

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee. held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 2 November 2023.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Frisby CC (in the Chair)

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC
Mr. N. Chapman CC
Mr. D. Harrison CC

Mr. Max Hunt CC
Mrs. R. Page CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC

In attendance

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

26. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

27. Question Time.

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

28. Questions asked by members.

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

29. Urgent items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

30. 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.

Mrs. R. Page declared an interest in Agenda Item 8 – Recycling and Household Waste Sites Consultation as a member of Harborough District Council.

31. Declarations of the Party Whip.

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

32. Presentation of Petitions.

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

33. Recycling and Household Waste Sites Consultation.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport regarding the consultation on the Recycling and Household Waste Sites. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

Mr. Pain CC said that the proposals were being brought reluctantly to the Committee due to the challenging financial climate and the financial pressures in both Adult and Children and Families Social Care. He encouraged residents to engage in the consultation and recognised that the proposals would present challenges to residents.

Arising from discussions, the following points were noted:

- i. The Kibworth site had been redesigned to draw traffic away from the main road to reduce congestion. A traffic assessment would be carried out to assess whether the Kibworth site would cope with potential increased usage should the Market Harborough site be closed. This would be made available to Members as part of the consultation. A member expressed concern that the housing growth proposed for Harborough would increase visitor numbers to the RHWS, and would therefore, increase use of the Kibworth site and place increased pressure on local roads. They were advised that future housing growth was one of the criteria in determining the proposals and that there was not a direct correlation between increased housing and a growth in waste as there had been a change in recycling behaviour post Covid 19. Mr. Boulter CC asked that his reservations to the proposals related to traffic assessment and management around the RHWS site in Kibworth be noted in the minutes.
- ii. A report would be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2024, setting out the outcome of the consultation and presenting revised proposals should they be changed following the consultation, prior to submission of a report to the Cabinet for a decision on the future of RHWS.
- iii. There were significant funding gaps across the Council and all departments were being asked to make significant savings to enable other services, for example Adult Social Care, to be supported. The Scrutiny Review Panel had explored various factors to determine which sites would reduce opening hours, or would be proposed for closure, which included usage numbers and cost of operating, for example. The Director recommended that Members looked at the Scrutiny Review Panel report which was now available on the Council's website.
- iv. The Council did not currently have a policy on usage of RHWS by people living outside of the Leicestershire border, although this had been considered by the Scrutiny Review Panel. Data showed that usage of RHWS was reciprocated across boundaries and was usually determined by people's commute to work. Members recognised that policing cross boundary usage would be a challenge. The consultation questionnaire allowed for people to identify their location, so cross boundary usage would be evident.
- v. For sites proposed for closure, the land occupied would be 'mothballed'. Members were assured decisions about what would happen to vacated sites would be made in the future once final decisions had been made about the RHWS.

- vi. Leicestershire had 14 RHWS, which was more than in other neighbouring counties. The statutory duty placed on councils was to provide the ability for householders to dispose of their rubbish and the offer had to include the weekend period. The location and number of sites was discretionary and based on need and locality.
- vii. The level of fly tipping in an area was linked to the level of enforcement carried out by district councils, and not linked to the availability of RHWS in the locality. Levels of deprivation in the area was also a contributing factor to the levels of fly tipping.
- viii. The Scrutiny Review Panel was keen for the consultation questions to be succinct and direct rather than include wider information for residents to consider. Members said that it would be useful to include information in the consultation on the Council's statutory obligations to enable people to be fully informed when responding to the consultation.

Members acknowledged the work of the Scrutiny Review Panel and recognised the challenge presented in forming proposals for the consultation.

The Lead Member for the Environment and the Green Agenda highlighted that it was a legal requirement for the Council to present a balanced budget and that all departments had a responsibility to contribute to the financial challenge faced by the County Council. He assured the Committee that all responses from the questionnaire would be considered in formulating the final proposals for consideration by the Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

That the following proposals for the consultation on Recycling and Household Waste Sites be noted:

- a) Closure of three of the Council's Recycling and Household Waste Sites (RHWS): Market Harborough, Shepshed, and Somerby;
- b) Change to part time opening at the Bottesford RHWS;
- c) Reduction in summer opening hours at all RHWS; and
- d) Introduction of Christmas Eve closure at all RHWS.

34. Tree Management Strategy Annual Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on the work taking place under the Tree Management Strategy to manage the County Council's trees and woodlands. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

Members commended officers for their efforts in delivering the Tree Management Strategy, especially that the targets for tree planting would be achieved in eight years rather than 10 as set out in the Strategy.

Arising from discussions, the following points were noted:

- i. The County Council had been successful in attracting funding and planting trees by working in partnership with other bodies, for example, other local authorities and developers. The Leicestershire Tree Charter had been developed in partnership with the National Forest. The Tree Management Strategy would be reviewed next year and would look forward by five years from 2025.

- ii. A member expressed concern about the financial sustainability of the ambitious targets for tree planting and maintenance considering the increase in pressures on the Department and also questioned the lack of clarity in the Strategy on timelines for maintenance and management of the trees. The Director explained that the Tree Management Strategy was a guide to appropriate planting and that the Council had a duty to ensure each tree was maintained and inspected in order to manage the impact on neighbours, the highways and traffic. A risk-based approach was adopted to schedule tree inspections and the timing and process was determined by whether planting was near a highway, a highly populated area or in middle of farmland or a copse. Officers had worked closely with the Highways Service to agree clear programmes of inspection for trees planted along the highway. The Director acknowledged the challenging financial position of the Council and explained that measures were in place to make the inspection and maintenance of trees more financially sustainable and highlighted a trial in the Hinckley area to seek developer funding for a 60-year period to cover the maintenance of trees planted as part of the development. This resilience was currently being built in for new trees coming into the system. It was explained that the high volume of calls received from the public related to trees were prioritised on a safety basis. It was suggested that training for members could be organised which could include details of the Tree Management Strategy, how trees would be managed, and how enquiries would be dealt with and triaged.
- iii. A member expressed concern that contact details in the Tree Management Strategy were out of date due to a change in members or officers. The Director agreed to update the front page of the Strategy.
- iv. Officers agreed to send a link to members with details for registering trees on i-tree and for how trees planted by Parish Councils could be registered. The next stage would be to integrate i-tree with each of the Council's trees.
- v. The Director informed members that since the report had been published, the Council had been successful in securing funding from the DEFRA Coronation Living Heritage Fund to plant orchards. These would be planted on public land and would be accessible to the community.
- vi. The next Tree Management Strategy from 2025 would take account of pests and diseases that affect other trees, not just ash, such as chestnut, sycamore and oak.
- vii. The Lead Member for the Environment and Green Agenda explained that legislation on biodiversity net gain would be released in November and come into effect from January 2024. He added that the legislation related to the submission of a planning application and the need for the applicant to demonstrate that there would be a 10% increase in biodiversity. Officers were working with planning colleagues at the County Council and district councils to dovetail the approach to following the new legislation.

RESOLVED:

That the update provided on work taking place under the Tree Management Strategy to manage the County Council's trees and woodlands be noted.

35. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 24 January 2024 at 2pm.

2.00 - 3.30 pm
02 November 2023

CHAIRMAN