



Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 11 March 2020.

PRESENT

Mr. S. J. Galton CC (in the Chair)

Mr. T. Barkley CC
 Mr. P. Bedford CC
 Mr. D. C. Bill MBE CC
 Mr. G. A. Boulter CC
 Dr. T. Eynon CC
 Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC

Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC
 Mr. D. Harrison CC
 Mrs. R. Page CC
 Mr. A. E. Pearson CC
 Mr. T. J. Richardson CC
 Mr. M. B. Wyatt CC

72. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2020 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

73. Question Time.

The following questions, received under Standing Order 34, were put to the Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission:

Questions asked by Mr John Marriott on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural England

Introduction

In response to a question at the Environment and Transport Scrutiny meeting in March 2019, Mr Pearson acknowledged that

"there is an increasing urgency for action to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and that this needs to be achieved through the achievement of carbon neutrality in the quickest time possible"

and that it was

"important to set on record that the County Council is committed to taking actions aimed at reducing the worst impact of climate change."

He noted that

"We will however continue to take action to meet and exceed where possible the commitments and targets set out in our Environment Strategy."

"We take our leadership role seriously and seek to build on the global and national commitments made to address the situation by working with partners to take action in Leicestershire."

Inter alia, one of the actions was

Working with the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership and other partners to identify how we can work together to move Leicestershire towards a low carbon energy and transport future.

In May 2019 the County Council declared a Climate Emergency and in September the Cabinet agreed to Review its Environment Strategy and Action Plan. One of the key actions was to "consider how best to engage with Communities, businesses and other stakeholders."

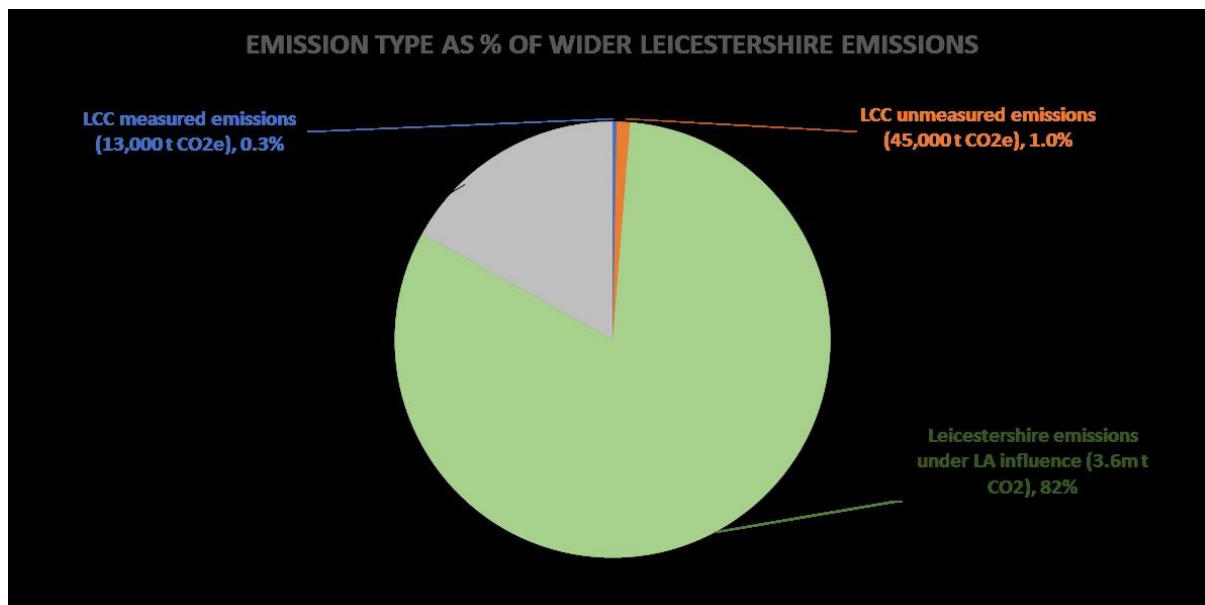
In September 2019, in response to a question from CPRE Leicestershire, the Council acknowledged that "the private car would be likely to remain the dominant mode of travel." It was claimed that the SGP was predicted to have a minor positive effect overall on Climate Change, although there appears to be no evidence to support this statement.

The joint Leicestershire / Leicester City "Strategic Transport Policies" document has been approved for consultation, however it does not seem to appear on the City Council's web site. This is an extremely simplistic and vague document which lacks any supporting information. It fails to explain how the policies will accommodate additional development or show that it will achieve an acceptable transport and environmental solution. It follows the Strategic Growth Plan in assuming that new road projects, and other proposals to increase highway capacity significantly, are essential. These views appear to reflect the views of bodies like LLEP, Midlands Engine and a small group of 'stakeholders' with mainly business interests.

