

Note on motion with regard to Net Zero Advisory Group

This note puts down some thoughts on the following part of the motion:

- Requests that officers explore opportunities to develop the Net Zero Advisory Group, so that it has more authority and responsibility for our climate strategy, and so that the public can access it (e.g. via agendas published online, and being able to attend meetings).

The NZAG was set up as an advisory group to inform policy development and to advise officers, the Environment PDG and the Cabinet in taking forward the net zero agenda. It was not set up to be a decision-maker in its own right. For that reason, whilst the Group can be responsible developing the Climate Strategy, for decision-making purposes responsibility lies first with the Cabinet and then (for new policy) with the Council on the recommendation of Cabinet.

It is worth remembering that, whilst the Council makes provision in the budget, it is mostly the Cabinet which decides how to make use of that budget, unless specific delegations are given elsewhere e.g. to officers, Cabinet members and so on. Climate change – policy, strategy etc. – is a Cabinet function, which is why the Environment PDG reports into Cabinet.

The Council's advisory groups generally meet in private and are not facilitated by Member Services i.e. the groups do not have agendas on Modern.gov. The NZAG was permitted to set its own terms of reference and decide how it would go about its business. The report to the Environment PDG made it clear that this could include meeting with individuals, groups, stakeholders etc. There is no reason therefore why the NZAG could not extend invitations to the meetings (specific or more general), but this would not secure the request to publish agendas online and public attendance.

Councils up and down the country have differing arrangements (and names) for groups/committees established to take forward the Net Zero/Climate Change agenda. But, fundamentally, they have to fit in with the Council's governance arrangements when it comes to decision-making responsibility. On a fairly quick review, the following are some of the opportunities that the NZAG/Environment PDG might wish to explore:

- 1 Climate Change website – this is currently at an advanced stage, although I have yet to see how it dovetails to the Council's main website. That website could be used to signpost to past and future Council meetings, reports and decisions – i.e. anywhere the Council has a meeting coming up do discuss a specific Net Zero action or climate change report, that could be flagged with a link to the meeting agenda. A summary of the outcome could also be posted as a 'news' item.
- 2 Regular or standing reports – following on from the previous suggestion, the NZAG could ask for a standing item on the Environment PDG agenda and/or the Cabinet agenda – each meeting, quarterly or at whatever frequency is desired. Again, these could be flagged, tagged, copied and linked on the website.

- 3 Request to Cabinet that NZAG be added to modern.gov to meet in public – provided it remains clear that it is advisory and not a decision-making. The reasons for this request would need to be explained – what would those reasons be and how would this contrast in practice (with the other two advisory groups) be justified?
- 4 Cabinet Committee – it is lawful for Cabinet to establish a committee of the executive, which would meet in public through modern.gov. The members would be nominated members of the Cabinet, but other members could attend and speak in the usual way. Such committees usually have delegated authority from Cabinet to make certain decisions, although the scope of such decision-making may be limited by the delegations and terms of reference given to it by the Cabinet. If this is of interest, some discussions would need to take place, including with Cabinet, to work up the structure etc. before a properly formed recommendation/proposal can be made.

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