

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & MANAGED GROWTH SCRUTINY BOARD

17 January 2023

## MINUTES

- Present: Councillors: D Pinwell (Chairman), M Parker, A Feeney, A Hodgson, Mrs D Holl-Allen MBE, M McLoughlin, M Parker (Vice-Chairman), D Pinwell (Chairman), W Qais, J Ryan, K Thomas, M McLoughlin, A Hodgson
- Councillors in Attendance: Councillor I Courts: Economy Portfolio Lead and Leader of the Council  
Councillor A Mackiewicz: CPH Climate Change, Planning & Housing
- Officers: Perry Wardle: Assistant Director, Growth and Development  
Lauren Beach: Finance Manager  
Mark Andrews: Head of Planning  
Fiona Hughes: Chief Executive, SCH  
Carol Trappett: Head of Housing & Neighbourhoods, SCH  
Hannah Buckley: Social Housing & Homelessness Lead, SCH  
Brenda Gallagher: Safeguarding & Community Safety Project Manager, SCH  
Ann-Marie Attfield: Group Manager, Climate Change & Sustainability  
Charlene Jones: Team Leader, Planning Policy  
Austin Rodriguez: Head of Stronger Communities  
Paul Rogers: Democratic Services

The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting commenced at 6:00 p.m.

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Feeney gave apologies in advance of his departure from the meeting at 7:30 p.m. due to other commitments.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Councillor D Pinwell declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item 7 'Housing Allocations Scheme', informing the Scrutiny Board that he was a member of the SCH Board and would hand the Chair to Councillor Parker (Vice Chairman) for this agenda item and would not participate in the discussion.

Councillor Thomas declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to 'Draft Climate Change Supplementary Document', informing the Scrutiny Board that her employer JLR submitted planning applications for site located in the borough of Solihull.

### 3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were received.

### 4. MINUTES

Two amendments put forward by Councillor McLoughlin were agreed, which were:

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- Page 14, paragraph 3: replace 'Net Zero' with 'Jet Zero'.
- The draft Minutes for the Borough Wide Economic Strategy report referencing 'Blossom Field Road' should be corrected to read 'Blossomfield Road'.

The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

## RESOLVED:

- (i) Subject to the above amendments, to agree the draft Minutes arising from the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022 as a true record.

## 5. MINUTES

Councillor Thomas noted that page 24, paragraph 3 of the draft Minutes referring to the 3 Categories of home ownership stated that Category 2 was the most important. The Minute should be corrected to read that the Council should be attempting to move all people into Category 2.

## RESOLVED:

- (i) Subject to the above correction, Members of the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board agreed the Minutes arising from the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

## 6. MTFS UPDATE – BUDGET STRATEGY 2023/24 – 2025/26

The Scrutiny Board received a report outlining the budget proposals identified within the Climate Change, Planning and Housing Portfolio for the period 2023/24 to 2024/25. The report was presented by the Finance Manager. Members discussed and sought further information from Officers in relation to the following matters:

- The Neighbourhoods and Community Safety management restructure.
- The application of fees charges by the Council to cover the costs of the service/s or works provided.

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

## RESOLVED:

- i) To note the pressures and mitigating actions set out in the report; and,
- ii) To note the schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2023/24 as attached at Appendix B to the report.

## 7. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

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Councillor Pinwell relinquished the Chair to Councillor Parker (Vice Chairman) for this agenda item and did not participate in the subsequent discussion.

The report provided to the Scrutiny Board presented proposed changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme, which included changes to banding and preference which affected the priority order, adjusting qualification criteria, compliance with updated legislation and extending the Annual Lettings Plan to facilitate priorities and demands to be better reflected in the allocation of social housing.

