

Councillor Neil Reeve

Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change

Report to Full Council 18 July 2023

This report reflects the highlights of the Portfolio from May 2023 to July 2023

The main activity during this short period has been spent familiarizing myself with the portfolio. This has included starting to frame the relevant portfolio items for the upcoming new Corporate Plan.

The first All Member Environment and Climate briefing was held on Tues 6 June, with an additional Environmental Services briefing on 20 July.

Environmental Services

I have made a visit of the Little Canfield depot site, meeting staff and familiarizing myself with the vehicle fleet. I also saw the vehicle washing facilities, and workshop. The moves from Dunmow, and Saffron Walden Shire Hill are now well embedded.

On 13 June I attended the Essex Waste Partnership - Member Advisory Board, together with the lead Officer. The agenda included:

- progress reports on Joint Working projects (across Local Authorities) for example primary road litter picking services, and food waste and food recycling
- the upcoming 'Waste Strategy for Essex' (which will largely form basis of UDC's strategy).

The team had a presence at the Saffron Walden Common Eco/Green Fair on Saturday 10 June.

There have been some disruptions to our normally reliable services in recent weeks. These have been caused by a number of factors. In January, our vehicles that collect residual and recyclable waste have been redirected to Braintree rather than Gt Dunmow. This follows the closure of the Great Dunmow waste transfer station. In April our garden waste crews were redirected by the County Council to unload at Birch near Tiptree / Colchester, rather than Haverhill or Ongar. Both of these changes have meant that our collection rounds needed to be amended to ensure that works can be completed. This is not a quick process to undertake, and it is complex without causing multiple day changes for residents. It has been necessary to test amended collections rounds to ensure that they are balanced between crews and are achievable. It is regrettable that our residents have been impacted by these changes but as we work through these issues, collections are returning to normal. Alongside the changes to tipping locations, we have also had some temporary staffing issues and vehicle breakdowns especially during the hot weather. Hopefully these are now largely resolved.

Air Quality

On 19 June a meeting was held of the Clean Air Stakeholder Strategy Group. UDC was awarded a two-year £0.5 million grant by DEFRA, running from 2023 to December 2024. Progress updates were received under the three main work packages of Pollution Awareness; Active Travel; and Traffic Management. Work is currently on schedule and is also providing input to the Local Plan.

Climate Change

The Climate Change Team, have been progressing the actions in the Climate Change Action Plan, and the Air Quality project (above).

I attended a meeting of the Essex Districts and Borough Climate Forum on 5 July. Highlights were a report on Climate Actions in South Essex; a briefing on the 'Carbon Cutting Essex' app; a briefing on the 'Carbon Literacy Project'; and a preview of the Essex Autumn Climate Summit scheduled for 31 Oct.

Possibly the main item for me has been thinking with the team about how to embed Climate Change mitigation as a concept that runs through all Council staff and activity, and to include this concept in the upcoming new Corporate Plan, and flow through to the staff Service Plans.

A highlight was to receive **UDC's first all-electric vehicle**, a large van that will be used by the ground maintenance team. This vehicle was on display at the Saffron Walden Common Eco/Green Fair on Saturday 10 June. Also on display were electric assist cargo bikes, that could be trialled (hopefully for local families and businesses) and much literature on the broader environment and climate change.

A personal climate change note

My wife and I live in the rural village of High Easter. A few years ago we had solar panels installed on the roof of a building in the curtilage of a listed building. More recently we had storage batteries installed. During this time we have replaced our two cars by all electric vehicles. Whilst expensive (still) they are very cheap to run. Our average power from the public network is now just over one unit (kWh) per day (i.e. also including charging the vehicles). Like most of the rest of the village, we still use oil for heating. Our next step is to improve our roof insulation, and replace the heating by a heat pump (air or ground source?)