



Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee. held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 9 November 2021.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Frisby CC (in the Chair)

Mrs. A. Hack CC

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC

Mrs. R. Page CC

Mr. B. Lovegrove CC

Mr. B. Harrison-Rushton CC

Mr. N. Chapman CC

Apologies

Mr. T. Pendleton CC

In attendance

Mrs. P. Posnett CC, Lead Member for Communities, minute 21 refers.

Mr. B. Pain CC, Lead Member for the Green Agenda

14. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 September were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

15. Question Time.

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

16. 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).

17. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

18. 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.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

20. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

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

21. Engagement on the Council's Strategic Plan.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive, the purpose of which was to seek the Committee's views on the draft Strategic Plan (2022-2026) as part of the 12-week public consultation period. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mrs. P. Posnett CC, the Cabinet Lead Member for Community and Staff Relations, to the meeting for this item.

Arising from discussions the following points were noted:

- i. A concern was raised regarding the installation of new gas boilers under the Warm Home Grants. Officers agreed to clarify the matter with Public Health and provide more information on the programme, which was funded by Government.
- ii. Arising from a query on the lack of reference to wood burning stoves, Members were informed that the Strategic Plan was high-level and addressed such issues with an action that looked to influence communities to reduce their carbon emissions. Further detail on the Council's approach and the specific behaviours which it would aim to encourage within communities would be outlined in relevant supporting strategies underpinning the Strategic Plan, such as the Council's Environment Strategy.
- iii. In relation to the commitment to 'support environmentally sustainable farming practices that support the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and the condition of natural capital features', Members queried how the Council would look to encourage this, noting the impact ploughing had on the release of carbon dioxide. The Lead Member for the Green Agenda stated that farms leased by the Council were tenanted, and that the Authority had a legal obligation to uphold its contracts. Whilst it was not considered appropriate to tell farmers how to farm on the land they leased, members were assured that officers in Corporate Property worked with farm tenants to consider their sustainable practices and how they could support the Council's Action for Nature plan.
- iv. Officers offered to meet with community groups and partners to go through the Strategic Plan if they wished. Furthermore, the online survey offered options which allowed responders to only answer on certain aspects which were of particular interest to them thereby minimising the burden on members of the public and encouraging responses. Officers offered to develop an Executive Summary of the Plan.

- v. In response to a query about missing figures in section 5.4 of the sub-outcome to ensure the 'economy and infrastructure are low carbon and environmentally friendly', Members were informed that the figures related to the fact that while commercial CO2 emissions and industrial emissions had reduced significantly, transport emissions had not. Officers would add the missing figures to the Plan.
- vi. Regarding quality of water in waterways within the county, Members felt it was important that these were highlighted within the Plan, to ensure they were protected and looked after. It was noted the responsibility for water quality however rest with other agencies such as Environment Agency. Officers advised that they would aim to highlight the issue of waterway quality in the Plan.
- vii. The Council had a road map to achieve carbon neutrality from its own emissions by 2030, and is developing a road map for wider Leicestershire emissions by 2045. Carbon neutrality meant that any CO2 released into the atmosphere was balanced by an equivalent amount being removed. Within the Council's own emissions, the most recent assessment suggested there was between 4,500 and 8,500 tonnes it would be unable to remove; therefore, some offsetting would be necessary with initiatives such as tree planting.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the update on the work undertaken to review and refresh the Council's Strategic Plan be noted.
- b. That the Chief Executive be requested to give consideration to the comments now raised as part of the consultation on the Council's Draft Strategic Plan (2022 – 2026).

22. Environment and Climate Change Annual Performance Report 2020/21.

The Committee received a report of the Director of Environment and Transport and the Chief Executive on the annual Environment and Climate Change Performance Report 2020/21. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion the following points were noted: -

- i. The Director advised that the County Council's 'renewable energy generated as a percentage of consumption' was 17%, which missed the 23% target. While the Authority had put as many solar panels across the estate as space allowed, it was evident that the energy output could be affected by numerous factors, such as reduced efficiency over time, cleanliness of a panel, or an increase in energy consumption. It was suggested that there may have been gaps in the collection of data from the panels and the Director undertook to investigate this.
- ii. There had been a 28% increase in electric vehicle charging to 20.33 charging points per 100,000 population. This data was provided by the National ChargePoint Registry, but was limited as it did not include privately funded charge points.

- iii. The data on fine particulate matter was collected annually and details would be provided at a future meeting.
- iv. Concerns were expressed over the low numbers of rivers deemed to be in good chemical status both within Leicestershire and nationally. The Director advised that responsibility for surface water bodies fell to the Environment Agency.

The Lead Member placed on record thanks to the Department and officers who were working hard to achieve the environmental goals of the Council through the multiple initiatives set out in the appendix to the report.

Members were asked to suggest any indicators they wished to see in future performance reports, as the content of these reports were being revised in line with the Strategic Plan 2022-2026.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

23. Leicestershire Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and the Effects of Covid-19.

The Committee received a report of the Director of Corporate Resources regarding Leicestershire County Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and the impact of Covid-19. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion the following points were noted:-

- i. Biodiversity across the county was poor as a result of historic farmland use. The County Council's grass land management schemes looked to introduce wildflower coverage where possible, such as the scheme at Market Bosworth Country Park.
- ii. Members questioned why Woodland Management Plans, which managed biodiversity and amenity within specific sites, were only 'mostly' in place. Officers clarified that Woodland Management Plans covered all Leicestershire County Council owned parks where land parcels were above a certain size, however it did not cover smaller parcels of land and land that the County Council was not responsible for.
- iii. District councils owned their own parks which were also well looked after. The County Council worked in partnership with district councils and others through the regional Midlands Parks Forum.
- iv. While there were no current plans to create a new country park, the Country Parks and Open Spaces Strategy reflected the desire to do so if an opportunity arose.
- v. Officers clarified that Bradgate Park was not listed within the County Council's country parks as it was managed by an independent charitable organisation. The County Council did however have representation on the Management Board.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

24. Tree Management Strategy Update.

The Committee received a presentation updating Members on the Tree Management Strategy. A copy of the presentation marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion the following points were noted:-

- viii. The Authorities target to plant 700,000 trees would require a rapid increase in planting, as set out within the Action Plan, delivery of which would include trees planted to replace trees lost through Ash Dieback.
- ix. Recognising the benefits of tree planting the County Council would be reviewing its current policy which did not allow tree planting on highway verges, due to the impact on underground utility service and the potential safety risk of creating a hard barrier for cars.
- x. A comment made about the importance of increasing orchard space within Leicestershire and the contribution this would make to biodiversity was noted..
- xi. Members recognised the work undertaken by volunteer Tree Wardens, an important group in the ongoing maintenance of the trees within communities.
- xii. The Authority was taking part in a study alongside the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT), with the support of the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund, to develop an approach to re-establish and grow its tree stock on the Council's road network and in new developments. The study would look at the ecosystem and benefits trees could provide in both rural and urban areas.
- xiii. The County Council would communicate widely on its plan and produce a website that would include detailed information on tree planting and what native species would be used. It was also intended that an interactive map would be developed where residents could record any tree they had planted, and this would enable Members to see the where trees had been planted in their division.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

25. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

26. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 26 January 2021 at 2pm.

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