

Minutes of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

County Hall, Worcester

Tuesday, 8 November 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Tony Muir (Vice Chairman), Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Paul Harrison,
Cllr Emma Marshall, Cllr Beverley Nielsen, Cllr David Ross and
Cllr Emma Stokes

Also attended:

Cllr Richard Morris, Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment
Cllr Bob Brookes

Rachel Hill, Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste.
Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways & Transport Operations
Gary Woodman, Interim Assistant Director, Economy
Richard Woodward, Waste Services Manager
Liz Alston, Sustainability Manager
Dave Corbett, Lead Analyst (Performance)
Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Alison Spall, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 October 2022 (previously circulated).

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

16 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Alastair Adams.

17 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

In relation to agenda item 5 Waste Management Service Contract:

- Councillor Marshall declared that she was a Member of the Carbon Reduction and Biodiversity Member Advisory Group (CRBMAG) and the Worcestershire Waste Task and Finish Group (WWT&FG).
- Councillor Stokes declared that she was a Member of the Worcestershire Waste Task and Finish Group.

18 Public Participation

None.

19 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 7 October 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20 Waste Contract

The Panel received a report which set out the background to the current Waste Services Management Contract. The Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste (EMPW) advised that an extension to the Contract was currently being finalised, following which a detailed report would be brought to the Panel.

The Waste Services Manager explained that the report set out the history of the contract, including the variations which had been incorporated over time to encompass changes in legislation. The 25-year contract had commenced in 1998, and the proposed 5-year extension would extend the contract to January 2029. The Panel was informed that the contract covered the Council's role as a Waste Disposal Authority (WDA) and that it was an integrated contract with one contractor covering all the services. As a WDA the Council had two key roles, firstly to ensure the disposal of recycling and recovering value from the waste collected by the waste collection authorities in Worcestershire and Herefordshire; and secondly to manage the household waste sites across the two counties.

Members were invited to ask questions and the following main points were raised:

- It was confirmed that Herefordshire Council was still fully engaged in the process and would continue to be part of the contract for the extended period. There would be some variations included as part of the contract to accommodate some recent changes that Herefordshire had agreed to implement as part of their collection arrangements. The Panel was informed of the revised disposal arrangements for Herefordshire Council waste which would include food waste being sent directly to the anaerobic digester and untreated paper products being handled in a separate location in the transfer station, to then be sent directly to a processor.
- The Assistant Director (EMPW) advised that when the contract extension was agreed, there would time for Officers to plan for what

might follow in 2029 and for the team to quickly focus on this new priority.

- Members referred to examples of ideas for using the excess heat and carbon from the EnviRecover plant to create new revenue streams. The Panel was advised that a working group consisting of representatives of the Contractor, the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) and the Sustainability team were currently looking at options on this. Sources of financial support to enable options to be explored were also being actively sought, with one recent application to the Heat Network Distribution Unit proving unsuccessful.
- In response to a question, the Waste Services Manager confirmed that historically, it had been necessary to divert some of the residual waste for disposal to an out of county facility in Coventry for a limited time, although most of the waste had still continued to be disposed of at the Hill and Moor site. In current times, specialist recycling facilities located outside of the county continued to be used where processing was not available within county.
- It was confirmed that odour control monitoring was covered in the contract. Any odour control issues either came under the environmental permits monitored by the Environment Agency or the planning consent monitoring by the Council, both of which formed part of the contract and service delivery plan that the Council had with the contractor, and these were regularly monitored. It was noted that there were effective community liaison groups in place and that there were currently no odour issues of concern.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for the Environment advised that when the current work was finalised, the process of building towards the contract for 2029 would begin. This would be a great opportunity to incorporate elements which would enable further significant inroads to be achieved in the reduction of carbon emissions and would involve the WWT&FG.

The CMR emphasised the importance of 'recovery value' being at the heart of what the Council waste services does, with all possible value from waste being obtained at the different stages of processing. For instance, the incinerator bottom ash (IBA) from the EnviRecover plant was taken to the Hill and Moor site and recycled further into different metals and aggregates, to ensure that all scope for recycling had been achieved.

The Chairman thanked the CMR and Officers for the update and advised that the Panel would look forward to a further update once the extension to the contract had been completed.

