

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee. held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 11 November 2024.

PRESENT

Mr. D. Harrison CC (in the Chair)

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC
Mr. N. Chapman CC
Mr. M. Hunt CC

Mrs. R. Page CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC

In attendance

Mr. J. Morgan CC (Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee)
Mrs. M. E. Newton CC (Spokesperson for the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

24. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2024 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

25. Question Time.

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

26. Questions asked by members.

The following questions were received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5) and were put to the Chairman of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Questions asked by Mr. M. Hunt CC:

1. How well prepared is the authority for the mandatory household food waste collections?
2. When is the introduction of food waste management planned in Leicestershire?
3. To what extent does the county currently have the capacity for generating so-call green gas from food waste?

Reply by the Chairman:

1. The County Council will ensure it has capacity to receive / treat food waste collected by the district councils in Leicestershire.
2. The district councils, as waste collection authorities, will be required to collect food waste from non-household municipal premises by 31 March 2025 (upon request

and for what payment they deem fit), and from all households by 31 March 2026. Any questions regarding planning for the implementation of food waste collections should be directed to the district councils.

3. The County Council has made contractual arrangements for the anaerobic digestion of food waste that is and will be collected by the district councils. The facilities generate a biogas which is burnt on site to generate electricity.

27. Urgent items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

28. 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.

29. Declarations of the Party Whip.

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

30. Presentation of Petitions.

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

31. Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2024-28.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Public Health concerning the Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2024-28 and asked for the Committee's comments before the Action Plan was presented to Cabinet for approval. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8, is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Morgan CC, Mrs Seaton CC and Mrs Newton CC, Members of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to the meeting for this item.

In presenting the report, the Director explained that delivery of the actions within the Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan increasingly relied on partnership working and the contribution of many partners within the Air Quality and Health Partnership such as district councils and the NHS, as well as internal colleagues in the Department for Environment and Transport.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. Plans were in place to roll-out the Wheeze project, run in South Wigston, across the county, once it had been evaluated fully. Blaby District Council was very keen to explore such a project.
- ii. Following concern expressed by a member about congestion in South Wigston caused by buses stopping on the carriageway for passengers to alight, it was explained that bus stops could be planned in a layby or on the highway, and there

- were benefits to both options. It was recognised that the example given was on a very busy road and that it was a balance of encouraging and supporting public transport as well as managing traffic flow on the highway.
- iii. Officers were working closely with Network Rail to keep travel disruption to a minimum and manage traffic flow on what was a busy route when the bridge in South Wigston is closed due to the network rail works for Midland Mainline electrification.
 - iv. Progress made by the district councils on addressing air quality was regularly monitored through the Air Quality and Health Partnership, as all district councils attended the meetings and reported on progress made. Additionally, the Director of Public Health signs-off Annual Status Reports produced by district councils before they were submitted to DEFRA and could ensure that different health and active travel considerations were reflected in the reports.
 - v. It was the district councils' statutory duty to develop Local Plans and content around air quality. However, Public Health officers were consulted on the content of Plans and would comment on the inclusion of key health policies, including air quality. Members expressed concern about whether feedback given, especially related to air quality, would be taken on board and were informed that it was a balance to manage what was a statutory duty of district councils, whilst ensuring that key health policies were reflected in Local Plans. Officers were working with all six Local Plans that were currently being developed to embed health impact assessment requirements, including air quality. Public Health aimed to have data and evidence available in the future to strongly influence district councils to include a health impact assessment for specific developments.
 - vi. A mapping process would be undertaken to address the cumulative effect on air quality of smaller local developments, with health issues and data overlaid, to identify areas of risk of harm to health, potential mitigation and a focus for Partnership activity.
 - vii. Longer term, there was aspiration to influence the Section 106 process to include healthy design principles to influence the use of funding so that actions that addressed air quality were included and healthy developments were achieved.
 - viii. The Chairman expressed concern about air quality and how it was measured so that live data could be used for planning purposes. The Director emphasised that the Partnership was much stronger than in previous years and used the monitoring and measuring of air quality to inform action. He acknowledged that more zephyrs were needed for more thorough measuring but highlighted that resources were prohibitive.

RESOLVED:

That the vision, aims and priorities set out in the draft Air Quality Action Plan 2024-28 be supported.

32. Future Approach to Residual Waste Management Post-2031.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport concerning the proposed future approach to managing residual waste from 2031 onwards and asked for the Committee's comments before the proposals were presented to Cabinet for approval. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9, is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following Points were raised:

- i. Modelled assessments for carbon impact had been carried out on all the options set out in the report and whilst all had a carbon impact, officers needed to understand that impact more. A commitment had been given to carbon being an important element when the joint Resources and Waste Strategy was developed with district councils. It was recognised that strategic ambitions needed to be identified but realising them would be challenging within current budget constraints.
- ii. A low investment merchanting approach had been proposed in the report as the preferred way forward taking account of the detailed options appraised and risks associated with the Council commissioning its own waste treatment facility. The priority was to maintain an efficient waste management service for Leicestershire residents.
- iii. A member raised concerns about recycling at Recycling and Household Waste Sites (RHWS) in the county and asked that more resources be identified to ensure the service to residents was maintained. It was noted that recycling at RHWS was not included in the report and the challenging financial position of the Council was understood.
- iv. Future contracts with providers would include a high level of flexibility to achieve maximum recycling or composting of garden waste and to meet new legislative changes. Members were informed that the Leicestershire Resources and Waste Strategy developed with the district councils aspires to support achievement of the national target of 65%. Members were assured, however, that any new contracts would not prohibit the ability to achieve maximum targets for recycling.

