

DEBORAH TAYLOR CC

Leader of the Opposition

Meeting: Cabinet

Date/Time: Tuesday, 15 July 2025 at 2.00 pm

Comments for Cabinet; Agenda Item 10

The County Council approved the revised Environment Strategy 2018-2030 on 8th July 2020. The vision of the Strategy is that 'Leicestershire County Council will minimise the environmental impact of its activities and will improve the wider environment through local action. We will play our full part to protect the environment of Leicestershire. We will tackle climate change and embed sustainability into what we do.'

In December 2022, the County Council adopted the 2030 Net Zero Council Action Plan and the 2045 Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy and Action Plan. The vision of the Net Zero Strategy is that 'In 2045, Leicestershire has ended its contribution to global warming and has adapted to the impacts of climate change. The transition to net zero has created a cleaner, greener Leicestershire for people, prosperity, and planet; supporting healthy, resilient communities, enabling sustainable growth, and enhancing biodiversity.'

Since these commitments were made, the Council has been subjected to an increasingly constrained financial position with a significant deficit forecast. In February 2024, considering this and the estimated increased resources required to reach net zero, the Council resolved to extend the net zero targets to 2035 for Council operations and 2050 for Countywide emissions, in line with the national target.

National legislation is in place to support the UK's transition to net zero – the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 commits the Government to a 100% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 compared with 1990 levels.

The Council £2m carbon reduction reserve was set aside in 2022 to create a fund to pump prime new carbon reduction initiatives. The Leader of the Council has proposed that this reserve is reallocated from net zero activities to flooding initiatives and adapting services to mitigate the impacts of severe weather events.

The Leader of the Council has requested that the Council repositions the Council's approach to the net zero agenda, focussing on dealing with the impacts of climate change and extreme weather (e.g. flooding and extreme heat), wider projects that deliver financial savings and projects that deliver additional social, economic or environmental benefits, in support of the Council's Strategic rather than carbon reduction activities.

The main primary legislation in the United Kingdom, which aims to tackle climate change, is the Climate Change Act 2008 (the "2008 Act").

Whilst local authorities have used various statutory powers to participate in net zero projects, at present, there is no overarching legal duty on local authorities to contribute towards achieving net zero. However, there is a patchwork of obligations that require local authorities to take climate change into account in the performance of their functions.

Going forward, local authorities may be legally required to take positive action to combat climate change. The Environmental Targets (Public Authorities) Bill is currently before Parliament.

In summary, the proposal under consideration presently appears lawful. However, the Cabinet should have in mind that, in the coming years, Parliament may well expand the Council's legal duties.

I can not see anything in the report that mitigates this risk, and therefore, the Cabinet should think carefully about this proposal and make sure they have a plan in place if this legislation does become statutory.

D. Taylor