21 The Council's Net Zero Carbon Plan

The Panel received a report which set out an update on developments relating to the Council's Net Zero Plan.

The CMR advised that since taking on the Cabinet Member role, and having reviewed the situation, he had instigated a shift in emphasis on the Plan. Cabinet colleagues had agreed that the pace of the progression of the

Council's Net Zero Plan should be slowed down in order to ensure that it was more robust and effective. Time should be allowed for wider engagement with a range of groups including members, customers and District Councils as well as ensuring the involvement of the CRBMAG. The CMR wanted to ensure that the focus on carbon reduction and biodiversity initiatives was embedded within the Directorates and that they identified improvements that could be made in their area to bring value to the Plan.

The Sustainability Manager provided an overview of the report drawing attention to the following key issues:

- There had been an overall reduction in net emissions of 47% since the baseline year of 2009/10, which had been achieved through key measures in the Net Zero Plan including, investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy on the Council's estate, an increase in remote working, and by far the largest proportion resulting from the move from landfill of household waste to disposal through the Energy to Waste facility, EnviRecover.
- The Council reported emissions under 3 scopes, only two of which it had direct control over. With the Council procuring green electricity for its buildings and street lighting, the Panel was informed that this enabled it to offset virtually all emissions associated with electricity use.
- The Council worked with the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) to develop its Energy Strategy and had since provided support for the Energy Strategy Steering Group and monitored progress. The Council had also developed and managed a range of projects to support the strategy including European Union (EU) funded business support programmes providing advice and grants across a range of areas, such as improving energy and water efficiency and generating renewable energy. Post EU, the Council has also been active in developing support programmes via the Community Renewal Fund, such as Zero Carbon Ready Worcestershire.
- Progress against the Energy Strategy targets showed that the county was in line to halve its emissions by 2030 and that 13% of the county's electricity demand was now generated from renewable sources, an increase of 8% since 2015.

Members asked a range of questions, to which the following responses were provided:

- A Member asked for baseline information to compare the data provided in the absolute carbon emission chart in the report. The Sustainability Manager confirmed that detail would be provided within the Net Zero Plan. It was noted that the percentage for household waste disposal had slightly increased recently as a result of an increase in the number of households in the county, and also because some of the other areas on the chart had recently reduced, resulting in the percentages being altered.
- A Member raised a query regarding funding for a peat scheme in Droitwich which had been subject to delays and difficulties. The Sustainability Manager advised that the Public Sector Efficiency

Programme was still open to projects which would be completed by May 2023. This would be followed up outside of the meeting.

- A Member referred to emissions from road surfacing, highlighting that the 3% source of carbon emissions from Ringway shown on the chart clearly did not cover such emissions. The Member referred to greener methods of laying roads and that this would be welcomed in the county. The Panel was informed that discussions were taking place with Highways as to how road surfacing emissions could be captured for the Net Zero Plan. A toolkit was also being developed with other local authorities for this purpose and reporting was expected to improve over time.
- The Panel was provided with examples of ways in which the Council's highways and engineering contractors were seeking to reduce their own carbon footprint including initiatives to reduce idling of vehicles and use of electric vehicles.
- In respect of the 3 scopes under which the Council reported emissions, it was highlighted that Scope 3, relating to goods and services which the Council bought, would be the hardest to influence. The Panel felt that suppliers should be requested to have their own carbon reduction strategy so that the Council could assess their progress against their plan at the point of contract renewal. It was agreed that this suggestion would be put forward as a formal recommendation to the CMR.
- A question was raised as to the Council's understanding of the emissions from the lower supply chain when products were purchased from overseas. A Member suggested that obtaining a certificate confirming the details of the supply chain would be good practice. It was reported that the Procurement Team were looking at this issue in detail and trialling some new software.
- The Panel was informed of the extent of the Council's offsetting which was currently only through the purchasing of green electricity. Tree planting schemes in the county were currently being considered as an additional form of offsetting. The Sustainability Manager explained that the first priority continued to be cutting emissions, then where offsetting could be achieved, with economic or environmental benefit to a local area, that was the next preferred option.
- In respect of infrastructure plans, the Assistant Director (EMPW) advised that when new bids were being submitted to the Department for the Environment (DofE), a carbon management plan had to be prepared and that this formed part of the business case which was reflected in the contract. Additionally, biodiversity plans which involved a huge amount of work, were a key requirement for inclusion in these plans, in line with the provisions of the Environment Act.
- In response to a question, the Assistant Director (EMPW) agreed to find out when the Green Gas contract was due for renewal and the likely uplift on the cost, and report back to the Panel.
- The Panel was advised that there were some challenges on accelerated investment in renewable energy schemes in the county, for instance, due to grid capacity, which the network provider was trying to address.
- A question was raised about biomethane farms and work to contain methane emissions. The Panel was informed that the research for the energy strategy had captured some of this detail and there were a

