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Agenda item

Report of the Task and Finish Group on Council Housing Zero Carbon Retrofit

- [Meeting of SWT Community Scrutiny Committee, Thursday, 27th January, 2022 6.15 pm \(Item 76.\)](#)
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This is the final report of the Task and Finish Group chaired by Councillor Dave Mansell.

This matter is under the responsibility of Executive Councillor for Housing, Cllr Francesca Smith

Covering Report Author: Marcus Prouse – Specialist – Governance and Democratic

Minutes:

Cllr Mansell gave a presentation on the work of the Zero Carbon Retrofit Task and Finish Group:

- The Task and Finish Group was set up by the Scrutiny Committee before it was spilt into two separate Scrutiny Committees.
- Membership of the Task and Finish Group was Cllr David Mansell, Cllr Norman Cavill, Cllr Ian Aldridge, Cllr Alan Wedderkopp and Cllr John Hassall. The group was supported by officers.
- Eight online meetings were held. Presentations were given by officers as well as from representatives of external organisations such as Sanctuary Housing.
- The group sought to look at ways to undertake zero carbon retrofits and looked at what would be needed to achieve zero carbon and carbon neutrality.
- The group looked at whole house retrofit which involved retrofitting the whole house. This could be beneficial as only insulating one area, such as the loft, could lead to damp in certain areas of a house.
- The group considered Energiesprong which looked like a good method for retrofit. Also looked at what other councils were doing and other retrofit approaches.
- Near the end of the group's work a guide called the LETI retrofit guide was published.

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- The group looked at a comparison between the cost of gas and electricity. There were levies on electricity which made it more expensive even though it was the cleaner fuel. A comparison of heat pumps and gas boilers was also undertaken.
- Announcements about government policy and funding had been made recently.
- Energiesprong used a wrapping layer around the outside of a house to insulate it. This was both more beneficial than interior insulation and was also designed to be more cost effective. There were a number of local authorities working with and using Energiesprong and Energiesprong had government support, however, the cost of Energiesprong was currently still relatively high.
- An explanation of the recommendations in the report of the Task and Finish Group were given.
- The following was highlighted from the recommendations the Task and Finish Group put forward; a need for a guide for the net zero retrofit of the council's housing stock, the potential for work to be done in stages based on a whole house approach, a target date needed for gas boilers to cease being fitted in the Council's housing stock, solar and thermal panels being provided where there was a business need for it, a report being produced on what would be needed to achieve a net zero retrofit programme and funding being sought for carbon retrofit.
- It was raised that there was greater use of electricity planned, for example to power cars and for heating. Greater energy efficiency was therefore needed, as well as more zero carbon electricity and more renewable energy production.
- The use of the LETI guide for retrofit was encouraged.

The Chair thanked Cllr Mansell for his presentation.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change introduced the report:

- Thanked Cllr Mansell and the others on the Task and Finish Group for all their work. The level of detail in the report was commendable.
- Raised that it was a complicated situation without an easy solution. We were in a transition period during which we would have to decide what to prioritise as part of the transition process.

The Assistant Director for Housing and Communities introduced the report:

- There was significant consensus between the Task and Finish Group and officers.
- Officers were working hard to deliver a strategy and a delivery plan. These would consider the variables such as different property types and provide fully costed options.
- It was raised that there would be a balance to be struck between speed of transition and cost.

