

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment, Flooding and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 26 January 2026.

PRESENT

Mr. K. Robinson CC (in the Chair)

Dr. J. Bloxham CC
Mrs. N. Bottomley CC
Mr. N. Chapman CC
Mr. G. Cooke CC
Dr. S. Hill CC

Mr. P. Morris CC
Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mr. C. A. Smith CC

In attendance

Mr. A. Tilbury CC – Lead Member for Environment and Transport.

11. Minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2025 be taken as read confirmed and signed.

12. Question Time.

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

13. 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).

14. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

15. 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.

16. Declarations of the Party Whip.

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

17. Presentations of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

18. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 - 2029/30.

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 2026/27 to 2029/30 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as it related to the Environment, Flooding and Climate Change side of the Environment and Transport Department. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item '8' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mr. A. Tilbury CC, the Cabinet Lead Member for Environment and Transport to the meeting for this item.

Arising from discussion, the following points were noted:

Growth

- (i) The Local Transport Grant (LTG) funding, part of which had been allocated to address flood alleviation work, was one stream of Government funding which could be used flexibly for most highways and transport related activities, excluding rail improvements. Members noted that some of the funding had been directed to highway maintenance, drainage and flood alleviation activities. It was emphasised that bus services were not impacted by this transfer, as they were funded separately through the Bus Fund Grant which could only be used to benefit bus services and passengers.
- (ii) In response to a Member query regarding the lack of budget provision for flood wardens, the Director confirmed that whilst no current budget allocation existed to support this service, work was underway to review this for the future. Members noted that flood wardens currently formed part of the Resilience Service, but consideration was being given to this being transferred to the Environment and Transport Department. Depending on the outcome of this work, future growth would need to be put forward to fund this activity.
- (iii) The transfer of sections of Ashby Canal to the Ashby Canal Association would not remove all costs relating to maintenance of the canal from the Council's budget. Members noted that only those sections required to rebuild specific sections of the canal would be transferred to the Association. The sections retained would therefore continue to be the responsibility of the Council and the costs forecasted for that had been included in the MTFS.

Savings

- (iv) The Corporate Efficiency Review being undertaken by Newton on the Council's behalf had begun with the intention of some additional savings being included in the 2026/27 budget. However, there were currently no initiatives that related to Environment Services. It was noted that since 2010 approximately £30m a year had been taken out of the Environment and Transport Department's overall revenue budget. The total budget for Environment Services was currently £1.6m and this covered a wide array of services. It was not considered possible to reduce this

budget further. However, the Director provided assurance that services would continue to be challenged to be as efficient as possible.

- (v) A Member questioned what growth requirements could be expected following the Efficiency Review and what the aspirations were for the service with a current £1.6m budget. The Director highlighted that the key aims of the Service were as set out in its existing strategies and policies and that funding would be allocated to deliver these as efficiently and effectively as possible. It was highlighted that the Department would also continue to work to secure any other grant funding streams that might become available which would support its current approach.

Other Funding Sources

- (vi) A Member queried the Department's capacity to seek additional grant funding noting the level of work involved in making a submission and the staff resources required to support this. The Director confirmed that this was an ongoing issue that the Department and the Council as a whole had to manage. It was highlighted that staffing levels varied across the Service and that there were significant challenges in recruiting to specialist positions, with competition from the private sector and national bodies that could offer higher salaries being a key issue. Whilst the Department continued to use agency staff where necessary, this did come at a higher cost. Members further noted whilst the budget existed in some areas, for example to support flood alleviation work, several posts remained vacant due to the challenge of recruiting the necessary skills to the Council in these service areas.
- (vii) It was noted that there were no future developments relating to Environment Services. However, there were proposals within the Highway, Transport and Waste Services budgets which would have an impact on and contribute to the delivery of environment related outcomes. The Director undertook to share more information with the Committee regarding such relevant future developments within the MTFs.

Capital Programme

- (viii) Reference to 'Green Vehicle Fleet' as a future development within the Capital Programme related to work taking place to examine the feasibility of installing charging infrastructure at Council depots. This was in response to the Government's current mandate prohibiting the production of new internal combustion engine vehicles from 2030 which would require the Council to move over to an electric fleet. The Department would monitor the national position in relation to this legislation. The Director confirmed there was currently no commitment to invest to green the fleet.
- (ix) A Member requested clarification regarding capital substitution pressures and potential impacts on highways and flood alleviation schemes highlighted in the report. It was noted that the uplift in Government funding is predominantly capital. To complete works in-house, our accounting policies would have required some of this capital funding to be substituted for revenue funding. This had created some accounting challenges which had now been resolved. The Committee was assured that this was simply an accounting matter and did not impact the delivery of projects within the current Capital Programme.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 - 2029/30 be noted;
- b) That the comments now made be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission for consideration at its meeting on 28 January 2026 and then to the Cabinet on 3 February 2026.

