

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee. held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 22 January 2025.

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

36. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 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 under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

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 in respect of items on the agenda.

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 in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

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

42. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

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

#### 43. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/2026 - 2028/2029.

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 2025/26 to 2028/29 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as it related to the Environment and Waste Management Services within the Council's Environment and Transport Department. 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 to the meeting for this and other items.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

##### Revenue Budget

- i) A reduction in residual waste and therefore a saving had been forecast due to the planned introduction of mandatory food waste collections from April 2026. A member questioned what else the Council planned to do to reduce this further. The Director assured members that the Council would continue to deliver existing programmes that sought to encourage recycling and reuse and educating residents on how they could better dispose of their waste as well as continuing to implement the Leicestershire Resources and Waste Strategy. However, Members acknowledged there would always be some demand for residual 'black bin' waste disposal. The Lead Member highlighted that reductions would be countered by rising population and housing growth which were expected to result in more waste being generated. The Authority would monitor the impact of growth against the impact of its programmes and the introduction of mandatory food waste collections and other factors such as changing waste types, which all had to be taken into account when assessing the Council's future waste contract needs.
- ii) A Member raised concern that the Department's resources of £0.39m to tackle Ash Dieback had been transferred to the Corporate Resources Department. It was noted that this was simply an accounting matter and reflected the fact that the Corporate Resources Department employed the team that looked after trees and woodlands.

##### Growth

- iii) The technology currently being used to dispose of residual waste which came at a cost was currently considered the most viable option to dispose of waste at the scale required. A Member challenged whether it was more economical to use and therefore pay landfill tax or to incinerate waste and pay the proposed incineration tax. It was noted that the Council sought to manage waste in accordance with the waste hierarchy at the top of which would be waste prevention, reuse and recycling and landfill at the bottom. It was agreed that there needed to be a push towards repurposing waste in line with the circular economy principals rather than sending it to landfill as there were no benefits from this, in order to limit any damaging impact on the environment.
- iv) A Member commented that the ultimate aim would be to reduce non-recyclable packaging. As previously discussed by the Committee, it was noted that the Government's introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging

would now make producers responsible for the costs relating to that packaging from 'cradle to grave' (i.e from production of the material to its disposal). A scheme administrator had been set up by the Government who producers paid a fee to and which was now feeding through to the Authority to help it meet the cost of disposing of this type of waste. The Lead Member emphasised that the Council had been indicatively allocated £6m for 2025/26 but that future allocations were unclear. It was intended that this approach would help to manage away non-recyclable packaging materials, which would then in turn reduce the payments having to be made by the industry.

### Savings

- v) Opening hours at recycling and household waste sites (RHWS) were being reduced in the summer but not universally. Sites would no longer be open 9am until 7pm every day through the summer opening period. Some sites would close at 5pm on certain days but on occasion be open later for residents convenience. Evidence of use showed that sites were used less in the evenings compared to morning usage. However, it was acknowledged that some evening access was still needed and there would therefore be days when some sites would be open until 7pm, to accommodate this. The Director emphasised that the advice to the public would be to check the Council's website prior to visiting.
- vi) Fly-tipping was raised as a concern by some Members who queried whether there were links between closing waste disposal sites and an increase in fly-tipping. It was noted that there was currently no data to suggest there was an escalation in fly tipping cases as a result of closed sites. A Member suggested that enforcement action was the biggest deterrent which was the responsibility of district councils. However, the Lead Member emphasised this was not only a district council problem as the County Council had responsibility for disposing of the waste which could be costly. The Council therefore worked closely with district councils and other agencies, such as the Police and the Environment Agency to address what was a criminal offence. Members noted that the cost of disposal had been factored into the budget.

### Other Factors Influencing MTFFS Delivery/Other Funding Sources

- vii) It was noted that the County Council had responsibility for the ongoing maintenance of a section of the Ashby Canal as a result of the legacy of a proposal a number of years previously to restore and reopen the canal.

### RESOLVED:

- a) That the report on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 -2028/29 be noted;
- b) That the comments now made be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission for consideration at its meeting on 27 January 2025.

### 44. Environmental Performance & Progress Update Report for 23/24.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport the purpose of which was to update the Committee on Environmental Performance and a Progress Update for 2023/24. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) A Member emphasised the importance of delivering on targets set to address climate change and commented that the quick, easy gains had been achieved making future progress more difficult to deliver, particularly given the financial pressures the Council continued to face.
- ii) The use of electric vehicles was considered a step in the right direction but a Member raised concerns regarding the detrimental impact on the environment of having to mine rare materials used in creating the batteries and the impact of batteries being disposed of at the end of their expected lifespan. Members were assured that every effort was made to repurpose batteries, reusing them for storage if no longer suitable for use in vehicles, and then further repurposing the rare materials.
- iii) A Member queried the percentage of homes (49%) that did not have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C or above, suggesting that this seemed high. It was noted that the Warm Homes Grant administered by the Council's Public Health Department would help residents to improve insulation within their homes and thus improve their EPC rating. Members noted that an update would be provided to the Committee regarding the Grant scheme at an appropriate time.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