The report was presented by the Safeguarding & Community Safety Project Manager, SCH, who informed the Scrutiny that:

- The last significant Housing Allocations review took place in 2014.
- Since 2014, the housing landscape had changed considerably, notably with increased pressures to reduce homelessness and addressing temporary accommodation in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- There were currently 3,000 on the Housing Register. Only 25% of the total can be assisted. The current average waiting time to receive a housing offer was 193 weeks.
- Priority was therefore given to those in the greatest housing need.
- Much of the original Housing Allocations policy had been retained, but the new policy would reflect reasonable preferences.

The main changes in the proposed Housing Allocations Scheme were presented as:

- Who Can Qualify to Be Included on the Housing Register: A local connection to the borough is now required, such as family association or employment within the borough. If this qualification is not met, those with exceptional housing need will be considered for housing.
- Two-Year Residency Rule: Will not apply to those escaping domestic violence from other local authority areas in temporary accommodation.
- Income and Asset Threshold: Will be introduced and set at an appropriate level based on gross household income, which will determine if the resident/s have the means to access private rented/purchase.
- Exemptions: Will apply for those with insufficient funds for adaptations; subject to domestic violence and/or financial control; armed forces applicants.
- Banding System: Introduces 4 Bands based on a preferential scheme:-

Band A – Additional Preference (very urgent housing need)

Band B – Reasonable Preference (urgent housing need)

Band C – Reasonable Preference (housing need)

Band D – Reduced Preference

- Reduced priority criteria would be applied in the cases of some applicants with instances of unreasonable behaviours (ASB) and rent arrears.

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- High Priority needs were recognised in the Housing Allocation Scheme proposals for those children in need and at potential risk and any households potentially impacted by housing regeneration schemes in the borough.
- Band T – It is proposed to remove Band T altogether from the new allocations policy i.e. tenants currently on the housing register with no need (currently 286).
- Annual Lettings Plan: It is the intention to provide and agree targets and identify needs on the Housing Register fairly and to identify any unintended consequences once the new Housing Allocations Scheme is introduced. SCH are proposing to submit the Annual Lettings Plan for annual scrutiny and once established to delegate its on-going management to Officers.
- It was the intention to take the new Housing Allocations proposals to public consultation post May 2023 and seek to implement the new arrangements from January 2024.

Having received the presentation from the Safeguarding & Community Safety Project Manager SCH, Members of the Scrutiny Board raised several further questions relevant to the report, which in summary included the following matters:

Councillor McLoughlin referenced page 79 of the report, which referred to “intentionally homeless” and cautioned careful consideration before using such terms, as many people suffering homelessness could not afford increased rents on their former homes, which led to them applying for inclusion on the Housing Register without any corresponding Court Summons. This in turn led to the classification of “intentionally homeless”, which did not reflect reality of the situation. Councillor McLoughlin question whether extreme anti-social behaviour (ASB) would form one of the banding categories. The Safeguarding & Community Safety Project Manager SCH clarified that SCH had a dedicated team to investigate instances or allegations of ASB. All such reports would be investigated, and a decision taken if it were beneficial to move a person/s suffering from ASB.

Councillor Ryan welcomed the report, noting that it far exceeded previous iterations in its scope, clarity and context for the issues the Council is facing. However, Councillor Ryan noted that it should be remembered the Council was at the forefront of regeneration and renovation of the boroughs existing housing stock, leading to substantial upgrading. The major challenge, however, was demand for social housing in Solihull, which far exceeded available supply. Councillor Ryan questioned whether it was the case that only those included in Band A of the new Housing Allocations Scheme criteria had a chance to be re-housed. The Scrutiny Board was advised that the Council and SCG were looking at every possible solution to assist people and families with their housing needs in the borough.

SCH followed the Housing Reduction Act, much of which was focussed on preventing homelessness in the first instance. The Council and SCH had in fact 50% of the potential cases of homelessness via the application of housing guidance and assistance to those concerned. There was also the option of accessing the private rented sector.

It was reported that 180 people were currently in temporary accommodation. The impact on children and young people in those households was fully recognised and

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therefore every effort was made to secure settled accommodation as soon as possible. Regarding receiving housing through the housing allocations scheme, it was presently the case that an individual or family need to be classified in Bands A or B to be assisted. The Annual Lettings Plan would, however, allow for further analysis leading to the production of further housing options.

