

SCRUTINY COMMISSION 28TH FEBRUARY 2007

ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the Council's current and planned response to the Environment Agenda as requested by the County Council at its meeting on 6th December 2006 as a consequence of the following notice of motion:- .

Climate Change

- (A) "That the County Council agrees to sign the Nottingham Declaration on an all-party basis by 1st January 2007;
 - (B) That the Scrutiny Commission be asked to consider the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Energy, together with the principles of the Notice of Motion in the name of Mr Bown, which the Council welcomes, with a view to considering the Council's existing response to the Environment agenda and recommending to the Cabinet and the Council an appropriate way forward and further action plans in respect of the Environment Strategy and other related strategies such as climate and waste."
2. The notice of motion from Mr Bown which was not discussed at the County Council meeting urged the Cabinet to:-
 - (i) appoint an "Environment Champion" for the County Council and for Leicestershire and to encourage other organisations to appoint their own Environment champions to ensure that the Environment is high on the agenda across the whole County;
 - (ii) encourage partnership organisations such as the Local Strategic Partnership, Leicestershire Together, to develop an Environment Strategy and an Action Plan to achieve its objectives;
 - (iii) benchmark our current environmental impact and monitor progress towards reducing our adverse environmental impact;
 - (iv) consider how waste minimisation, reduced packaging and more recycling might engage the commercial sector as well as the household sector;

- (v) ensure through the planning system that new buildings reduce their impact on the environment as a factor in their design and that existing buildings are assessed to reduce their environmental impact;
 - (vi) propose more efficient use of energy and more efficient and renewable sources of energy including on site generation through wind turbine, passive solar heating, hydro turbines, biomass heating;
 - (vii) deliver far more carbon-fixing by tree planting – notoriously low in Leicestershire (2% cover);
 - (viii) operate a low energy transport scheme including the Leader and Chairman’s vehicles and place electrical vehicle charging into new park and ride schemes;
 - (ix) bring forward options for methane capture from landfill sites during their operation;
 - (x) continue to support vigorously Leicestershire food producers and local consumption to reduce food miles;
 - (xi) develop a robust audit of all CO₂ emissions arising from the activities and functions of the County Council, so we are well positioned for future carbon trading schemes;
 - (xii) aim to become a carbon-neutral authority;
3. The notice also asked that in order to allow the public and members to monitor the Council’s resolve, an environment impact statement is attached to all Council reports, similar to those relating to financial impact and equal opportunities.

Action taken following the County Council Meeting

Nottingham Declaration

4. As a result of the decision of the Council the three Group Leaders signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change on 20th December 2006. Signing the declaration commits the County Council to work with central government to contribute at a local level, to the delivery of the UK climate change programme, the Kyoto Protocol and the target for carbon reduction by 2010.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

5. The following County Council strategies and partner led strategies to which the Council is a signatory are relevant the Environment Agenda:

a) **The County Council’s Environment Strategy**

This is a strategy for the County Council itself and was first approved in 2004. It has been subject to two reviews since that date and a further review is under preparation.

b) The Climate Change Strategy

This was prepared by ENABLE (Environment for a Better Leicestershire) for the Leicestershire Together Board in March 2005. An Action Plan is currently under consideration.

c) The Procurement Strategy

This was approved by the Cabinet in December 2006.

d) Local Area Agreement

The Cleaner Greener strand includes a range of environmental targets relating to waste, climate change, biodiversity, access to Country Parks and measures to tackle graffiti.

e) Leicestershire Waste Management Strategy

This has been prepared by the Waste Management Partnership. A Waste Local Development Framework is under preparation and a Waste Action Plan is also under development for the County Council's own sites as one of the actions from the Environment Strategy.

f) Energy and Water Strategy

This was developed by a five member scrutiny panel and its findings endorsed by the Scrutiny Commission on 31st January and the Cabinet on 12th February.

g) Other Strategies

There are a range of other strategies relating to Environmental matters which the County Council has approved which include the Local Transport Plan, including the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2006) and the Landscape and Woodland Strategy (2001 revised 2006).

