



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

**ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY AND NET ZERO STRATEGY – REVISED ACTION  
PLANS**

**MINUTE EXTRACT**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport the purpose of which was to seek the Committee's views on the draft revised Environment Strategy Action Plan, the 2035 Net Zero Council Action Plan and the 2050 Net Zero Leicestershire Action Plan. The report also sought the Committee's views on a proposed Mink Control Policy proposed to be introduced by the Leicestershire and Rutland Water Vole Steering Group of which the Council is a member. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

**Environment Strategy and Net Zero Action Plan Reviews**

- i) The streamlining of objectives from over 300 to 55 as part of the efficiency review was considered a good approach, as was the plan to streamline activity to enable officers to focus more on delivery. A Member commented, however, that the objectives were not SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relative or Time bound) objectives and did not seem to be time dependent. They suggested that more needed to be done to prioritise these to focus delivery towards the 2035 and 2050 target.
- ii) It was noted that there were two action plans; a County wide plan and a County Council plan. The County Council updates were feeding through and the Department strived to make these SMART with clear actions attached. The County wide action plan was more high level and challenging, and covered strategies such as the Local Transport Strategy and the Energy Strategy. These were supported by more detailed action plans held within the department which had responsibility for delivering these (for example, the Energy Strategy would be supported by an action plan held within the Corporate Resources Department). Officers acknowledged that this was a challenge for officers as it was difficult to track what was being delivered by all the relevant teams. However, the governance processes in place made sure regular updates were provided so that overall progress on key priorities could be tracked.

iii) The Lead Member highlighted that the revised Strategy had been consolidated and streamlined in response to budget constraints. Officers had managed a considerably difficult task to narrow down the list of previous actions which had been criticised for being too detailed. It was acknowledged that in a changing environment the Department had to be prepared to adapt to change but at the current time the Strategy now presented what was considered the best way forward. The Lead Member welcomed comments from the Committee and asked that any contradictions which Members identified in either Strategy or Action Plan be provided directly to the Department for consideration.

### Mink Control Policy

In presenting the Mink Policy for consideration, the Director outlined that this fell under the Environment Strategy which included a commitment to support action to reduce the impact of invasive non-native species. In seeking to deliver on this commitment, the County Council was a member of the Leicestershire and Rutland Water Vole Steering Group which involved other partners such as other local authorities, the Environment Agency, the River Trust and Rutland Wildlife Trust. The Steering Group had proposed that a common mink control policy be introduced by all partners as it was a non-native species and a predator to water voles.

Members noted that water voles were an endangered species and identified as a priority species within the Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy alongside a commitment to implement predator control measures as a means of protection.

The Committee supported action to reduce invasive and non-native species but questioned whether mink were the most destructive factor. It was queried whether other factors such as water quality and loss of habitat had been considered as a reason for the decline of water voles. Members also raised serious concerns about the suggested method of disposal (i.e. the use of an air rifle) and questioned whether this was truly regarded as humane and in line with best practice.

The Director advised the Committee that the draft policy and the information provided by the Steering Group had been based on expert guidance which suggested native water vole numbers were in decline as a result of carnivorous mink which were on the incline. The Steering Group supported the strategic and humane control of mink and the policy it had put forward including the suggested method of disposal had been based on the Water Life Recovery Trust's Field Manual for smart mink trapping, the Trust being considered experts in this field.

Overall Members supported the principle of the proposed Policy but agreed that the Cabinet should be made aware of its concerns regarding the possible method of disposal and requested that it seek assurances that only humane methods would be used when implementing this. The Lead Member assured the Committee that their concerns would be brought to the attention of the Cabinet.

## RESOLVED:

- a) That the report on the revised Environment Strategy Action Plan, the 2035 Net Zero Council Action Plan and the Net Zero Leicestershire Action Plan be noted and that the comments now made by the Committee be presented to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 7 February 2025.
- b) That the Mink Control Policy be noted and supported in principle, but that the concerns raised by the Committee regarding possible methods of disposal of American mink as suggested within the policy be submitted to the Cabinet for further consideration.

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