
COMMUNITIES AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 14th July, 2025

Present:	Councillor Stephen Button (in the Chair), Councillors David Heap, Loraine Cox, Clare McKenna, Clare Yates, Jodi Clements (Vice Chair) and Noordad Aziz Cooptees Sandie Dent, Rawstron and Jean Battle
In Attendance:	Councillor Ethan Rawcliffe, Ian Marfleet (The Regeneration Project Manager) Stuart Sambrook (Policy Manager)
Apologies:	Councillors Tina Walker and Mike Booth

90 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mike Booth and Tina Walker.

Councillors Aziz acted as substitute representative for Councillor Booth.

91 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Jackie Rawstrone, Co-optee member of the Committee, declared a personal interest in item 6 of the agenda, Allotment Review, due to her holding a tenancy of a Council allotment. She remained in the meeting and participated in the discussion.

There were no dispensations declared at the meeting.

92 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Communities and Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee, held on 4th March 2025, were submitted for approval as a correct record.

Resolved – That the minutes of the last meeting held on 4th March 2025 be approved as a correct record.

93 Overview & Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2025-26

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer submitted a report seeking approval of the work programme for the Communities and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2025-26.

Resolved - That the work programme for the Communities and Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee be approved for 2025-26.

94 Draft Climate Strategy & Action Plan

The Policy Manager submitted a report to consult the Committee on the draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan and sought comment from Committee. He also gave a presentation to update Committee on Hyndburn wide CO2 emissions and the Council's transition to Carbon Net Zero. He provided details of:

- The background to the Council's climate change initiatives, starting with the Green Agenda in 2018, which had resulted in the Council declaring a Climate Emergency in 2019.
- The importance of limiting global warming to 1.5c or staying well below 2c to try to achieve pre-industrial levels and to achieve a 7.6% annual reduction in carbon emissions that would be required to achieve net zero targets.
- The focus of the Strategy in showing the achievements to date, emissions of Council activity and Hyndburn wide, carbon reduction pathway, natural solutions, partnership work and the Action Plan.
- HBC Carbon footprint and a levelling off in the trajectory in achieving a reduction of carbon emissions in recent years.
- The continuation of LCC aiming to reduce transport emissions through the promotion of using electric vehicles by installing charging points across the borough.
- The work of the Council in decarbonising its public buildings and action it has taken to reduce carbon emissions such as changing fuel used by its vehicles to hydro-treated veg oil and procuring green renewable energy when possible.
- The importance of offsetting the harmful effect of climate change through work to develop areas of biodiversity and planting trees. Tree coverage in the UK was the lowest in Europe.
- The work of the Net Zero Working Group and the focus of their work.

The Policy Manager also informed the Committee that Hyndburn Council had set aside a £1m climate reserve pot to help to achieve Hyndburn's target to make the Council's activities net zero carbon by 2030 which clearly demonstrated the Council's determination to tackle global warming. The Council had used this funding in various ways including:

- The appointment of two Officers – a Home Energy Reduction Officer and a Natural Spaces Project Officer over a 3-year period.
- The acquisition of Bury Meadows with initial improvements and planned works.
- The natural solutions programmes delivered by external organisations over 3 years
- Installation of solar panels to improve energy efficiency at the Market Hall.

This budget had substantially been allocated and required further funding to achieve any future progression, particularly if the net zero targets were to be achieved.

He explained that to help provide direction with the transition to net zero and after the Council's recent Corporate Peer Challenge, an action plan had been created to provide further guidance in the following areas:

- Reduction of fuel poverty
- Making the Council's activities and operations net zero by 2030
- Removal of fossil fuel from Council-owned assets, focusing on the highest emitters and buildings at risk
- Enhancing green open spaces and the natural environment

- Increasing housing growth
- Increasing employment and business growth.

Members of the Committee were invited to ask questions and raised the following issues:

- Who would work with local businesses/companies to encourage working towards net zero?
- How could there be greater awareness and access to grants for home energy efficiency improvements and to increase public confidence in choosing a genuine company.
- How Hyndburn's housing stock contributed to climate change.
- The number of empty properties and dereliction around Accrington town centre being a contributor to climate change and how a change in street scene, increasing ecology, could help to offset carbon emissions.

Ian Marfleet advised the Committee that, since 2024, all businesses had to submit an onsite biodiversity net gain or pay off site biodiversity net gain. He also pointed out that the Council had contracts with third parties to plant trees in the borough and that work was ongoing with private farmers to improve their lands for sustainable farming. These action types all required support from the Council.

Resolved

- (1) **That the Committee be provided with an update on the Council's strategy for dealing with empty business properties;**
- (2) **That Cabinet be requested to give consideration to extending the Council's Climate fund in order to facilitate the Council's ability to achieve its net zero targets;**
- (3) **That the Head of Regeneration and Housing be requested to give consideration to carrying out a stock condition survey of housing in the borough to provide clarity in understanding the level of work required to achieve its net zero targets.**

95 Review of Allotments

The Regeneration Project Manager submitted a report to provide an overview of the Allotments Service.