The Committee commended officers for their work in developing the proposals within challenging budget constraints and supported the proposals within the report.

RESOLVED:

That the views of the Committee be reported to the Cabinet.

33. Biodiversity Duty Plan.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport concerning the draft Biodiversity Duty Plan and asked for the Committee's comments on the proposals before the Plan was presented to Cabinet for approval. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10, is filed with these minutes.

In presenting the report, the Director explained that the requirement to report on the Biodiversity Duty Plan included reporting on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). Guidance was awaited from the Government on how this would be done.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. A member expressed concern about balancing the policy for increased housebuilding with policies on increasing and maintaining biodiversity to protect 30% of UK land. It was noted that Local Plans dictated how the country would change spatially and that they also referenced the BNG requirement within them.
- ii. The County Council would do all it could within remit and budget constraints to provide services to the public. However, some issues, such as flooding, biodiversity and environment agendas, were not wholly within the County Council's

- remit, and so it would work in partnership to support other organisations and communities to address these issues. It was noted that the remit of the Council needed to be made clearer to residents.
- iii. The County Council had been clear within the report and the draft Biodiversity Duty Plan about its role in reporting of BNG. However, action could not be taken until further guidance in relation to this reporting duty had been received from the Government.
 - iv. The County Council had obtained grant funding to purchase swift boxes, which had been made available to the public, and would seek to do so again should the opportunity arise.
 - v. The Government had introduced a range of measures to improve nature; the components of which needed to be looked at as a whole and not in isolation, for example measures associated with the Biodiversity Duty Plan, water quality, air quality and waste management. Additionally, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy would map measures and actions that would improve nature throughout Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and it was agreed that a flow chart showing how biodiversity interacts with other policies would be included in the Strategy. Members noted that a report on the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy would be presented to the Committee in January 2025.
 - vi. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) identified the need to improve monitoring and recording of species, habitats and the state of nature and officers were considering ways to do so within the Council's limited resources. The LNRS also detailed 100 indicator species had been identified which showed clearly that the habitat was in in good biodiversity. However, it was recognised that the Council did not have the resources to carry out such detailed monitoring and reporting and would be considering how that could be resourced going forward including asking residents to get involved and building on the work of the County Recorders, volunteers in the county that support the Council's work.

Members welcomed the Biodiversity Duty Plan and measures to improve biodiversity across Leicestershire.

RESOLVED:

That the comments of the Committee be reported to the Cabinet.

34. Tree Management Strategy Annual Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which gave an update on the work taking place under the Tree Management Strategy. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

In presenting the report, the Director highlighted that the planned schedule for tree planting was ahead of delivery time.

The Cabinet Lead Member for the Environment and the Green Agenda commended officers for their efforts to deliver the Strategy and for securing an additional £400,000 for tree planting.

Arising from discussion, the following Points were raised:

- i. It was not mandatory for all council-owned farms to support the tree planting by the County Council. Officers had selected specific council-owned farms where tree

- planting would be beneficial and enhance other features on the farm. A good response had been received from farmers.
- ii. The Council carried out a summer survey to monitor the condition of trees with Ash Dieback. As part of day-to-day surveys all diseases and notable trends were identified.
 - iii. Misterton Marshes was an important site and included council-owned farmland in the area. There were plans to create large areas of green space and a new woodland in adjacent farmland as part of a wider development proposal.
 - iv. More than half of the Forestry Commission grant received was allocated for maintenance. The focus was planting the right species of tree in the right place to ensure they established well in the long-term. The County Council also worked with a range of partners to plant trees, including district councils whilst remaining mindful of budget constraints.
 - v. It was acknowledged that if mature trees were lost to disease, and replaced with smaller saplings, then the landscape would be changed for some time until they grew, and this would also affect biodiversity.
 - vi. Tree planting included non-native species where appropriate to do so and which may cope with a changing climate and offer resilience. This was more of a challenge in rural environments where it was more appropriate to reflect native species in planting schemes whilst ensuring diversity of species. Trials were being held to identify suitable alternative tree species to support wildlife.
 - vii. In response to a concern from a member, it was explained that suitable sites for tree planting were identified to ensure that trees were able to establish well once planted and would not be impacted by the neighbouring environment.

RESOLVED:

That the annual update on the Tree Management Strategy be noted.

35. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 22 January 2025 at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 4.02 pm
11 November 2024

CHAIRMAN