

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee. held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 14 September 2023.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Frisby CC (in the Chair)

Mr. N. D. Bannister CC

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC

Mr. N. Chapman CC

Mr. D. Harrison CC

Mr. Max Hunt CC

Mrs B. Seaton CC

In attendance

Mr. B. L. Pain CC – Cabinet Lead Member for the Environment and Green Agenda

15. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2023 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

16. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 34.

17. Questions asked by members.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

18. Urgent items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

19. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations were made.

20. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

21. Presentation of Petitions.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 35.

22. Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Public Health which provided an update on the progress to date made against actions within the Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2020-24 and the initial proposals for an updated plan for 2024-28. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussions the following points were noted:

- (i) There was close working between Public Health and the Environment and Transport department to tackle the issue of pollution caused by Highways. For example health considerations were being input into the Local Highway Design Guide development such as specifications for Active Travel and green infrastructure.
- (ii) Public health now had input on planning applications and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.
- (iii) The County Council was investing in road schemes with the aim of improving air quality. For example, the Melton Mowbray Distributor Road would contribute to reduced traffic congestion and pollution in Melton town centre. The A511 scheme had also been designed with reducing congestion in mind.
- (iv) The County Council's own fleet of vehicles was being decarbonised where the appropriate vehicles were available and the business case could be made.
- (v) The County Council had been awarded government funding to install more Electric Vehicle charging points in Leicestershire.
- (vi) The County Council worked in partnership with bus operators regarding the provision of services. The Government's National Bus Strategy aimed to increase the number of bus journeys undertaken and the County Council was using government money to support existing bus services in Leicestershire. However, bus patronage in Leicestershire, as with the rest of the country, had still not recovered to pre Covid-19 pandemic levels.
- (vii) A member raised concerns that not all bus stops in Leicestershire had their own lay-bys which meant that whilst the buses were picking up passengers, traffic behind was having to wait which contributed to air pollution. It was suggested that when new housing developments were being approved, opportunities were being missed to ensure that bus stops had lay-bys. In response the Director of Environment and Transport acknowledged that ideally all bus stops should have lay-bys but noted that many bus stops in Leicestershire had been in place for many years and the physical road layout would not permit bus lay-bys. The Director also gave reassurances that bus stops in Leicestershire were safety checked and risk assessed by the County Council as an appropriate location for a bus to stop on the carriageway.

- (viii) There were 14 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in Leicestershire as of 2020. These areas were designated because the local air quality exceeded Government's national air quality thresholds.
- (ix) In use in Leicestershire were Zephyr air quality monitors which measured gasses and particulate matter. There were two in North West Leicestershire and one in the Harborough area. Whilst the data provided by the Zephyrs was very useful, there were different models of Zephyr in use which meant that it was difficult to join up the data from each and get an overall picture. Purchasing the Zephyrs was also expensive. Government grants were available which could be made more use of in Leicestershire as North West Leicestershire District Council had done in purchasing their Zephyrs.
- (x) The County Council had received a report from EarthSense which provided an overview of pollutants, polluters, hotspot areas in Leicestershire and it also contained recommendations around the next steps for the Partnership's work. The recommendations re-enforced national messages around active travel and encouraging people to use more environmentally friendly forms of transport.
- (xi) A member raised concerns about the high prevalence of asthma and viral wheeze cases in the under 15s in the South Wigston area of Leicestershire. In response the Director of Public Health provided details of a piece of work which had taken place jointly between Public Health and University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust which looked at whether there were correlations between areas with poor air quality and prevalence of breathing issues. Partnership working was also taking place with Oadby and Wigston Borough Council around data monitoring, and air quality monitoring was taking place around Parkland Primary School. Work was also taking place with an organisation called Modeshift to encourage sustainable and active travel in the area.
- (xii) With regards to pollution caused by cars waiting to pick up children outside schools, campaigns were taking place in Leicestershire to stop the drivers from idling their engines including putting up notices. A pilot scheme had taken place where the streets on which schools were located were closed off at opening and closing times. The pilot had been successful and a further pilot scheme would be taking place. The schemes required the support of school staff to close and open the roads as the County Council was unable to provide resources. It was not always possible to close the roads when the school was located on a main road.
- (xiii) Discussion took place around whether electric vehicles produced more particle pollution in the atmosphere from tyre wear because they were heavier. It was agreed that this would be looked into further after the meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the progress to date made against actions within the Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2020-24 and the initial proposals for an updated plan for 2024-28 be noted;
- (b) That officers be requested to provide a report to a future meeting of the Committee regarding the updated Action Plan for 2024-28.

