

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Climate Change Scrutiny Panel

Monday, 12 October 2020 at 6.30 pm

Councillors Present:

K L Jaggard (Chair)

J Hart, T Lunnon and A Pendlington

Also in Attendance:

Councillor I T Irvine and P C Smith

Officers Present:

Russell Allison	Housing Enabling and Development Manager
Karen Dodds	Head of Crawley Homes
Heather Girling	Democratic Services Officer
Alan Moore	Mechanical, Electrical and Energy Efficiency Surveyor
Clem Smith	Head of Economy and Planning
Louise Skipton-Carter	Sustainability Manager

1. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations

No disclosures of whipping declarations were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Climate Change Scrutiny Panel Committee held on 10 September 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Witness Sessions

The Chair provided some background information on the Panel and then witnesses were asked for their views on residential/domestic buildings operating environmentally sustainable facilities within the town achieving a low-carbon future, together with understanding the challenges faced – now and in the future.

Crawley Homes, as part of Crawley Borough Council is the town's largest landlord. The Council also has a number of legal responsibilities towards residents in the private housing sector. The Council works with developers, landowners and residents to guide and facilitate new development, and works on projects in order to create both a high quality environment and a high quality of life.

Karen Dodds (Head of Crawley Homes), Russell Allison (Housing Enabling and Development Manager), Alan Moore (Mechanical and Electrical Surveyor) and Councillor Irvine updated the Panel that:

- Crawley Homes was currently working towards the Government's target of carbon neutral homes by 2050.
- There was a programme of loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and external wall installation to improve the energy performance of homes and in particular to address aspects of fuel poverty. Work had been undertaken since 2012 which had included a retrofit programme to reduce energy output in homes.
- Different approaches and technology worked for existing properties and new builds. It was important to identify the best solution and approach to ensure homes were future proof.
- It was important to understand how residents live and how best to use the technology to evaluate the ideal solution.

Panel Members raised a number of queries. The issues raised and the key responses included:

- Confirmation that smart meters were currently only being installed on void properties due to a current shortage. However at the DHN sites, these were automatically fitted with smart meters.
- Acknowledgement that historically a programme had been completed around insulation. Now a timetable was in place to complete those sites where previously access was unobtainable, there was an option to install deeper insulation for leaseholder flats where grants were available.
- There had been significant improvements in performance of cavity wall insulation but it was noted that whilst this had benefits for properties and energy efficiency this could become costly for leaseholders.
- Some homes may require extensive maintenance to ensure they maintain a fit for habitation status. All options needed to be considered in order to provide higher energy efficient standard, including retrofitting or potential regeneration to improve dwelling density and ensure homes were fit for future generations. Feasibility study appraisals would be undertaken when required.
- Confirmation that with regards to the installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging points within future developments these were reviewed as part of the new build specifications and would also form part of any regeneration. It was noted that quite often EV points fall out of the Crawley Homes remit, and were being planned as part of the current West Sussex wide EV Charging Network project. However with the increase in town centre housing locations offering limited parking spaces it was felt that car clubs may provide alternative provision.
- Acknowledgement that the air source heat pumps that were installed as a trial were not a 'one size fits all' approach. The Net Zero Collective initial study would look at current energy performance and data. It would be important to ascertain the best fit for the each property type. It was noted that a full data study would be carried out in conjunction with Southampton university research team. Volunteer tenants had been identified across a range of property age/construction types and survey equipment had been fitted. It was estimated that full data would be available summer 2021 whereby it was anticipated that an efficiency plan could be developed. There could also be the option to liaise with Crawley College to assist and train individuals to fit the technology, however funding would need to be made available.
- Recognition that the eneriesprong whole house approach whilst effective was also costly, particularly for leaseholders. It was noted that the funding was for Crawley Homes' properties and tenants.

