provided in the future on what local businesses were achieving.

It was noted that it was a significant challenge to decarbonise businesses across the borough as the vast majority of microbusinesses had a small number of employees and unlikely to have a business plan with objectives (relating to becoming more environmentally friendly and decarbonising). Reference was made to small grants made locally through South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) that would help and support businesses at the beginning of their journey.

Climate Champions – It was noted that the Council had created a brand of ‘Climate Doncaster’ and that the Council and its partners had undertaken a great deal of work towards this. It was hoped that ‘Climate Doncaster’ would help to identify with individual change and point towards achievements taking place within neighbourhoods. It was explained that this information would be pushed out through the media and the press as well as being collected under the Climate Doncaster banner to help show what was being done and influence others. Members were told how the Council was helping to fund community groups with their work as part of ‘Environmental Pride’, which was a partnership approach. Members were provided with an example of a grant awarded for ‘Growing Together Education’ a Community Interest Company which was a working farm shop that provided a Community Café, Community Craft Shop, education and training programmes, was SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and practiced Green Social Prescribing. Members were informed that work was being undertaken with schools to develop climate champions for the future.

The Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Waste, commented how work that had taken place was very much commended and had made great strides over recent months, tackling ambitions within the strategy. It was noted that this work crossed a number of areas that had included waste, housing and EV charging points. It was recognised that all Ward Members, businesses and schools all had their part to play.

Reference was made to the Team Doncaster level group, which brought the Council, NHS and Blue Light Services together to plan a joined approach to environmental issues. Members were told of the NHS's new Green Plan, which looked at all aspects of the organisations operation and included looking at what materials were purchased, how sites were run, how they recycled and finally, the environmental treatments of the estate. It was considered important that the Council exercised its place leadership role although acknowledged that there was a framework in place where all big landowners and agencies come together to plan that work

RESOLVED that the Panel note and consider the information received.

15 Community and Environment Scrutiny Review - Community Asset Transfer process

The Senior Governance Officer provided an outline of the Panel's review, which considered the Council's Community Asset Transfer process. It was explained that the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) was a process that allowed a community organisation to take over publicly owned land or buildings in a way that recognised the public benefits resulting from a transfer. An outline was provided on how the Panel held a number of meetings to engage and seek the views of Officers, a National Membership Network (supporting local community organisations) as well as looking at the process and practice within another Local Authority. The Panel also heard about a range of case studies and heard the views of Members who had worked with groups involved in the process. During the review period, the Panel also considered the proposed Strategic Asset Management Strategy 2023-2030, scheduled for consideration by Cabinet on the 1st February 2023.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Enforcement acknowledged receipt of the recommendations.

RESOLVED that;

- a. The Panel agreed the recommendations from the review as included in Appendix A of the report; and
- b. That the recommendations (incorporating the feedback provided on the proposed Strategic Asset Management Strategy 2023-2030) and a report outlining the findings of the review be forwarded to the Executive for consideration.

16 Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan and Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Senior Governance Officer presented the Scrutiny Work Plan that had recently been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____