The Head of Housing & Neighbourhoods, SCH further advised that 200 people were currently in hotel / temporary accommodation. Every person received a personal housing plan to address their individual housing needs.

Regarding the categories of banding, those individuals seeking to move to a studio apartment would not be classified within Band A. Similarly, those seeking accommodation in a high-rise block or bungalow would be placed in a lower banding. In terms of borough wide housing support, targeted financial advice was provided to some people to prevent potential homelessness from occurring.

Councillor Qais questioned how the current proposals would affect those already on the Housing Register and secondly, how would applicant's expectations be managed. The Head of Housing & Neighbourhoods, SCH clarified that all people on the Housing Register would be formally consulted on the allocation scheme proposals. The proposals had yet to be stress tested, although a clear timeline for their implementation from January 2024 had been established. Those on the Housing Register would be written to by SCH regarding the proposals and advised on which priority banding would be applicable to them if the new housing allocations scheme were to be adopted.

Councillor Thomas reference the inclusion in Band A of those individuals suffering from domestic violence and proposed that those people subject to local community violence and no longer safe to remain in their own home should be afforded the same priority as domestic abuse victims. Regarding the fiscal thresholds and limits, Councillor Thomas questioned how many people would be excluded from the Housing Register if the income threshold were to be established at £70,000. The Safeguarding & Community Safety Project Manager, SCH advised the Scrutiny Board that this information was not currently collected and would be collected via the consultation exercise. The Safeguarding & Community Safety Project Manager, SCH advised that Coventry City Council had introduced an income threshold and that contact would be made to clarify what impact it may have had on managing resources and customers. It was further clarified that the Solihull income threshold proposal was based on a set formula used by most councils.

Councillor Feeney questioned whether there was requirement in percentage terms for the Council to provide social housing as part of new housing development constructed in the borough and what was currently being achieved in terms of new social housing provision. Councillor Mackiewicz (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Planning & Housing) clarified that there was a requirement of 40% of affordable housing to be social rented, with the Council currently achieving 38%. Annually 300 new affordable houses were brought forward, for example the Kingshurst Village development. However, demand continued to outstrip supply. The Councils Local Plan stipulated provision of 6,000 new, affordable homes to be constructed.

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Councillor Parker summarised the discussion and the pertinent points arising through the consideration and subsequent discussion of the report. The following issues were noted:

- There were 1.1 million people on the national Housing Register.
- The Council recognised its obligations under the armed forces covenant and to domestic violence victims.
- Equality and fairness had to be applied through the Housing Allocations Scheme.
- If the Housing Allocations Scheme were not reviewed and revised, it would have the potential to be challenged in Court and would be out of sync compared with other local authorities.
- Members had raised several valid points and comments on the draft proposals, including Councillor Thomas' reference to applying Band A priority to victims of local community violence and to be placed on the same priority as victims of domestic violence and Councillor Mcloughlin's regarding use of language and terminology within the Housing Allocations Scheme policy.

Having considered the report, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

## **RESOLVED:**

- i) To note the Housing Allocation Scheme draft proposals.

## **8. NET ZERO ACTION PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2021/2022**

The Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP) Annual Report 2021/22 provides a narrative on Solihull's progress in delivering the NZAP, interprets the KPI data and details how the Council is performing against the actions in the plan. The report also details key challenges in delivery and future focus. The report was presented by the Group Manager, Climate Change & Sustainability. The Scrutiny Board was informed that:

- All KPI data was focussed on 2021/22.
- The annual report addressed year 2 of a 3-year timeline for this iteration of the NZAP.
- The reported 19% CO2 reduction in 2019/20 coincided with the Covid Pandemic period and should be treated some with some caution.
- Solihull Council had halved its emissions since 2017/18.
- The annual report data showed a scale up in many NZAP areas, such as roll out of EV charging infrastructure, tree planting activity and reaching towards net zero objectives. However, there was a recognised need for more renewables energy generation in the borough.
- Council activities accounted for less than 1% of borough wide emissions.
- Key challenges on delivering the NZAP were funding, national policy, energy costs and delivery of net zero.