- Confirmation that UPVC windows were currently still the best approach, although this was assessed regularly as part of the specification reviews. However they had been used for a long period due to the cost effectiveness and performance. There was a need to strike a balance between budget and value for money together with the environmental concerns and lack of maintenance required.
- Whilst the Government's current Green Homes Grant could not be utilised by Crawley Homes' tenants, the council would identify any funding opportunities when they became available.

RESOLVED

That Panel Members thanked all attendees for their attendance and contribution. The discussions had been informative and would aid the Panel in forming its recommendations.

4. General Updates

Louise Skipton-Carter (Sustainability Manager) and Clem Smith (Head of Economy and Planning) updated the Panel on key projects and initiatives.

- In order to assist and influence home owners there were various initiatives available:
 - Solar Together Scheme – This was a group buying programme for solar PV panels and battery storage, whereby home owners and SMEs could apply. It was run in conjunction with most district and borough councils within West Sussex. Residents register their interest and a reverse auction takes place with the winning bidder setting a competitive price for all solar and battery systems. All installers were pre-vetted and must comply with criteria to guarantee the quality of the offer. Installations for the first auction in October 2020 would be completed by May 2021.
 - Energy Switching - Robin Hood Energy, who provided the white label company for Your Energy Sussex, had been sold to Centrica, the parent company of British Gas. Existing Your Energy Sussex customers had been contacted and were able to continue with their existing energy tariff for the duration of their current supply agreement or be able to switch supplier, as Robin Hood Energy had offered a green energy tariff.
 - iChoosr - an alternative for energy switching. iChoosr hold three auctions in February, May and October in which energy companies bid their best prices to beat competitors and gain a large number of new customers. The more people who take part, the greater our chances of getting a competitive energy deal.
 - Green Homes Grant - homeowners or residential landlords could apply for a Green Homes Grant voucher towards the cost of installing energy efficient improvements (primary and secondary measures – criteria applies). Vouchers cover two-thirds of the cost of eligible improvements, up to a maximum government contribution of £5,000. Individuals in receipt of certain benefits may be eligible for a voucher covering 100% of the cost of the improvements. The maximum value of the voucher was £10,000.
 - Warmer Sussex – whilst still in its infancy, the Whole House Plan provided homeowners with an overview of their home and its current energy requirements. Using the information gathered during a survey home and a conversation with an energy advisor this would demonstrate all of the possible improvements to be made, indicative costs of these measures and the impact these will have on the energy efficiency, comfort and environmental impact of an individual's home. A report was then prepared and expert advice outlining the next stages including finalising

specification, gathering prices from several vetted contractors, putting contracts in place, overseeing the quality of the work, dealing with any disputes and signing off the work.

- Towns Investment Fund – this incorporated a number of areas including (if successful) £5m green retrofitting grant fund for homes across the borough from April 2021 over a period of five years, £2.5m green tech business grants to assist businesses with expertise in installing the new technology and green construction skills training at Crawley College to help up-skill the local workforce. It was noted that the Towns Investment Fund was currently under consideration, with the outcome due imminently and councillors would be updated accordingly.

Panel Members raised a number of queries. The issues raised and the key responses included:

- Confirmation that unfortunately there was not a direct replacement for Robin Hood energy green tariff and this was currently being investigated as the preference was to promote a green tariff.
- It was felt that there was a need to promote the initiatives and projects to local residents, particularly when trying to influence the need for green tariffs and energy efficiency.

RESOLVED

That Panel Members thanked the Head of Economy and Planning and the Sustainability Manager for the informative updates.

5. Actions and Information

Following the witness sessions and the action points above, it was agreed that another meeting would be required to briefly pull everything together and establish the recommendations and format for the draft report.

The recommendations from each of the Panel's meetings had been noted and these had been issued to Panel members along with the proposed voting process on 29 September 2020. Currently there have been no comments or queries received. Any Panel members wishing to submit any views or queries it was requested that these be emailed through by 23 October 2020 otherwise it would be anticipated these would be included in the paperwork for the November meeting.

The meeting date was agreed as follows: Wednesday 11 November 2020 at 7.00pm.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Climate Change Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.34 pm

K L Jaggard (Chair)