23. Government response to consultation on preventing charges for DIY waste at household waste recycling centres.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport which informed of the recently published Government response to the 2022 Consultation on Preventing Charges for DIY Waste at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) and the potential implications for the Council. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Environment and the Green Agenda stated that he was supportive of the Government's proposals in principle as the general public would not have to pay for DIY waste, but at the same time the department had costs and a budget to manage which was a big challenge.

Arising from discussions the following points were noted:

- (i) Although commercial waste could be charged for, the County Council did not accept any commercial waste at its RHWS so could not gain any income from that. The current income budget of £150,000 would be lost under the Government's proposals.
- (ii) In response to a suggestion from a member regarding the County Council reusing some of the DIY materials deposited at the RHWS and gaining an income from that, it was explained that the County Council did reuse some materials already and plans were in place to create rehome zones at the RHWS. However, further clarification would be needed from Government regarding which materials were within the scope of the ban on charging.
- (iii) A member raised concerns around how the new rules would be enforced bearing in mind it would be difficult for RHWS staff to know whether the waste was genuinely from an individual household or whether professionals such as kitchen fitters were seeking to avoid charges. In response some reassurance was given that the County Council was working on solutions to this problem. The County Council would need to put in place a new permit system but decisions would have to be made on how rigorous the system was and how much money would be spent on it.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the update on the Government response to the 2022 Consultation on Preventing Charges for DIY Waste at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) and the potential implications for the Council be noted with concern;
- (b) That officers be requested to provide a further report on the topic for a future meeting of the Committee when further information about the Government's proposals is known.

24. Environment and Climate Performance Report to June 2023.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Environment and Transport which provided an update on the key performance indicators that the Council was responsible for delivering against the Council Strategic Plan (2022-26). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussions the following points were noted:

- (i) Members welcomed that 248,643 trees had been planted by the Authority and its partners up to June 2023 which greatly exceeded the year's 140,000-planting cumulative target. In response to a question from a member it was confirmed that the County Council did have a mechanism for measuring the loss of some trees through disease, particularly those lost to ash dieback.
- (ii) The 'Total household waste per household (kg)' metric improved in performance slightly as waste decreased by 2% from 969kg in Quarter Two 2022/23 to 948kg in Quarter Three 2022/23. Performance has also improved over the year with waste levels having declined by 7% since the same time last year. In response to a question from a member as to how these reductions had been achieved it was suggested that it could have been because the materials now being received were more lightweight. It was also noted that during the period the data covered, the weather had been dry which would have meant that less heavy garden waste would have been received. It was clarified that garden waste was collected separately from other waste types but in the performance data it had been combined together.
- (iii) With some performance indicators such as rivers the Council did not have direct control of delivery. River quality was measured by the Environment Agency (EA) and in 2019 the EA had made a significant change to the way the data was recorded. This was due to a change in methodology in how they assessed river quality. The resulting more robust and thorough approach revealed much worse water quality that had been previously reported. The Environment Agency had been asked for more data but they had informed the Council that it would not be available until 2025. The EA's data release date was also reported in the national media. The County Council would continue to regularly request data from the Environment Agency in case rivers were assessed in Leicestershire prior to the full data set being published in 2025.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the key performance indicators be noted.

25. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting of the Committee take place on Thursday 2 November 2023 at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 3.35 pm  
14 September 2023

CHAIRMAN