



**ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 24 JANUARY 2024**

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022-23

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides details of the Council's environmental performance on progress in delivering its commitments to net zero and on the performance of the Council's Environmental Management System for 2022-23. The report provides an update on progress in delivering the aims and objectives of the Council's Environment Strategy 2018–2030.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Cabinet approved a new Environment Strategy 2018-2030 on 6 July 2018. The vision of the Strategy is that "Leicestershire County Council will minimise the environmental impacts of its own activities and will contribute to the improvement of the wider environment through local action. The Council will continue to play a significant role in protecting and enhancing the environment of Leicestershire, meeting the challenges and opportunities of climate change, and seeking to embed environmental sustainability into both social and economic development in the county."
3. A revised Strategy was subsequently adopted by the County Council on 8 July 2020 to account for the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency in May 2019.
4. The declaration committed the Council to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 for its own operations. Furthermore, the declaration committed the Council to working with partners and lobbying the Government to make the wider 2050 net zero target possible for Leicestershire and to limiting global warming to less than 1.5°C in line with the Paris Agreement.
5. Subsequently, the County Council signed up to the UK100 Race to Zero Pledge and committed to achieving net zero emissions for Leicestershire by 2045.
6. In December 2022, the County Council adopted the 2030 Net Zero Council Action Plan and the 2045 Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy and Action Plan.

Background

7. For 2022-23 reporting, a new report format and approach has been introduced. This is to provide a single report which gives a clear and comprehensive update on the Council's wider environmental performance, and on progress in delivering its commitments to net zero.
8. The full performance report has been appended to this report and divided into two main sections. Section 1 provides details of the environmental performance and progress for Leicestershire County Council as an organisation, while Section 2 provides details of performance and progress for Leicestershire as a county, accepting that there are some areas of overlap.
9. The report provides details of performance and progress in relation to the Council's commitments to net zero, including the 2030 net zero target for Council operations and the 2045 net zero target for Leicestershire as a county.
10. The report also provides details of performance on a wider range of environmental aspects both for the Council and the County, mainly in relation to progress in meeting the aims and objectives set out in the Environment Strategy 2018-2030.
11. Furthermore, the report provides an assessment of performance against the Council's Environmental Management System.
12. Where circumstances have changed since the end of 2022-23 in relation to environmental risks, the current position is provided where appropriate. Details of progress in delivering the 2030 Net Zero Council Action Plan and the 2045 Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy and Action Plan are provided as of December 2023. Reference is also made to more contemporary changes that may affect the Environmental Management System where this is appropriate.

Report Headlines

13. The main headlines from the 2022-23 Environmental Performance and Progress report are as follows:
 - a) Leicestershire County Council
 - i. There has been a 7.2% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions for Council operations compared to 2021-22 with emissions at 9,395 tCO₂e;
 - ii. The Council's greenhouse gas emissions have reduced by 73.7% since 2008-09;
 - iii. The percentage of Council land in better management for nature remains at 97%;
 - iv. Office waste recycling from Council sites has fallen to 51.2%;
 - v. Office paper purchased has risen by 12% but remains 5.5m A4 sheets less than 2019-20;

- vi. There are two environmental high risks and eight climate change high risks;
- vii. A total of 78 Government policies, legislation and changes in regulation were identified as relevant to the Council;
- viii. There have been a number of new statutory duties for local government introduced as part of the Environment Act 2021 including, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Biodiversity Net Gain, the Biodiversity Reporting Duty and new duties from the waste collection and packaging reforms;
- ix. A total of £3.6m energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades were completed on Council properties;
- x. Whole estate buildings decarbonisation plan is underway;
- xi. Electric Vehicle Fleet Transition Plan is under development;
- xii. Information on the progress and performance of action on carbon reduction and climate adaptation in the County was submitted to the world's leading environmental reporting platform, the Carbon Disclosure Project, to enable them to benchmark the Council's progress and advise on areas of improvement. The County Council scored a B in this process.

b) Leicestershire

- i. Greenhouse gas emissions for Leicestershire in 2021 were 4.85 MtCO_{2e}, an increase of 323,000 tCO_{2e} compared to 2020, due to the expected bounce back from the Covid-19 pandemic;
- ii. Per capita greenhouse gas emissions for Leicestershire in 2021 were 6.8 tCO_{2e};
- iii. Greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 28% since 2005;
- iv. 52.6% of existing domestic properties have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of C or higher, meaning that Leicestershire moved from the 3rd to 1st quartile when compared to comparable local authorities (Note: The Council's performance is benchmarked against 33 English authorities which cover large, principally non-urban geographical areas. Where it is available, it is indicated which quartile Leicestershire's performance falls into. The 1st quartile is defined as performance that falls within the top 25% of relevant comparators (the best). The 4th quartile is defined as performance that falls within the bottom 25% of comparators (the worst));
- v. The Solar Together project has supported 460 solar panel installations across the County, saving an estimated 7,385 tCO_{2e} over the next 25 years;
- vi. The Warm Homes scheme delivered £2.5m of Sustainable Warmth funding to 250 households across the County. A further £6m in funding has also been secured;
- vii. Securing of £2.56m in funding to deliver the Pathfinder Places project with partners, to support delivery of the 2045 Net Zero Leicestershire Action Plan.