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- Focus towards 2024 was centred on actions such as retrofitting of properties and encouraging sustainable travel, funding, public engagement actions and the on-going reduction of Council emissions.

Having received the report presentation from the Group Manager, Climate Change & Sustainability, the Scrutiny Board raised several questions pertinent to the report, which in summary included the following matters:

Councillor Thomas clarified that on page 19 of the NZAP Annual Report 2021/22 (5.4.1 *Cycling Infrastructure*), the 2 cycle lanes referenced were not new, but rather had been subject to various improvements. Councillor Thomas noted that the biggest gaps and challenges found within the NZAP were found on page 16, which referenced 11,000 households as being in fuel poverty and questioned whether the Council could bring them out of fuel poverty, and on page 25 (Section 8: *Energy Supply*), asking why the Council was not seeking to accelerate renewable energy capacity as originally hoped for.

Members were advised that there were several underlying issues in relation to addressing fuel poverty in the borough. Current energy costs would have a significant impact on achieving fuel poverty goals, as did the current cost of living crisis. Energy efficiency had a role to play via retrofitting policy and programme for properties across the borough. In terms of renewables, a 20% increase in capacity in the borough had been achieved. There were some technical issues in Solihull with some of the renewables schemes. However, a renewables energy feasibility scheme had been undertaken looking at models to encourage further uptake in renewables.

In terms of gaps and challenges facing successful achievement of the NZAP Action Plan objectives, further detail would be included in future. However, Members were advised that consistency of policy application was key, as was provision of funding and wider finance.

The Head of Stronger Communities noted that the provision of a renewables programme was the start of a new industry from a demand perspective. Expressions of interest were increasing, as was understanding of what was involved with renewables by householders. Government funding for low-income households to uptake renewables opportunities was currently limited. Banks were considering releasing equity against householder's mortgages to fund renewables work on properties. Furthermore, there was a need for massive growth across SME's and skilled people in the renewable supply chain to support its continued development and growth.

Members were advised that much of the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) data applicable to Solihull was found to be outdated, resulting in the housing stock being in better condition than was originally thought to be the case. The Group Manager, Climate Change & Sustainability further noted that residents in the borough had been upgrading their properties over the last decade, with installation of solar panels, improved double glazing etc., which had yet to be fully captured and reflected in the Council's EPC data.

Councillor Qais questioned whether there were any plans to extend the retrofit scheme across the borough and secondly, to what extent were private properties included as

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part of the Council's plans for introducing EV charging infrastructure and was Council support available if so.

Regarding page 20 of the NZAP Annual Report on Sustainable Travel Education and Road Safety Training, Councillor Qais noted that both services should be co-ordinated together with schools.

The Group Manager, Climate Change & Sustainability clarified for the Scrutiny Board that the Council's EV Charging Strategy was focussed on access to charge points regardless of location. The Sustainable Travel Team did currently co-ordinate with Road Safety Training Team and schools.

Councillor Mrs Holl-Allen questioned whether the Council able to conduct a survey of the cycle routes in the borough. The Assistant Director, Growth & Development advised that cycle lane usage had been monitored but would confirm outside of the Scrutiny Board meeting whether a full-scale survey had yet taken place.

Councillor Ryan noted that planning would have a significant role to play in future years to ensure new development would contribute to reducing emissions. It should be also questioned whether individual companies located in the borough were addressing their emissions and whether there was potential for them to be doing more to address this area of their business; for example, through the introduction of EV fleet vehicles and using green/renewable energy sources. Secondly, Councillor Ryan questioned whether the Council was taking advantage of the small parcels of land that became available post development to plant more trees. Thirdly, Councillor Ryan questioned whether residents were being encouraged to maximise the potential for further tree planting in their own gardens. Finally, Councillor Ryan stated that the Annual report should be disseminated to schools, businesses and community and voluntary groups located across the borough and that the Council should partner schools and Councils towards delivering the NZAP Action Plan targets and objectives.