He explained that:

- There were 730 allotment plots over 24 allotment sites, which covered an area of land of 26.1 Ha.
- The average plot size was 340m².
- The National Allotment Society (NAS) recommended a target number of allotment plots per 1,000 households as 20. Hyndburn had 24.5 allotment plots per 1,000 households – 22% greater than required.
- A draft allotment consultation had been drafted for 2025.
- He referenced the percentage of respondents in relation to a consultation of allotment tenants held in 2018 and of the key outcomes.
- The last tenancy agreement was extremely detailed, and had been approved in March 2014

- The provision of allotments had been subject to numerous rent reviews as outlined in 3.4 of the report.
- He gave details of the budget break down and the annual repair and maintenance budget for allotments and garages.
- Vacancy rates and average occupancy periods were detailed as 147 vacant plots in 2024 and a 5.5 year average occupancy in 2024. The main reasons for tenants terminating their allotment plots were due to ill-health and a lack of time.
- In respect of enforcement, most allotments are inspected during Spring and Summer and tenants scoring very poor or worse would be served a 'Use it or lose it notice.
- The total number of allotment applications since 2021 was 1,944 and the present number on the waiting list was 510.

The Committee submitted a number of questions in advance to the meeting which were responded to by the Officer, relating to the following issues:

- The length of time tenants were given to bring allotment plots to a standard after starting a new tenancy before any enforcement action was started.
- If some of the larger allotment plots could be made into more manageable smaller plots.
- If future consultations could include a sample number as percentages on their own gave no understanding of how many had taken part in a survey.
- How vandalism was being dealt with on allotments.
- What strategy was in place for dealing with fly tipping.
- What security was in place to protect allotments from vandalism, fly tipping and anti-social behaviour.
- Could allotment sites be used as shared community allotments?
- What information and guidance was given to new tenants to help them use their allotments more beneficially.
- Could external organisations like Community Payback be used to improve allotments in poor conditions before being offered to new tenants.

The Officer explained:

- that he took the starting condition of the plot at the commencement of the tenancy agreement into consideration before deciding what, if any, future enforcement action to take. The process of enforcement action was explained.
- that the Council held allotment plots of various sizes and although there was a need for large plots, some had already been split into smaller plots. He indicated that they could reduce the size of more plots should the need arise and resources allow.
- how previous surveys had been held and indicated that sample size would be included with future surveys.
- that incidents of vandalism and external fly tipping were very low, with most waste related problems caused by the tenants themselves although the introduction of a refundable deposit had made a significant difference to the amount of waste/debris left by tenants at the end of their tenancy agreements.
- That the only means to prevent commercial flytipping would be to permanently remove vehicle access to the sites through the erection of impenetrable barriers.

- That there did not seem to be a will for self-management of the allotments, amongst tenants, and that previous proposals of self-management through an allotment association had not materialised. The consultation for 2025/26 would provide the opportunity for tenants to comment on the opportunity for self-managed allotment sites, the results of which the Council would consider as part of a review.
- New tenants were provided with the Allotment Guidelines which explained, in detail, how an allotment should be used.
- Community Payback and Bootstrap had both previously been used to undertake improvement works to allotment sites. Bootstrap no longer existed and the Council no longer held a service level contract with Community Payback.

The Regeneration Project Manager indicated that the rate of turnover of plots was high with 40% of tenants terminating their plots having held the plot for less than 2 years. He gave reasons why plots became vacant and pointed out that there was a long waiting list for allotment plots. He explained that he had been employed to work for the Allotments service for two and half days per week but found it difficult to complete the amount of work required. He pointed out that he was only able to serve up to 100 'Use it or lose it' Notices per year due to resource restrictions. He acknowledged the Committee's proposals contained in the advanced questions but pointed out that both resources and budgets were an issue in ensuring good management of the plots.

Members asked further questions relating to the following issues, and were provided with responses:

- the number of members made up Hyndburn Federation of Allotments
- vacancy rates of garages

- enforcement action against allotment plots of a poor standard or disused

Cath Holmes, Chair of Hyndburn Federation of Allotments, was in attendance and referred to an inadequate budget provided for allotments as well as the service being under-staffed. She requested that this was considered by the Committee.

With reference to 3.4 of the report which showed the 'Central Support Services & Chief Executives Administration' received a budget of £42,500. The Committee requested a breakdown of how this budget was used.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted; and**
- (2) That the Head of Planning & Transportation gives consideration to increasing the budget allocated for managing the allotment sites.**

96 Cooptee Nominations

The Overview & Scrutiny Officer submitted a report to inform the Committee that there was still a co-optee vacancy for a young person (18 – 25 years). She reported that the co-optee position would cover the remaining municipal year for 2025-26 and invited the Committee to submit nominations. She informed the Committee that nominations would be considered at the next Committee and any recommendations be submitted to Full Council for approval.

Resolved - that the report be noted.

Signed:.....

Date:

Chair of the meeting
At which the minutes were confirmed