

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee. held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 24 January 2024.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Frisby CC (in the Chair)

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

Mr. M. 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, and Mr. N. J. Rushton, Leader.

36. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2023 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

37. Question Time.

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

38. Questions asked by members.

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

39. Urgent items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

40. 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.

41. Declarations of the Party Whip.

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

42. Presentation of Petitions.

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

43. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 - 2027/28.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Environment and Transport and the Director of Corporate Resources which provided information on the proposed 2024/25 to 2027/28 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as it related to the Environment and Waste Management Services within the Council's Environment and Transport Department. The report also sought the Committee's views on proposals to recommend to the Cabinet that the Council's net zero target dates be revised from 2030 to 2035 for the Council's own emissions, and from 2045 to 2050 for the County's emissions, in light of the Council's wider financial position. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mr. B.L. Pain CC, Cabinet Lead Member for the Environment and the Green Agenda and Mr. N. J. Rushton CC, Leader of the Council to the meeting for this and other items.

In presenting the report, the Director explained that the environment aspects of the MTFS related to the Environment and Transport Department only and not the wider environmental activity across the Council.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

Revenue Budget

- i. The premium paid as part of the package to recruit and retain HGV drivers had helped the Council to be more competitive in the marketplace, although it could not compete with the attractive offers made by the bigger private sector operators in the area. Staffing overall was near full complement with the use of the premia and agency staff, but in such a competitive market, it was a challenge. Overall, the service was coping from a driver perspective by paying the premium and by using agency staff. However, there was a shortage of managers and frontline staff. Overall, 20% of vacancies were currently filled by agency staff. The Department preferred to keep the level of agency staff to 10%. Other amendments had been made to the recruitment package, such as changing contractual hours to a four day on/four day off contract, which reflected what was offered in the wider marketplace and enabled the Council to compete.
- ii. Regarding the free disposal of DIY waste following the change in legislation from 1 January 2024, Members expressed concern about the volume that households could now potentially deposit at RHWS which would increase the Council's costs and were informed that households were restricted to four visits in a four-week period.

Growth

- iii. Pre-existing arrangements were in place to manage the disposal of asbestos at certain Council Recycling and Household Waste Sites (RHWS), and details were available on the Council's website for the public to follow. This was not charged for

at the same rates but had been included in the new process now in place linked to the legislation for the disposal of DIY waste. All items known to include asbestos, including artex, were covered within these arrangements with a need to have a permit for removal and disposal for health and safety reasons.

Savings/Savings under Development

- iv. The income from the sale of items from the RHWS for reuse was included under ET9 'service approach', which was a broad description in the budget and included savings linked to reuse of items. The Director agreed to amend the descriptor for clarity.
- v. Members expressed concern that income from the disposal of trade waste could be reduced if traders used the new legislation for the disposal of DIY at RHWS to dispose of their waste. The Director assured members that trade waste services were only available at Whetstone Transfer Station and that it had a unique trade point in the market. The RHWS across the county did not accept trade waste at any of the sites. RHWS staff monitored people disposing of waste, so could identify traders using the wrong facilities. Additionally, Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) was used to provide vehicle count data and monitor service usage levels. A report would be presented to the Committee in March on the removal of charges for DIY waste and related work.

Other Factors Influencing MTFs Delivery/Other Funding Sources

- vi. A member expressed concern that the report proposed an extension to the net zero target dates by five years and stated that achieving the original target dates should be the Council's top priority. Other members added that, whilst they understood the concerns expressed, they recognised the importance of making savings to balance service delivery and the needs of residents within the resource envelope available to the Council.
- vii. Mr. B. L. Pain CC, Cabinet Lead Member for the Environment and the Green Agenda, highlighted the many achievements made to date in working towards the Council's net zero targets. He added, however, that despite these many achievements, it was recognised that the Council was off track in achieving the net zero targets overall. In light of the financial challenge facing the Council there was a need to extend the Council's targets to be in line with national targets. Mr. N. J. Rushton CC highlighted that the Council had achieved a great deal in working towards the Council's net zero targets. However, with a growth bid in this area of £475,000, which was not possible to meet, the targets needed to be revised. He added that, if the growth bid was met, then the money would need to be identified from another budget within the Council which would then be reduced. The Director of Corporate Resources clarified that the £475,000 related to the cost of the team working on the environmental agenda and not the cost to the Council of conversion to net zero, which could not be costed but was way beyond the Council's means and could not be met without Government legislation and funding.
- viii. Members were assured that a report on the reprioritisation of activity under the net zero targets would be brought back to the Committee, before being presented to the Cabinet and Council.