The Scrutiny Board was advised that many larger companies located in Solihull have Net Zero targets established and plans in place to decarbonise. The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership also provided support to SME's to decarbonise their businesses.

Councillor McLoughlin noted that the recent period of severe cold weather had highlighted the importance of efficient home insulation. Regarding the downward trend for reported emissions during the Covid Pandemic period and its relationship to future budgeting for 2022/23, had the Council projected how much emissions may rise again going forward.

Referencing EPC's, Councillor McLoughlin noted that although 32% of households were reported to have attained a Category C rating, conversely 68% of households in the borough did not meet the Category C standard.

Regarding Section 7.3, page 22 of the Annual Report (*'What does the data tell us?'*), it was noted that although in 2022 it was recorded there was 16.2% Canopy Cover across Solihull compared with 16% nationally, this had reduced in the borough from 17.1% recorded in 2016. Was there a definitive amount of Canopy Cover identified to be attained in Solihull?

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The Annual Report detailed that *'Almost half of Solihull's local wildlife sites are in positive management (46%), this is similar to the national average of 47%'*. Councillor McLoughlin stated that it was vitally important to engage and educate people regarding their custodial duties for the natural environment and questioned whether it was possible to seek to outperform the national average of 47%.

Members were informed that it was recognised that there would be an upraise in the number of vehicles using the road network post 2020. However, the data evidenced that continued to be on a downward trend. It was further expected data would evidence a reduction in the amount of domestic electricity and gas consumption due to current energy prices. There was no specific Canopy Cover target currently identified, but the Councils tree planting objectives would address future Canopy Cover in future years. However, the Scrutiny Board was assured that Canopy Cover would be reviewed as part of the KPI suite for 2023/24.

In terms of the local and national wildlife site management targets, it was the case that a significant number of local wildlife sites were privately owned, and it was difficult to establish whether they were positively managed or not. However, the Council did work in partnership with organisations such as the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, which positively managed their sites.

Regarding housing stock condition in Solihull, the Group Manager, Climate Change & Sustainability advised Members that it was better than the EPC data would indicate.

Councillor McLoughlin raised the issue of exporting renewable energy and of the consequent benefits arising for the local community. Citing instance of collective purchase arrangements of solar energy in other locales, Councillor McLoughlin highlighted the problematic issues of procurement of quality materials, associated cost and scale of provision as potential obstacles to delivering collective purchase of renewable energy. The Group Manager, Climate Change & Sustainability confirmed that there were many potential models available supporting delivery of renewable energy, including collective purchase models. The West Midlands Combined Authority was reviewing funding mechanisms. Members were further informed that the current priority to be addressed were those households experiencing fuel poverty and who could not afford renewable energy initiatives. The Council continued to take forward its retrofit programme, resident education as to what options were available to them and continued to explore further stock conditions and co-operative models.

In summary of the Scrutiny Boards consideration of the report, Councillor Pinwell noted that:

- It was important to communicate the objectives of the NZAP Action Plan and progress made to date as detailed in the Annual Report 2021/22 to be conveyed to residents and businesses in the borough to encourage self-reflection as to their role in delivering the programme.
- Some objectives and longer-term goals were in the hands of external factors, such as the status of required technology and an underdeveloped renewables market.
- The commitment of SME's was required and needed to be recognised within the NZAP Action Plan.

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- A 'trees in – trees out' development mind set had to be discouraged in the borough.
- All 10 sections of the Annual Report 2021/22 showed good progress to date.

Having considered the report, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

## RESOLVED:

- i. To note the progress in the first year of delivery of the Council's Net Zero Action Plan; and,
- ii. To include the next Net Zero Action Plan Annual Report (2022/23) in the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board Work Programme for 2023/24.