Resource Implications

14. The report has identified that there are concerns about the sufficiency of existing staff and financial resources to meet the growing environmental workload that is arising from a combination of factors, including new Government obligations and the increasing need for action to meet the environmental challenges.
15. Since the Council's adoption of the updated Environment Strategy in 2020 and the Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan in 2022, the context in which the Council is operating has altered. The local government financial position has progressively become more challenging with significant implications for the County Council. The Council has moved from a position of being able to balance in-year and the following year's budget to struggling to balance in-year with the prospect of having to use reserves to balance for the following year. Additionally, the largest ever expenditure gap at the end of the four-year MTFS period has been identified. To add to this challenging context, in recent months the Government has put out mixed messages on the environment agenda including pushing back the date for ceasing production of petrol and diesel cars and the launch of the Plan for Drivers.
16. While officers have worked hard to proactively deliver on the environment agenda, the scale of the task within the challenging financial position has hampered environmental performance to an extent. As set out in the MTFS report elsewhere on this agenda, revised net zero targets are being recommended to the Cabinet and the County Council to better reflect the reality of the Council's funding position. Subject to approval of these new target dates, there will be a need to reconsider the Council's environmental priorities, including the Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan and provide a credible plan to deliver on the revised targets within the limited resources available for this agenda. This plan will be reported to Members for approval.
17. The Environment Act 2021 and subsequent legislation has already placed and is expected to place new or additional duties on local government. Once these are fully known and understood, it will be necessary to assess whether there are any further resource implications for the Council.
18. In addition, business cases will be developed for specific projects as required which may identify resource implications.
19. The Director of Law and Governance and Director of Corporate Resources have been consulted on the content of this report.

Conclusions

20. The following key conclusions have been drawn from the report:
 - a) Leicestershire County Council

- i) While emissions have continued to reduce by almost 74% since the 2008-09 baseline, the County Council needs to continue to achieve an average reduction of 1,342 tCO₂e per year to meet the 2030 Net Zero target. However, the reduction in emissions for 2022-23 fell 45% short of what is needed. This shows that the Council is not currently on track to meet its 2030 net zero target and that more work will be needed to meet the emission reduction target.
 - ii) While generation of renewable energy on Council sites is not currently on target, there is an expectation that there will be an increase going forward, as the repaired and new solar panel arrays and the improvements to the biomass boiler take effect.
 - iii) The new ways of working are overall helping to reduce the Council's environmental impact, though some of the environmental impacts will have been shunted to the homes of staff.
 - iv) While some good activity is taking place on biodiversity such as tree planting and the wildlife verge scheme, the need to demonstrate how the Council is meeting the new strengthened biodiversity duty will highlight if there is more to do going forward.
- b) Leicestershire
- i) The Council is currently not on track to achieve the net zero 2045 target but action in this area is in the early stages and will need ongoing review. At the moment, this highlights the scale of the challenge more than lack of progress.
 - ii) Particularly, there is a need to target action on reducing transport, domestic, industry and agriculture emissions, with a focus on actions to increase electric vehicle take up, encouraging more active travel, increasing renewable energy generation and improving the energy efficiency of existing buildings.
 - iii) Significant amount of work is needed to engage with partners on the delivery of projects within the 2045 Net Zero Leicestershire Action Plan.
 - iv) There are concerns about the water quality of the County's rivers.
 - v) There will be a significant amount of work needed to implement the collection and packaging reforms which contribute to meeting the national 65% recycling target by 2035.
- c) Overall
- i) The insufficiency of action on climate adaptation is a concern.
 - ii) The current workload and staff capacity issues are a concern.

- iii) The current financial position of the Council is a concern in terms of resourcing action on the environment.
 - iv) There is a need to prioritise actions on the environment and the use of staff and financial resources. Within that, there is also a need to decide how best to allocate resources between meeting the Council's own and the wider County net zero targets.
 - v) The uncertainty regarding Government policy on the environment and implications of recent environmental legislation are a concern.
 - vi) There is increasing public interest and scrutiny of local authority action on the environment.
21. In light of the varied Government statements on environment in recent months, as well as the Council's unprecedented financial challenges, consideration is being given to revising the Council's net zero targets for its own operations and for the wider County. Subject to the Cabinet and the County Council approval of revised net zero commitments, there may be a need to reconsider the Council's environmental priorities, including the Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan and provide a credible plan to deliver on the revised targets within the limited resources available for this agenda.
22. The Committee is asked to note the findings included in the appended Environmental Performance and Progress Update Report for 2022-23.

Circulation under Local Issues Alert Procedure

23. None.

Equality Implications

24. This paper provides a report on the County Council's environmental performance and therefore in itself has no equality implications.

Human Rights Implications

25. This paper provides a report on the County Council's environmental performance and therefore in itself has no human rights implications.

Environmental Implications

26. The report shows how the Council is performing in terms of reducing its impact on the environment and provides an indication of the state of the environment in Leicestershire based on the data currently available and used. The report also highlights a concern that insufficient action is being taken on addressing the impacts of climate change on the Council and on Leicestershire as a county.

Background Papers

Environment Strategy 2018-30 -

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2020/7/13/Environment-Strategy-2018-2030-delivering-a-better-future.pdf>

2030 Net Zero Council Action Plan

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/net-zero-council-action-plan.pdf>

2045 Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy & Action Plan -

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/net-zero/net-zero-leicestershire-strategy-action-plan-and-reports>

Action for Nature document -

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/8/16/action-for-nature-strategic-approach-to-biodiversity.pdf>

Appendix

Environmental Performance and Progress Update Report 2022-23

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