number of farms where gas was being generated and injected back into the network. Severn Trent and the Hill and Moor site similarly captured gas which was used to make electricity.

- The Interim Assistant Director, Economy reported that training providers at Further Education Colleges were looking at the introduction of training on some key green skills required in the county, such as heat pumps and Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) monitoring. Whilst the Colleges were looking to build in green skills across their whole curriculum over the next few years, there was little demand from students for the specific training being offered at this time.
- A Member referred to a possible hydro-electric site which he had identified. The Sustainability Manager agreed to put the Member in touch with appropriate contacts to pursue this matter further.
- On the generation of wind powered electricity, it was highlighted that there were a few sites within the county, although there were restrictions in terms of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). A Member referred to a scheme in Europe whereby turbines were placed in central reservations of roads to capture wind. Members agreed it would be helpful to understand the possibilities for the expansion of wind power generation within the County and felt it would be useful if this information was able to be made available for interested parties.

The CMR referred to the language of sustainability and how the public could struggle with certain terms. A broader term such as 'sustainable future' might be an easier concept to grasp. In the new Net Zero Plan there would be a key focus on offsetting, not just with regard to the Council's own land, but also how it could provide support more widely across the county. The CMR would like to see the Council based on a circular economy and that effort be focussed on sustainability work, working closely and collaboratively with the District Councils, towards a One Worcestershire Plan in 2023.

The Chairman thanked the CMR and Officers for the report and looked forward to future updates on this issue.

22 Performance Monitoring

The Lead Analyst (Performance) updated the Panel on areas of success and challenge within the Quarter 2 performance data. Members were invited to ask questions and the following main points were made:

- Explanation was provided in respect of the clarifications on the pothole defect reports and the increase in 28-day clarifications. The high number for October was largely due to weather conditions and also the impact of staff leave.
- In terms of the outstanding public enquiries (PEMs), the Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations (HTO) advised that there would always be a residual number of outstanding PEMs which related to 'live' issues. These were only closed when the category had been completed.
- In response to a query regarding response rates to street lighting queries, the Assistant Director (HTO) explained that work towards

linking the Mayrise software system to the member portal was under way, which would reduce the timeframe for responses. In addition, the owners of streetlighting assets were being established which would also improve the efficiency of the process.

- The Lead Analyst confirmed that the waste collected across Worcestershire in 2020/21, was 473.3 kg per head of the county's population and that 91.62% of that waste had been diverted from landfill, as shown on the latest DEFRA data summary.
- The Assistant Director (HTO) agreed to check whether a green gas emission forecast was available yet for this year.
- In terms of street lighting, the Assistant Director (HTO) confirmed that all light-emitting diode (LED) lighting would be rolled out by June 2023. The Panel would be advised of the forecasted energy consumption when the rollout was complete following the meeting.
- A Member highlighted the 0.1% figure for 'reuse' in the graphs on the disposal method table for 2021/22. The Assistant Director (EMPW) explained that it was difficult to capture reuse as this data only measured household waste services. Reuse referred to items which were repaired, if necessary, and used for their original purpose.
- Members queried whether the Council could do more to educate the public and promote the specialist recycling facilities available across the county which were external to the Council. The Assistant Director (EMPW) agreed to consider what could be done to promote the wide range of recycling opportunities in the county.

23 Work Programme

The Panel received the latest version of the 2022/23 work programme.

It was agreed that:

- The Waste Management Service contract would be added to the work programme, with a date to be determined.
- It was suggested that there should be an update on the Net Zero Plan every 6 months. It was agreed that the Chairman would be asked to give this consideration in liaison with the Officers and determine whether this was appropriate.

The meeting ended at 11.40 am

Chairman