## 9. DRAFT CLIMATE CHANGE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD)

The report presented the draft Climate Change SPD for consideration by the Scrutiny Board. The report was presented by the Team Leader, Planning Policy. The Scrutiny Board was informed that:

- The Draft Climate Change SPD was included in the Council Plan Update 2022/23 and was not a vehicle for new policy, but rather gave guidance for planning applications.
- The SPD was organised thematically with 7 main chapters, which were:

Energy Assessments.

Renewable/Low Carbon Energy.

Sustainable Construction.

Climate Change Adaptation.

Water Management.

Sustainable Transport.

Waste Management.

Having received the presentation, the Scrutiny Board raised the following questions pertinent to the report, which in summary included the following matters:

Councillor McLoughlin welcomed receipt of the draft Climate Change SPD at the meeting of the Scrutiny Board, noting that it was important to receive it in draft form and at the development stage for scrutiny comment.

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Councillor McLoughlin further commented that:

- He would welcome greater detail to be included addressing community projects and energy in the draft SPD.
- Regarding paragraph 6.26 of the draft Climate Change SPD, Councillor McLoughlin stated that globally 11% of emissions arose from building materials and that the Councils recognition of reducing such embodied carbon as a key factor in reducing carbon emissions was very positive.
- Reference to orientating buildings to maximise natural energy conservation was excellent.
- Paragraph 5.37 of the draft SPD referencing the surveying of underlying geology and digging of trenches and drilling unobstructed by tree roots was a significant issue across the borough and was applicable to any site, not just development sites. A good SPD would help guide n=both a Planning Committee and developers.
- Local Plan Policy P9 and references to “where possible”, to what extent did the SPD govern Planning Committee decisions and developers actions?

Regarding Local Plan Policy P9, the Team Leader, Planning Policy agreed that clarification would be welcomed for a policy requirement “should / encourage”. Where possible, a planning/development balance would be established. In terms of a sustainability check list there was not a “yes/no” answer.

Councillor Thomas queried whether in terms of Building Standards referenced in the Draft Climate Change SPD would it be possible to include reference to adherence to future 2025 Building Standards.

In reference to dedicated recycling space, especially for apartments and low- rise blocks, Councillor Thomas questioned whether an addition could be made to include reference to provision of collecting waste from flats that does not rely on plastic sacks i.e. adequate waste collection services.

Referencing Solihull Cycle Network, Councillor Thomas stated that the canal routes were very challenging, difficult to access (with provision of steps only, not ramps) and that some sections of the route were too narrow to cycle on.

The Scrutiny Board was advised that the SPD referenced Building Regulations 2021, but that Building Regulations could be brought forward where possible. However, some building sites were still using very old Building Regulations, not the 2021 standards. Any updating of the Building Standards in use on site was a step in the right direction.

Councillor Thomas’ comments and request in respect of waste recycling at flats would be reported back to Officers in the Waste and Recycling team. It was acknowledged that the Waste and Recycling Chapter in the Draft SPD was the least developed but would be addressed further.

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Maintenance of canal towpaths was the responsibility of the Canal and River Trust, but Councillor Thomas' comments would be conveyed.

Councillor McLoughlin expressed concern at the on-going challenge presented by flood risk carried by surface water and noted that one difficulty lay in the historical flood data the Council currently operated from. Councillor McLoughlin questioned whether the Council could be more agile than the current flood data dictated.

The Team Leader, Planning Policy confirmed that Flood Risk Management Plans were referenced in the Draft Climate Change SPD and that a Flood Risk Management Plan was under development and discussions taking place as to how best to deliver it. Officers would seek to sign post the Flood Risk Management Plan within the final version of the Climate Change SPD.

Having considered the report, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

**RESOLVED:**

To note the current iteration of the draft Climate Change SPD.

### **10. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGED GROWTH SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23**

The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

**RESOLVED:**

- i. To agree the agenda for the Scrutiny Board meeting scheduled for 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023 as detailed in the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2022/23.

The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board closed at 8:20 p.m.