#### 45. Environment Strategy and Net Zero Strategy - Revised Action Plans.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport the purpose of which was to seek the Committee's views on the draft revised Environment Strategy Action Plan, the 2035 Net Zero Council Action Plan and the 2050 Net Zero Leicestershire Action Plan. The report also sought the Committee's views on a proposed Mink Control Policy proposed to be introduced by the Leicestershire and Rutland Water Vole Steering Group of which the Council is a member. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

#### Environment Strategy and Net Zero Action Plan Reviews

- (i) The streamlining of objectives from over 300 to 55 as part of the efficiency review was considered a good approach, as was the plan to streamline activity to enable officers to focus more on delivery. A Member commented, however, that the objectives were not SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relative or Time bound) objectives and did not seem to be time dependent. They suggested that more needed to be done to prioritise these to focus delivery towards the 2035 and 2050 target.
- (ii) It was noted that there were two action plans; a County wide plan and a County Council plan. The County Council updates were feeding through and the Department strived to make these SMART with clear actions attached. The County wide action plan was more high level and challenging, and covered strategies such

as the Local Transport Strategy and the Energy Strategy. These were supported by more detailed action plans held within the department which had responsibility for delivering these (for example, the Energy Strategy would be supported by an action plan held within the Corporate Resources Department). Officers acknowledged that this was a challenge for officers as it was difficult to track what was being delivered by all the relevant teams. However, the governance processes in place made sure regular updates were provided so that overall progress on key priorities could be tracked.

- (iii) The Lead Member highlighted that the revised Strategy had been consolidated and streamlined in response to budget constraints. Officers had managed a considerably difficult task to narrow down the list of previous actions which had been criticised for being too detailed. It was acknowledged that in a changing environment the Department had to be prepared to adapt to change but at the current time the Strategy now presented what was considered the best way forward. The Lead Member welcomed comments from the Committee and asked that any contradictions which Members identified in either Strategy or Action Plan be provided directly to the Department for consideration.

### Mink Control Policy

In presenting the Mink Policy for consideration, the Director outlined that this fell under the Environment Strategy which included a commitment to support action to reduce the impact of invasive non-native species. In seeking to deliver on this commitment, the County Council was a member of the Leicestershire and Rutland Water Vole Steering Group which involved other partners such as other local authorities, the Environment Agency, the River Trust and Rutland Wildlife Trust. The Steering Group had proposed that a common mink control policy be introduced by all partners as it was a non-native species and a predator to water voles.

Members noted that water voles were an endangered species and identified as a priority species within the Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy alongside a commitment to implement predator control measures as a means of protection.

The Committee supported action to reduce invasive and non-native species but questioned whether mink were the most destructive factor. It was queried whether other factors such as water quality and loss of habitat had been considered as a reason for the decline of water voles. Members also raised serious concerns about the suggested method of disposal (i.e. the use of an air rifle) and questioned whether this was truly regarded as humane and in line with best practice.

The Director advised the Committee that the draft policy and the information provided by the Steering Group had been based on expert guidance which suggested native water vole numbers were in decline as a result of carnivorous mink which were on the incline. The Steering Group supported the strategic and humane control of mink and the policy it had put forward including the suggested method of disposal had been based on the Water Life Recovery Trust's Field Manual for smart mink trapping, the Trust being considered experts in this field.

Overall Members supported the principle of the proposed Policy but agreed that the Cabinet should be made aware of its concerns regarding the possible method of disposal and requested that it seek assurances that only humane methods would be used when

implementing this. The Lead Member assured the Committee that their concerns would be brought to the attention of the Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report on the revised Environment Strategy Action Plan, the 2035 Net Zero Council Action Plan and the Net Zero Leicestershire Action Plan be noted and that the comments now made by the Committee be presented to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 7 February 2025.
- b) That the Mink Control Policy be noted and supported in principle, but that the concerns raised by the Committee regarding possible methods of disposal of American mink as suggested within the policy be submitted to the Cabinet for further consideration.

46. Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport the purpose of which was to seek the Committee's views and comments as part of the ongoing consultation on the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) The Committee welcomed the Strategy which identified steps that could be progressed to make a big difference to the local environment.
- ii) It was noted that the development of the Strategy had been funded by the Government for which the County Council had led on as designated responsible authority for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Members were pleased and supported the innovative approach that had been taken to make the Strategy interactive which would help encourage participation.
- iii) A Member who was also the Chair of a Community Library Trust suggested that there was an opportunity to have an additional line of engagement if the finalised copies of the Strategy were left in local libraries for public access.

AGREED:

That the Local Nature Recovery Strategy be noted and welcomed.

47. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 12 March 2025 at 2.00pm.