Response to the issues raised by Mr Bown

6. The Energy and Climate Change issues raised in Mr Bown's Notice of Motion are largely covered in the separate report on the Energy and Water Strategy which was supported by the Commission and endorsed by the Cabinet. The elements not directly covered are dealt with below:-

Additional carbon fixing by tree planting

7. Carbon fixing by trees is well established. Whilst not being as straightforward as some of the publicity would imply this is an approach that, in the right place, can deliver longer term environmental benefits. However the economics, whilst improving, are not yet sufficiently good to encourage planting for any other reason.
8. Leicestershire is fortunate in that the National Forest has delivered a substantial increase in tree cover from 6% 10 years ago to 17%, largely through the National Forest Tender Scheme. In addition the SHIRE

Environmental Grants and the Stepping Stones Countryside management project have together supported a wide range of tree planting schemes. These have all combined to increase tree cover in Leicestershire to 3.8% in the last National Inventory carried out by the Forestry Commission in 1998. In addition, plans are being developed for a Community Woodland and Green Space project, set broadly within the Stepping Stones Countryside management project area. This should further enhance tree cover. There is already a contribution of £1 per car when booked in advance at East Midlands Airport towards tree planting in the Forest and the County Council could consider in what ways it could support such schemes through additional publicity.

A low energy transport scheme

9. In terms of a low energy transport scheme the more efficient use of owned and hired transport will be addressed by separate projects within the County Council's Change Management Programme.

Aim to become a carbon-neutral authority

10. Commitments to becoming carbon neutral are being increasingly used as a way of mobilising action across a whole organisation and over the long term aimed at a specific purpose. Organisations as diverse as Marks and Spencer and the National Government in relation to housing stock have all made recent announcements to this effect. Whilst carbon neutrality is theoretically achievable by any organisation, it is clear from the work carried out on the Energy and Water Strategy that the County Council has some way to go before it can reach typical standards on the building stock. The vehicle fleet issues have yet to be addressed and these are likely to be much more intractable. Members may feel therefore that such a confident and challenging target should perhaps be based on somewhat more of a track record of delivery.

Waste

11. A waste audit at County Hall has been carried out. A subsequent Action Plan for the County Council is under development and is due to be finalised by the end of March 2007. The 2006 Leicestershire Municipal Waste Management Strategy has now been adopted and is a partnership between the County Council and all Leicestershire Borough and District Councils. The Strategy contains both a Core Strategy and Action Plans relating to how waste will be managed throughout Leicestershire between now and 2020.

Procurement

12. A Corporate Procurement Strategy to 2009 was approved by the Cabinet on 19th December 2006. One of the underlying principles of the strategy is sustainability: *"We will ensure that our procurement practises help us to deliver on our objectives of improving social, economic and environmental well-being within Leicestershire."* An Environmental Procurement Policy is currently being developed along with Staff Purchasing Guidelines, which will contain a section on environmental purchasing and will be available by

mid 2007. A top 20 list of Sustainable Products has also recently been added to the i-procurement system. One of the procurement measures is the percentage of environmentally friendly products purchased through ESPO.

Environment Champion

13. The Notice of Motion referred to the desirability of appointing an Environment Champion for the County Council and to encourage other organisations to do likewise. At present the Cabinet Lead Member for Community Services, Mr Ernie White CC, fulfils this role and it may be seen as confusing if an additional person were appointed to fulfil a similar function. Mrs Ruth Camamile CC provides support to Mr White on Environmental matters and is also chairman of ENABLE which already acts as the environmental umbrella for Leicestershire.

Environment Strategy

14. The Notice of Motion in the name of Mr Bown, inter alia, commented that *“we need a more focused Environment Strategy which goes far enough and fast enough to meet the challenge before us and which engages the rest of the community”*. This fits well with the Cabinet’s thinking when it last approved the review of the Environment Strategy Action Plan (in September 2006). Its approval to that review was on the basis that work was underway on three key strands of activity (Energy, Waste and Procurement) so that by the time of the next review these documents would provide the core to the Action plan. Therefore the next review when considered by the Cabinet later in the year, will indeed be more focused.

