



**ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 22 JANUARY 2025**

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023-24

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

Purpose of the 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 2023-24. 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 the 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 climate emergency declaration committed the Authority 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 work towards 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.
7. Since these commitments were made, the Council has been subjected to increasingly constrained financial position with a significant deficit forecast. In

February 2023, in light of this and the estimated increased resources required to reach net zero, the Council resolved to extend the net zero targets to 2035 for the Council's operations and to 2050 for the Countywide emissions, in line with the national target.

Background

8. The full performance report has been appended to this report, and it is 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 2035 net zero target for County Council operations and the 2050 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 2023-24 in relation to environmental risks, the current position is provided where appropriate. Details of progress in delivering the 2035 Net Zero Council Action Plan and the 2050 Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy and Action Plan are provided, as of December 2024. 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 2023-24 Environmental Performance and Progress report are:
 - a) Leicestershire County Council
 - i. There has been a 2.7% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions for the Council's operations compared to 2022-23 with emissions at 9,282 tCO_{2e};
 - ii. The Council's emissions have reduced by 74.1% 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 increased by over 10% to 62%, and this is likely to be due in part to an overall increase in office waste by 8% compared to the previous year;

- v. The amount of office paper purchased has fallen by 1.5%, to 2.7m A4 sheets. This is 67% less than the pre-Covid-19 pandemic figure of 8.2m A4 sheets;
- vi. There are two environmental high risks (biodiversity and highways mowing regimes, and leaching from dog waste skips) and six climate change high risks (Highways assets x3, supplier resilience, property policies & building specifications);
- vii. 117 new or updated Government policies, legislation, regulations consultation and guidance have been 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 strengthened biodiversity duty and new biodiversity reporting requirements, as well as new duties from the Simpler Recycling reforms;
- ix. Due to limited staff capacity and the need to progress other priorities, it has not been possible to make significant progress on climate adaptation;
- x. The new ways of working and the financial pressures on the Council are making it more difficult to achieve some of the Council's environmental targets;
- xi. The completion of energy efficiency surveys across 62 Council properties, the results of which have been used to bid for external funding to make fabric and heating improvements at several sites;
- xii. The Electric Vehicle Fleet Transition study has been completed and will be used to advise on the potential next steps in electric vehicle (EV) fleet transition.
- xiii. An 18-month trial to dim and trim streetlighting has been progressed and with projected electricity savings of 1,336,166 kWh which equates to 277 tCO_{2e}, with an estimated annual saving of £0.5m from 2024/25.

b) Leicestershire

- i. Greenhouse gas emissions for Leicestershire in 2022 were 4.64 MtCO_{2e}, a decrease of 165,000 tCO_{2e} compared to 2021;
- ii. Per capita greenhouse gas emissions for Leicestershire in 2022 were 6.4 tCO_{2e};
- iii. Greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 31% since 2005;
- iv. The number of EV charging locations per 100,000 population increased to 59.1, moving Leicestershire into the third quartile relative to comparative English authorities;
- v. EV ownership has also increased by 40% to 216.5 per 10,000 population, with Leicestershire placed in the third quartile relative to comparative English authorities;
- vi. 51.2% of existing domestic properties have an EPC rating of C or greater, meaning that Leicestershire has fallen to the second quartile relative to comparative English authorities;

- vii. The securing of £2.56m in funding from Innovate UK to deliver the Leicestershire Collaborate to Accelerate Net Zero (LCAN) project with partners to support the delivery of four key work packages (£0.83m funding allocated to Leicestershire County Council to deliver one work package, with the balance of funding allocated to the project partners to deliver the remaining work packages). This funding will support the delivery of the 2050 Net Zero Leicestershire Action Plan.
- viii. Successful bid for Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding to support the delivery of 100 EV chargepoints across the County;
- ix. Progression for the development of the fourth Local Transport Plan, which will embed carbon reduction objectives into transport planning and encourage more sustainable travel options to lower emissions;
- x. The Warm Homes service launched its Home Energy Retrofit Offer project to offer personalised energy and retrofit advice to homeowners in hard-to-reach communities. It has also continued the delivery of the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 with an estimated maximum of 173 homes supported by March 2025 and an anticipated capital budget up to £2.5m.