produced.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- It was asked about fuel poverty and whether any work had been done elsewhere in the country to identify the fuel poverty tipping point. Officers responded that fuel poverty had been an issue in social housing for a long time. Officers would look to measure the impact of retrofit in terms of fuel poverty as part of the assessment of various options.
- It was asked what impact Unitary would have upon any decisions the Council may make in relation to this subject. Officers responded that the HRA would still face the same issues when the new authority was formed. The money in the HRA was ringfenced, there was a 30-year business plan and business would have to continue. The HRA would combine with Sedgemoor's when the new authority formed and partnership working with Sedgemoor had already begun. Financial decisions which bound the new authority would have to be made in accordance with the legislation. However, the ringfencing of the HRA funds and the 30-year business plan would enable some work to continue.
- It was asked about the kilo watt hours per year per square meter measurement and whether this was based floor area or footprint of the area. Officers responded that the measurements tended to be based on square meterage, so a volume of air that needs to be heated. There would be a need to understand the energy usage for different archetypes, for example a bungalow or a terraced house.
- It was raised that the cost of a fuel did not relate to the amount of energy in it. Even with gas prices rising, electricity was still around three times more expensive.
- It was asked if funds could be borrowed from the Public Loans Board for investment in retrofit. It was responded by officers that money could be borrowed but generally in the business plan the revenue set aside against depreciation of the housing stock was generally what funded the capital replacement programme. Ultimately action would be determined by affordability and what could be achieved alongside all the other costs the HRA faced. A range of treasury options for funding any work was always considered.
- Support was expressed for insulating homes.
- It was raised that properties in higher exposure zones, namely zones 4 and 3, were not best suited to have things such as cavity wall insulation or ground source heat pumps. Instead, retrofit solutions in these zones would be more expensive. It was asked if this had been considered. Officers responded that the comments were noted and when a strategy was brought forward these aspects would be considered.
- It was raised that there were government grants available for insulation being fitted in homes. Officers responded that there were a range of government grants available, some of which were open to the Council as a Landlord, such as subsidies for heat pumps which the Council had received, and others were not.
- It was suggested that it would be worthwhile making a commitment to when properties should be insulated by in addition to when gas boilers should cease to be installed. The Chair of the Task and Finish Group agreed that deadlines for installing insulation as well as deadlines for gas boilers ceasing to be installed would be important.

- It was asked if any research had been done into tenants' reception to improvement works for the purpose of achieving net zero. A representative of the Task and Finish Group suggested it would be best to work with tenants who were supportive first and then expand from there. There would be disruption during installation but there would be benefits in terms of reductions to energy bills.
- It was asked if the installation of electric vehicle charging points would be included in this work. The Chair of the Task and Finish Group expressed support for this being included.
- It was asked how practical converting the Council's housing stock would be, for example in relation to radiators. It was suggested that looking into central heating systems for groups of houses may be worthwhile as these could use existing radiators. The Chair of the Task and Finish Group responded that each property would have to be looked at individually for what the best solution was. Central Heating Systems and Heat Networks had been looked at by the group. They could be beneficial but could also be expensive although there was some government support.
- The Chair of the Task and Finish Group noted that gas in gas boilers and electricity in heat pumps had been compared by the group. At the current time electricity and gas were quite close to each other in terms of how clean they were as an energy source, but electricity would continue to become cleaner. A heat pump halved the carbon used compared to gas. Heat pumps were more expensive to buy and install currently but there were government grants and costs should decrease over time.
- It was raised that plans and information on retrofit should be publicised to the public and it was suggested it would be beneficial to look beyond the Council's own housing stock as the Council's own housing stock was only a small percentage of the homes in the district.
- Concerns were raised about fuel poverty.
- It was asked how much had already been done to retrofit the Council's housing stock and what was left to be done and what the costings for retrofit would be. The Chair of the Task and Finish Group responded that the group had looked at the costs of retrofit and included some examples but that no precise costings had been done. It would however be a sizeable sum to undertake a complete retrofit of the Council's housing stock.
- The Chair of the Working Group expressed that they hoped their work had helped to inform what the Housing Directorate would bring forward in their strategy. The group intended the recommendations to act as a steer for officers.
- The Chair of the Task and Finish Group proposed that the report proceed to the Executive and then to the Full Council

The Committee resolved to approve recommendation 2.2 of the report:

2.2 To note the report of the Task and Finish Group on Council Housing Zero Carbon Retrofit.

- The Chair suggested that the Committee pass the report in its entirety to the Executive and the Leader. This would exclude the committee recommending the report to Full Council, with this decision left to the Executive.

- Officers responded that ahead of the report going to the Executive they would add further officer commentary and detail and that they would look at the wording of the recommendations to ensure it would not bind the Council to anything which would not be achievable financially.
- The Chair of the Task and Finish report agreed support for the report going to the Executive.

The Committee resolved to submit the entirety of the report of the Task and Finish Group to the Executive and the Leader of Council for review.

James Barrahan and Marcus Prouse left the meeting at this point.

Supporting documents:

- [Report of the Task and Finish Group on Council Housing Zero Carbon Retrofit, item 76.](#)  PDF 227 KB
- [Appendix A - Report of the Task and Finish Group, item 76.](#)  PDF 893 KB
- [Appendix B - Officer Response Document, item 76.](#)  PDF 196 KB
- [Appendix C - Terms of Reference, item 76.](#)  PDF 388 KB

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