On the 5th March 2020 the Environment and Transport Scrutiny Committee was due to consider a Revised Environment Strategy (RES) 2018-2030 prior to it being presented to Cabinet on 28 April 2020 and to County Council on 13 May 2020. The RES refers to the County Council's declaration of Climate Emergency and to its commitment to support the limiting of global warming to less than 1.5°C, in line with the Paris Agreement.

The declaration also requested officers to undertake a review of the aspects of the RES necessary to achieve the carbon neutrality by 2030 aspiration, together with an assessment of the cost and technology implications.

The Scrutiny report for RES notes (para 12) that wider 'local authority influenced' emissions for Leicestershire includes emissions from the Housing, Transport, Agriculture and Industry sectors. It points out that this will include "Vehicles driving through and within the county". In para 13 & 14 it notes that LCC internal emissions are essentially trivial compared to those which it could influence. Transport is recognised as being a major contributor and potentially the most difficult to tackle.



The recent decision regarding Heathrow Airport and the Government's commitment to the Paris Agreement, makes it even more obvious that an urgent review must be carried out of the SGP and transport policies to produce a sustainable solution to meet Climate Change Commitments while improving the wellbeing of Leicestershire people and minimising the impact on the County's wider environment.

CPRE Leicestershire asks:

1. What discussions has the County Council had with the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership and other partners to identify how it can work together to move Leicestershire towards a low carbon energy and transport future?
2. What progress has been made on engaging with the wider community and interested organisations;
3. Is the County Council aware of Leicester City Council actions in regard to engaging with the wider community, business and organisations concerned with Climate Change and environmental issues?
4. Has the County Council had any discussions with the City Council or other organisations with regard to utilising the Bus Act 2017 to create a much more integrated public transport system for Leicester & Leicestershire?
5. What are the County Council's plans for engagement in 2020 with organisations concerned with environmental and sustainability issues? Business and the wider community?

CPRE Leicestershire is ready to engage with the County Council and is aware that other organisations also wish to engage.

Response from the Chairman:

Introduction

The report that went to Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 March 2020 explained the County Council's approach to taking forward action on the commitments made in the Climate Emergency declaration. Leicestershire County Council will be developing actions in two tranches. Tranche 1 (which was included in the papers to the Environment and Transport Overview Scrutiny Committee) deals with the council's own 'measured emissions' (those which we report to the Government) while Tranche 2 will deal with the council's 'unmeasured emissions' (those emissions which we don't have to report on or are difficult or impossible to measure) and the wider emissions of Leicestershire. Therefore, to date the majority of effort has been focussed on revising the Environment Strategy and Action Plan and in producing the Carbon Reduction Roadmap for the Tranche 1 emissions. Leicestershire County Council is now in the process of starting work on the Tranche 2 roadmap and it is in doing this that we will start examining, considering and taking action on those areas picked up in many of the questions below.

1. The County Council has worked with the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) and Leicester City Council to produce an Energy Infrastructure Strategy for the LLEP area which has made a range of recommendations for how emissions from energy and transport could be reduced. These recommendations have been included with the draft Local Industrial Strategy (LIS). We have contributed to the environmental evidence base that is informing the development of the LIS. We are also working with the LLEP to develop a Natural Capital Investment Plan which will support the LIS. We are participating in a Working Group that has been set up by the LLEP to explore electric vehicles (EV) and EV Infrastructure solutions and a second Working Group that will explore solutions in relation to the use of biofuels.
2. As explained above this will be considered as part of developing the Tranche 2 Carbon Reduction Roadmap. Some initial work has taken place on undertaking some Stakeholder Mapping which will inform what organisations should / could be engaged with.
3. The County Council is aware and has had some discussions with the City Council on this and plans to have further discussions. Their experience will be taken into account when engaging with stakeholders on the environment.
4. The Bus Bill was welcomed by Leicestershire County Council on its enactment as it removed many of the barriers to creating integrated sustainable passenger transport networks across wider areas, and the authorities discussed and explored the potential opportunities offered by the Bus Services Act. However, the realities and cost implications of implementing transport integration from mechanisms such as Franchising or Enhanced Partnerships are prohibitive without the additional support of long-term financial settlements from Government, particularly revenue. To date this remains one of the main barriers to realistically allowing better utilisation of the Bus Services Act 2017 to create more integrated passenger transport networks, and the County Council will continue to press Government to deliver long term funding settlements.