Conclusions

14. The following key conclusions have been drawn from the report:

a) Leicestershire County Council

- i. The County Council has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 2.7% in 2023-24 compared to the previous year. The figures show that the Council is currently ahead of target compared to the linear trajectory to achieve net zero from the 2016-17 baseline year to 2035. However, the level of annual reduction is starting to plateau as the quick win opportunities to reduce emissions diminish. If the current rate of reduction of 2.7% was to continue, then the County Council would not achieve net zero by 2035.
- ii. Emission reductions were found across most sources, but the majority of these reductions were less than 3%. This demonstrates that it is getting harder to seek out and gain substantial reductions without increased investment. Funding will be required to enable investment, in particular in EV vehicles and decarbonising Council buildings, to support future carbon reductions.
- iii. The value of undertaking environmental audits to improve environmental performance and compliance has been highlighted by the number of non-conformities and observations identified.
- iv. The Environmental Management System is likely to be affected by the recent change in Government, its policy positions on the environment and the roll out of new statutory duties. The Committee will be kept updated regarding such changes where these affect the Council's current approach.

- v. The scale of environmental change is signified by the number of (117) new policies, legislation, changes in regulation, and guidance issued by the Government of relevance to the County Council.

b) Leicestershire

- i. Data from the Government shows that Leicestershire's greenhouse gas emissions for 2022 had decreased by 165,000 tonnes since 2021. However, the average annual reduction since the 2019 baseline year is 2.5%, and an average annual reduction of 3.2% is required in order to reach net zero by 2050. Therefore, Leicestershire is not currently on track to reach net zero by 2050, assuming a continuation of the current rate of reduction.
- ii. While the wider County is currently not on track, several County Council led projects and policies have progressed during 2023-24, which will support the transition to net zero going forward. These include the LCAN project; the LEVI scheme and the associated Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy, supported by the development of the Local Transport Plan 2026 – 20240, and the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- iii. Concerns continue about the water quality of the County's rivers.
- iv. There has been very good progress on planting a tree for every person in Leicestershire.
- v. There is some concern that Leicestershire remains in the fourth quartile relative to comparative English authorities, for the level of fine particulate matter (PM 2.5).
- vi. There will be a significant amount of work needed to implement the collection and packaging reforms, that contribute to meeting the national 65% recycling target by 2035.

c) Overall

- i. The environment and net zero agenda, statutory duties and strategic commitments are expanding as a result of increased public interest and new emerging policies from the Government. For the Council, this adds pressure to support the delivery of activities from a resource perspective.
- ii. To address this, the Council has undertaken a reprioritisation exercise to ensure that resources are optimised to undertake essential delivery items, such as statutory requirement. However, there remains a risk around the capacity to deliver in some key areas, such as climate adaptation and seeking to secure external funding via bid writing.

- iii. The Council recognises that achieving net zero by 2050 (and other overarching environmental commitments) requires action from all sectors of society.

Resource implications

15. The report has identified concerns regarding the current financial position of the Council and how it may affect resourcing of action on the environment.
16. In 2024, the Council resolved to extend the net zero targets for the Council and wider County commitments and, in addition to this, requested that officers revise the Actions Plans for both the Environment Strategy and 2035 and 2050 Net Zero Strategies. Alongside these revisions, a prioritisation exercise was undertaken to consider the current staff resources and what is needed to deliver against these Action Plans and the statutory requirements of the Environment Branch (Environment Policy & Strategy and Carbon Reduction teams). This work has now been completed and the revised Action Plans, which reflect the staff and financial resources available, are the subject of a separate report for consideration by the Committee at this meeting.
17. As outlined above, the Environment Act 2021 and subsequent legislation has placed new or additional duties on local government, such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Once these are fully known and understood, it will be necessary to assess whether there are any further resource implications for the Council.
18. Business cases will be developed for specific projects as required, which may identify future resource implications.
19. The Director of Law and Governance and the Director of Corporate Resources have been consulted on the content of this report.

Circulation under Local Issues Alert Procedure

20. None.

Equality Implications

21. There are no equality implications arising from the content of this report.

Human Rights Implications

22. There are no equality implications arising from the content of this report.

Environmental Implications

23. 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 that is currently available and used. The report however highlights concern that insufficient staff capacity and financial

resources are likely to make it more difficult for the Council to meet its environmental targets and commitments, which may result in environmental implications.

Background Papers

Environment Strategy 2018-2030 -

<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>

Biodiversity Duty Plan -

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/LCC-Biodiversity-Duty-Plan.pdf>

Appendix

2023-24 Environmental Performance & Progress Update Report

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