19. Environmental Performance Report 2024-25.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport which presented the Environmental Performance Report 2024-25. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were made:

- i) A Member asked whether the Council had seen a rise in electricity costs for its electric vehicle fleet and whether this had been factored into future planning. It was confirmed that the County Council currently operated very few Electric Vehicles (EV) in its fleet. Before moving to a large EV fleet, the Council would comprehensively review the capital investment needed for the transition including charging infrastructure and power capacity. A full business case would be carried out and cost implications would be factored into the MTFS.
- ii) A Member queried the use of hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) for fleet vehicles in light of media reports suggesting some HVO supplies were fraudulent. They also questioned whether there were any additional costs of using HVO compared with using diesel. It was noted that HVO had been used by the County Council within the waste fleet which operated across household waste sites for a year. This delivered various operational benefits, including longer shelf life and improved engine wear. It was noted that the Council had a budget to cover the price difference between standard fuel and HVO and that the actual numbers remained below the budgeted level, due to favourable market prices to date. It was suggested that HVO prices were volatile, with no long-term fixed price available. Members were assured that officers would investigate the concern of fraudulent supplies further, including any risks associated with palm-oil HVO and provide an update outside the meeting. It was highlighted that a review of HVO use was ongoing to assess whether further benefits existed beyond those already known.
- iii) Policy changes encouraging more office based working could negatively impact the Council's environmental performance. It was highlighted that going online and reducing paper use and travel during and after the Covid-19 pandemic contributed positively to Council's performance and that a shift back to physical meetings and commuting could reduce some of the progress made.
- iv) It was highlighted that the national reporting frameworks assumed that a proportion of reuse occurred in households, although this was not measurable. The Council could measure collected waste streams, including recycling and composting tonnage. Behaviour change, national studies, and historic experience suggested that investments in reuse campaigns prevented waste from rising.

- v) It was noted that district and borough councils were responsible for fly tipping collections, while the County Council covered the cost of disposal. Trends varied and were influenced by multiple factors, including enforcement activity by neighbouring authorities. It was highlighted that previous reports to the Committee provided trend data over multiple years.
- vi) A Member questioned the reliability of the reported 97% of the Council managed land said to be under better management for nature. They further queried whether management plans existed and whether the Council could evidence biodiversity improvements. Officers acknowledged that comprehensive biodiversity measurements were difficult to attain and report due to the limited resources the Council had available to do this. The Council was, however, engaging volunteers, county recorders, and promoting local initiatives to strengthen evidence gathering. Work was underway through the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Biodiversity Net Gain requirements to develop more robust indicators, such as tree and hedge planting, pesticide usage, and site specific monitoring.
- vii) A Member raised concerns about the lack of information on the condition of three Sites of Scientific Importance (SSIs) managed by the Council, and whether biodiversity changes were being measured through surveys or other methods. Officers highlighted the challenges with delayed national datasets and limited Natural England resources for assessing SSIs.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

20. Climate Resilience Delivery Plan.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport which presented the Climate Resilience Delivery Plan. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) A Member supported the idea of creating a Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) asset list, citing examples where uncertainty over ownership caused significant delays in resolving issues. It was suggested that building a register would support efficiency, flood response, and clarity for residents.
- (ii) It was highlighted that the priority would be to improve records for SuDS that the County Council was responsible for; SuDS now featured more prominently in highway designs and maintaining accurate information on location, type, and maintenance requirements was considered important. This would commence with SuDS installed as part of the Melton Mowbray Distribution Road project.
- (iii) It was suggested that the design guide for Highways had been updated to support environmentally beneficial drainage systems, and improved registers would help prepare the Authority for any future changes nationally that might require it to manage SuDS, although this would require additional funding.
- (iv) Officers acknowledged the challenges faced when SuDS were managed by private management companies as there was no guarantee on the accuracy of records,

especially with older developments. Work was ongoing to build clearer records through planning consultations. It was suggested that working more closely with local planning authorities would support better data collection in future.

- (v) A Member raised concerns around the difficulties in identifying riparian landowners and enforcing their responsibilities, especially where watercourses ran through new developments. It was suggested that these should be highlighted through the planning process, so that future owners were informed and aware of their responsibility when buying a property. It was acknowledged that although enforcement powers existed, engaging directly with the landowner was generally more productive.
- (vi) In response to a query around how many planning applications the Authority had recommended for refusal on flooding grounds, it was noted that these figures were not immediately available. However, the Director of Environment and Transport stated that applications often went through many stages during the application process, and as a result any initial objections often led to revised applications, rather than a refusal.
- (vii) A Member commented that recommendations encouraging reduced private car use and flexible working could conflict with the Administration's desire for more office-based working and emphasised that, unless evidence showed greater office attendance was beneficial for residents, the environmental benefits outlined in the Climate Resilience Delivery Plan should be considered as a priority.
- (viii) A query was raised as to whether any work had been undertaken to compare the carbon impact of empty office buildings being heated and lit against multiple employees working from home and heating separate properties. It was noted that the Department had previously attempted to model this, but there were many factors that impacted the outcome, such as energy efficiency, vehicle types and distance travelled to work.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report on the Climate Resilience Delivery Plan be noted;
- b) That the comments now made be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 3 February 2026.

21. Date of Next Meeting.

That the next meeting of the Environment, Flooding and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee be confirmed for 9 March 2026 at 2.00pm.

2.00pm – 3.30pm
26 January 2026

CHAIRMAN