The above notwithstanding, we engage with the City Council and key stakeholders on an ongoing basis within our current working framework with the aim of improving and better integrating sustainable passenger transport provision in Leicestershire, which is to promote, encourage and enable use of more sustainable modes of travel over single occupancy car use.

For example, through our working partnership with the City Council on their Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) bid a bus alliance is being explored to integrate transport provision better, the objectives of which include; improving local air quality, reducing congestion through modal shift and improving commercial viability of the bus network. A notable element of this TCF bid is the electrification of Park and Ride bus services, which are jointly funded between both authorities, which will reduce carbon emissions delivering air quality benefits. (This builds on previous joint working, including to deliver bus service improvements along the A426 corridor.)

We are also in the process of developing the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Transport Priorities (LLSTP), in partnership with Leicester City Council, which highlights where the two Local Transport Authorities will work together to deliver common transport aims and objectives to support the development of the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan out to 2050. The principal aims of the LLSTP are to:

- Improve connectivity;
- Support the transition to a low carbon and circular economy;
- Support national and international efforts in combatting the impacts of and adapting to climate change;

The LLSTP is currently out to public consultation and the key documents can be found at: <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/have-your-say/current-consultations/leicester-and-leicestershire-strategic-transport-priorities>

The County Council continues to seek to identify opportunities to utilise better the mechanisms of the Bus Service Act 2017 with relevant partners within the funding constraints it is working within.

5. Plans are being developed. It is too early to give details of what this may look like, but the intention is to engage with key stakeholders and the wider community.

Mr Marriott asked a supplementary question on the response to question 4, to the effect that the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Transport Priorities focused on seeking large amounts of infrastructure funding to build more roads. It did not address what could be done to reduce traffic and improve public transport. He queried whether an estimate had been made of how much that would have?

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Environment and Transport responded to the effect that the County Council had been successful to date in attracting funding to influence behavioural change, for example through the use of buses, cycling and walking. It was hoped that the Government's new Bus Strategy would provide an opportunity to do more of this. The County Council also looked for opportunities to promote sustainable transport through its new road schemes. Estimates of the impact of sustainable travel schemes would be worked up once the Council knew what funding was likely to be available from the Government.

The Director of Environment and Transport also confirmed that the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Transport Priorities were currently out for consultation. The City and County Councils were taking different engagement approaches but if comments relating to the City were made to the County Council, they would be discussed with the City Council and taken into account.

74. 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).

75. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

76. 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.

Dr Eynon declared a personal interest in the consultation on the Equality Strategy 2020-2024 and Proposed Outcomes as her son was disabled (minute 79 refers).

77. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

78. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

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

79. Consultation on the Equality Strategy 2020 - 2024 and Proposed Outcomes.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which sought its views on the draft Equality Strategy 2020-24, provided details of the outcome of engagement and consultation and set out the principle actions proposed on the 2020-21 Action Plan. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:

- (i) Members welcomed the draft Strategy and felt that the work done to date by the County Council was encouraging. It was suggested that further consideration be given to consistency of language, for example to use 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)' throughout and to refer to 'people with disabilities' rather than 'disabled people'. It was also suggested that there was currently a lack of clarity in the draft Strategy between 'equity' and 'equality'. It was important to define these terms and be clear that the focus was on equity of outcome. Officers undertook to do this before the final version of the Strategy was submitted to the Cabinet. The foreword would also be reviewed to remove reference to Brexit.
- (ii) It was noted that the next national census would be undertaken in 2021 and that data relating to protected characteristics would be updated following this. However, the Council had a duty to publish a Strategy and would not be able to wait for the census results. It was confirmed that, once available, the results would be taken into account through the annual action plans.