- ix. The Emissions Trading Scheme was a form of taxation on the energy from waste (EFW) sector, following on from the Government's successful use of landfill taxes to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. More detail was expected from the Government, but it was likely that the increased taxation would be passed on from the EFW treatment facilities to the County Council via an increase in the gate fee, which is a fee charged by the treatment facilities to accept waste from waste disposal authorities.
- x. The Committee commended staff for the range of activity being undertaken with waste recycling.

Capital Programme

- xi. Regarding the expenditure detailed in paragraph 35 table 3 for lighting, this related to the improvements to the lighting provision within RHWS and not payment for lighting/electricity use which was funded out of the revenue budget.
- xii. A Member expressed concern about the increase in traffic and the need for improvements to the road and entrance to the Kibworth RHWS should the proposal to close the Market Harborough RHWS be approved. The Director assured members that a traffic assessment had been completed for all RHWS as part of consideration of the proposals. This showed that the entrance to the Kibworth site could cope with the additional traffic flow and that there were no additional measures needed.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report regarding the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 – 2027/28 (MTFS) and information now provided be noted;
- b) That the comments now made regarding the MTFS, including proposals to revise the Council's net zero target dates, be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission for consideration at its meeting on 29 January 2024.

44. Environmental Performance Report 2022-23.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport which provided information on progress made in delivering the Council's commitments to net zero and gave information on the performance of the Council's Environmental Management System for 2022-23. The report also gave an update on progress in delivering the aims and objectives of the Council's Environmental Strategy 2018-2030. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

In presenting the report, the Director explained that the report included the Council's environmental performance, progress towards achieving net zero and greenhouse gas emissions and related to the Council's progress in delivering the existing 2030 and 2045 targets.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. Regarding the increase in office mileage claimed, Members were informed that claims made were for petrol, diesel and electric vehicles (EV). When completing the claim, staff were asked to specify the type of car, so figures could be compiled

- for the level claimed for journeys made by EVs if this was required. The performance figures in the report were compared to the period during the pandemic when there had been very little travel undertaken by staff, hence the increase in office mileage shown. However, the current mileage claims were less than those made pre-pandemic. Data showed that there was a rise in the number of claims made for EVs, as more staff purchased such vehicles.
- ii. A Member expressed concern that the biomass boiler had not been working recently. It was explained that it was currently running and Members were informed that this method of generating energy was well proven and was a strong contributor to the Council's renewable activities. There had been issues previously with sourcing parts for the boiler with delays experienced as parts were sourced from Germany. Additionally, it had been challenging to source parts during the pandemic, as with parts for other pieces of equipment.
 - iii. In response to Members concerns about the significant decline in the number of Leicestershire rivers, from 99.6% to 0%, which were in good chemical status, the Director explained that this was due to a change in the Government's methodology for calculating the data. Members were informed that data for the county was in line with national performance. The County Council relied on other agencies, for example the Environment Agency, water companies, etc. to support achievement of the performance targets in this area. The County Council did not have a specific target on river water quality but did contribute to the achievement of the national target.
 - iv. Members asked that the Environment Agency and Severn Trent be invited to attend a future committee meeting as a follow up to their previous visit to enable the Committee to understand what was happening to Leicestershire rivers and what could be done to rectify the situation. The Director agreed that this was possible but added that clarity was needed about what would be discussed with them and Members would need to collate questions for submission to these organisations in advance.
 - v. Regarding the solar PVs, Members were informed that 10.9% of electricity used by the County Council had been generated from its solar PVs. The Council had considered the feasibility of installing rainwater harvesting equipment at County Hall about 10 years ago but had found that the costs of installation were exorbitant and so had not proceeded. However, the Council did consider installing solar PVs on new buildings and had installed them on the building for the Access Group, in Loughborough.
 - vi. The Director explained that the actions detailed in the report for Leicestershire activity towards achieving the net zero targets would be re-prioritised should the revised targets be approved, especially in light of the Council's financial situation. Members welcomed a simplified and more accessible action plan being developed.
 - vii. Mr. Pain CC added that the initial Action Plan included a large number of projects and identified where the Council had an advocacy or leadership role in delivering them. Many partners had been brought together and key stakeholders identified in order to work towards achievement of the net zero targets. He supported the Director's comments about the activities being re-prioritised in the short to medium term within the resources available.
 - viii. Regarding the installation of renewable energy and rainwater harvesting on new buildings, it was up to the Local Planning Authorities and district councils to determine standards for their areas, and this could also be driven by the Government setting new legislation.

Members commended officers for presenting such a transparent and honest performance report and for the achievements made which were detailed in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the update provided on the Council's environmental performance for 2022-23 and progress made in delivering the aims and objectives of the Council's Environmental Strategy 2018-2030 be noted.

45. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 11 March 2024 at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 3.27 pm
24 January 2024

CHAIRMAN