Benchmarking

15. The Notice of Motion suggested benchmarking our current environmental impact and monitor progress towards reducing our adverse environmental impact. To an extent this work is already covered by the Environment Strategy Action Plan reviews, which when coupled with the work done on the Energy and Water Strategy and the Waste Audit provides a reasonable picture of the County Council’s environmental impact. In terms of the picture for Leicestershire there have been two studies of the State of the Environment in Leicestershire (In March 1995 and a Strategic Overview of Leicestershire’s Environment by ENABLE in 2004) and an update to that overall picture is now due to commence. It is true that overall, environmental data appears to be less valued by National and Regional bodies when compared to social and economic data but the County Council is well placed, particularly when compared to other comparable bodies, in assembling environmental data. This is particularly due to two factors. First, the establishment of the Partnership for Environment Protection (a partnership between the County and the Leicestershire Districts) with the active support of Natural England and English Heritage. Second, the Historic and Natural Environment Team

within Environment and Heritage Services which brings together environmental records and manages the Leicester Environment Records Centre at Holly Hayes, Birstall.

Food Miles

16. The Leicestershire Food and Drink Group was launched in 2003 to bring together key partners and organisations with an interest in Leicestershire Food and Drink, to network, share good practice and avoid any duplication of projects. Currently chaired by County Council the group has produced a Strategy and Action Plan, which has as one of its objectives the reduction of food miles. One of the initiatives which will address this is the production of a food and drink directory, which will highlight local producers and retail outlets as well as supporting the Leicestershire supply chain.

Environmental impact statements in reports

17. In response to the suggestion that an environmental assessment be included in committee reports it is proposed to amend the report writing guide to cover this issue. This will remind authors of the reports to include 'Environmental Implications' i.e. an impact assessment whenever this is appropriate but will avoid requiring people slavishly to include the item on each and every report. This would be in keeping with the advice on other important issues which need to be covered in committee reports e.g. Crime and Disorder Implications, Risk Assessments, etc.

Resource Implications

18. Any additional costs that arise from addressing the Environment agenda, and are not covered by projects elsewhere (e.g. Change Management), will be reported separately as and when they have been quantified.

Timetable for Decisions

19. The Environment Strategy and Action Plan Review is expected to be reported to the Cabinet in spring 2007

Conclusions

20. The County Council's own Environment Strategy is well established and subject to regular review. The next version is expected to be more focused based on three key areas of change related to Energy, Waste and Procurement. Externally the main environmental imperative, that of climate change, is covered by the Climate Change Strategy for Leicestershire prepared by ENABLE. An Action Plan is under preparation for consideration by the Leicestershire Together Board. The Energy and Water Strategy provides a key set of actions and investment for the Authority for some time to come.

21. The benchmarking of environmental performance for Leicestershire is now due to be carried out and ENABLE will be requested to undertake this exercise.

Recommendations

22. The Commission is asked to note:-

- a) that a number of strategies are currently in place which seek to, within their overall broad objectives, to address environmental issues;
- b) that the next review of the County Council's Environment Strategy to be undertaken in the coming year will focus on three key areas of change related to Energy, Waste and Procurement, with a view to developing a core action plan;
- c) that the recently agreed Energy and Water Strategy provides a key set of actions and investment for the Authority for the coming years;
- d) that ENABLE has been commissioned by the LeicesterShire Together Board (which is chaired by the Leader of the Council) to prepare a Climate Change Action Plan to which the key statutory bodies in Leicestershire will be asked to sign up.

23. The Commission is also asked to consider what further comments/advice it wishes to offer the Cabinet on this matter.

Equal Opportunities Implications

24. A good quality environment has been shown to be a key measure of quality of life for all residents and visitors. Action taken on Climate Change will mitigate impact for all. Such impact is expected to be worst for disadvantaged people.

Background Papers

The Strategy Papers referred to in this report are all available on the County Council's website.

Circulation under Sensitive Issues

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