- (iii) In response to a query, it was confirmed that age discrimination had not been identified as an area of concern and was not a priority area within the Strategy. The age profile of County Council staff was similar to that of other Local Authorities; there were challenges in attracting younger staff although work on career pathways, retention and initiatives such as the Apprenticeship Levy were helping to address this.
- (iv) The target for BAME staff representation was based on data for both Leicestershire and Leicester City, as this reflected travel to work patterns. Employment data was regularly monitored to ensure that all ethnic groups were represented fairly. Currently, BAME staff were under-represented at a senior level, as were female staff, so these were areas of focus within the Equality Strategy and action plan. Positive action, such as targeted advertising of posts, could be taken although ultimately appointments must be made on merit.
- (v) With regard to the consultation, members felt that every effort had been made to reach out to as many people as possible and that the groups targeted were appropriate, but that the numbers of responses to the survey, even allowing for some to be from groups rather than individuals, was disappointing. It was suggested that the consultation process and principles used by the County Council could be an agenda item for a future meeting of the Commission.
- (vi) Some concern was expressed that, through the focus on hidden disabilities, the County Council was asking staff to disclose information that they would rather not share. Reassurance was given that the focus was on giving managers the right support to manage staff. A contrasting view regarding the importance of collecting data and monitoring it to measure outcomes and track the success of the Strategy was also expressed.
- (vii) Members emphasised the importance of supporting people with disabilities, including non-visible disabilities into work. This was felt to be a particular issue for young people who were in education until the age of 25 and were therefore missing out on work experience.
- (viii) It was confirmed that the County Council had a Trans Policy in place. This was an area where the Council was still developing its understanding and an area of increasing focus for the Stonewall charity.
- (ix) A view was expressed that young people tended not to notice whether people had protected characteristics and that perhaps a Strategy which categorised people into different groups could create a problem by emphasising differences. However, it was confirmed that the Strategy was focused on equity of outcome and creating a 'level playing field' for all groups of people. In addition, its content was derived from the legislative requirements.
- (x) It would be important to refer to human rights responsibilities as well as the rights themselves. The Human Rights Act stated that human rights were only applicable to those who did not infringe on others' rights. It was agreed that this would be referenced in the Strategy.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting on 28 April;

- (b) That the Council's approach to consultation be considered at a future meeting of the Commission.

80. 2019/20 Medium Term Financial Strategy Monitoring (Period 10).

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on the 2019/20 revenue budget and capital programme monitoring position as at period 10. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:

Revenue

- (i) A review of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) policy had been announced by the Government during the previous summer. It was hoped that the interim findings would be report around Easter time. It was not yet known whether they would recommend a tightening of the criteria or making more money available. In the meantime, the Department for Education had issued financial guidelines which mandated the carrying forward of deficits. The County Council remained responsible for formulating and implementing deficit recovery plans.
- (ii) In terms of children's social care placements, the County Council was proposing to increase provision in the county. This could end up with the County Council owning the buildings but using an established provider to operate the services.
- (iii) It was expected that coronavirus would have a limited impact on this year's budget. However, next year's budget could be affected in a number of ways. These included the need to buy more equipment, loss of income, slippage with savings programmes and potential issues with providers. It was expected that the Government's budget, due to be announced that afternoon, would include funding to mitigate the effects of coronavirus, but not that it would help to address the immediate issues of SEND and children's social care overspend.

Capital

- (iv) Concern was expressed regarding the level of slippage in the Capital Programme and whether this could have been foreseen. It was acknowledged that in previous years the process had been better, for example through categorising the Programme to reflect the level of certainty around a capital project, but this was no longer the case. Officers undertook to ensure that the Capital Programme was more realistic in future years and provided assurance that the slippage was due to over-optimistic estimates of what could be delivered rather than a performance issue.
- (v) It was confirmed that work had started on the café and education centre at Snibston Country Park. This was due to open next July. The slippage related to land that had previously been the car park. The original plan had been to sell the land for housing, but consideration was now being given to its use as an extra care centre and specialist dementia unit. Although this would reduce the capital receipt available to the County Council, it would have a net benefit due to delivery of revenue savings and avoiding the need to purchase an alternative site.

- (vi) The Commission was reminded that the Snibston Discovery Centre had required a subsidy of approximately £750,000 per year to run. That revenue saving had now been made for a number of years. The proposals for the Country Park were more self-sustaining. It was recognised that there was a cost to maintaining the scheduled ancient monument and hoped that income streams such as the café would be able to offset some of the cost.
- (vii) With regard to the relocation of the Records Office, it was confirmed that this was necessary because the current building was not big enough and expansion would be too expensive. The County Council was about to appoint architects to design the new building, which should have the capacity to contain records for a number of years.
- (viii) Officers undertook to provide further information relating to the savings at the Croft Depot which would not now be delivered. Officers would also indicate what would happen to the residual land that would now not form part of the Hinckley Hub. Finally, it was confirmed that the vehicle replacement programme included consideration of the environmental impact of the fleet and would form part of the Environment Strategy.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the revenue budget and capital monitoring position as at period 10 be noted;
- (b) That the Commissioners be asked to consider options for further scrutiny of the proposals relating to the Records Office and Collections Hub;
- (c) That Officers be requested to provide further information regarding the Hinckley Hub and Croft Depot savings.

81. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 8 April at 10.30am.

10.30 am - 12.20 pm
11 March 2020

CHAIRMAN

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