

Overview & Scrutiny

Meeting date: 09 September, 2023

Member Questions for Ubico (4 total)

1. Question from Councillor Chelin

I note the concern about staffing. What is the general turnover rate of staff and how does this compare with other similar organisations and the sector as a whole?

Response from Ubico

This is an area we are now tracking and working with other similar organisations to start benchmarking. The estimated attrition rate across the whole of Ubico in the past 6mths is 7.66% based on 875 employees.

For the Cheltenham contract the average length of service is 7.65 years. This figure is reducing year on year.

2. Question from Councillor Chelin

What is the demographic of the employees, e.g. in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, etc., and are positive action schemes being considered at all?

Response from Ubico

I have requested this info from HR, I will get the detail back to you as soon as I receive it.

3. Question from Councillor Chelin

Some residents claim that the reduction in opening hours of the Swindon Road centre will increase the levels of fly tipping. Can you say, yet, whether this is the case?

Response from Ubico

Over the past 12 months the number of fly tips reported have decreased on the Cheltenham contract. This is a trend we are seeing across all Ubico contracts.

4. Question from Councillor Chelin

What are the kinds of innovative and cross boundary opportunities that are mentioned on the first page of the exec summary?

Response from Ubico

Ubico are producing a business plan to look at the possibility of vehicle ownership, this would reduce the amount of vehicles across all contracts as vehicle sharing would be a major benefit along with having our own hire/spare fleet.

Other areas such as centralised bin/container delivery, tree surgery and fly tip clearances are also being explored.

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Meeting date: 04 September, 2023

Member Questions for CBH (4 total)

1. Question from Councillor Chelin

How realistic is the aspiration mentioned in 2.2?

Response from CBH

Over 90% of CBH carbon emissions relate to the managed housing stock, therefore achieving the ambition of net zero requires moving the housing stock to net zero. Through the work we have done since 2020 to understand what would be required to deliver this, it relies on decarbonisation of the grid, a small amount of carbon offset and investment to improve homes, currently estimated to be in excess of £70m. This is not affordable within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) without external funding support.

CBH is maximising the funding currently available through SHDF to support the HRA, however the funding is only aimed to achieve the Government minimum standard of EPC C by 2030. Whilst this supports the net zero direction of travel, it will not contribute significantly to improvements beyond EPC C. Investment levels required to achieve EPC C by 2030 are forecast to be circa £15M and achieving this target is reliant on CBH being successful with further external funding support.

2. Question from Councillor Chelin

How likely is it that the change to the minister responsible for DESNZ will make a positive difference to funding criteria mentioned in 2.3?

Response from CBH

We are unable to answer this question. Graham Stuart was appointed Minister of State for Energy, Security and Net Zero in February 2023.

3. Question from Councillor Chelin

How supportive are tenants, generally, of the approaches mentioned in 3.4? Do they, themselves, present any barriers to CBH progress on the journey to net zero?

Response from CBH

We experience a range of support and views when talking to tenants and leaseholders when delivering carbon reduction improvements. Many welcome the

improvements seeing the reduction in bills and feeling an overall improvement in comfort of their homes. A small number resist the improvements for a variety of reasons. This is recognised as a barrier nationally to the delivery of net zero within the social housing sector and we are constantly reviewing our engagement with residents to promote works and considering how far we should go to enforce measures.

4. Question from Councillor Chelin

I'd appreciate a bit more explanation of the technicalities mentioned in 4.2, in relation to impacts for fuel poverty.

Response from CBH

There is a risk that in reducing carbon emissions from homes that the incorrect installation of measures could increase fuel bills for our customers. This is also recognised by government and as a result the SHDF funding criteria requires there to be no increase in bills. Fuel bills could go up if the construction detailing of the property is not adequately considered. Properties have insulation, heating measures and renewables designed to meet the retrofit standards framework PAS2035. This covers a huge range of retrofit work including the installation details for external wall insulation, air tightness measures and all the junctions between construction elements. These elements require carefully designed details to ensure there are no thermal bridges, airtightness details are continuous and importantly ventilation is considered.

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Meeting date: 09 September, 2023

Member Questions for Climate Team (2 total)

1. Question from Councillor Chelin

There is fantastic work going on, a really collaborative approach with different organisations across the town, lots of successful funding bids, etc. What is the biggest challenge for the team and how best can councillors help to address this?

Response from Climate Team

The biggest challenge for the climate team links to the multi-faceted nature of addressing local climate change impacts and the scale of getting to net zero, particularly at a borough-wide level. There are two work streams, which each have a different set of challenges.

Firstly, decarbonising the council's own portfolio and assets. This requires significant up-front initial costs and a well-resourced team, encompassing a high level of technical knowledge and project management skill.

Secondly, to address borough-wide emissions, relies on wide-ranging societal changes. Elements needed to achieve net zero by 2030 lie outside of the council's direct remit, for example, the renewables mix in the electricity grid. Each business, charity, school, house and resident needs to be part of the net zero journey; whilst the council can clear barriers and provide support, there isn't yet clear and consistent messaging from central government prioritising climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Councillors have influence in their wards to champion the clear message that net zero is a fundamental priority, notwithstanding the resourcing challenges. In decision-making, the Climate Impact Assessment Tool (CIAT) now provides a template, which clearly evaluates the environmental and societal impact of potential projects and decisions. To embed the responsibility of considering the impact of Council actions and share it across the organisation, Councillors can reference and request evidence that the CIAT has been effectively considered and used proactively in project/policy development.

2. Question from Councillor Chelin

Related to the above – there is just so much going on that it can seem quite confusing. How does the team ensure that initiatives are complementary and not duplicating effort or competing for resources?

Response from Climate Team

The 'Climate Emergency Action Plan – pathway to net zero' has an indicative timeline linked to the actions within it, which informs the direction of the climate team in working towards the delivery of specific carbon-reducing actions.

The climate team initiated an internal Climate Staff Action Group, within which there is currently a member from most teams across the council. As the actions listed in the Action Plan span across different service areas and teams, these meetings are used to monitor progress of actions and discuss how to overcome barriers, as well as identifying opportunities for collaboration and reduced duplication of effort. There is also a specific Cheltenham Borough Homes and Cheltenham Borough Council meeting including both climate teams and managers, which achieves a similar purpose of monitoring progress, discussing how to overcome barriers and knowledge sharing. A monthly meeting also takes place to discuss energy usage across Council-owned operational assets with all the relevant stakeholders.

When considering external attempts avoid duplicated effort and outcompeting for resources, multiple meetings seek to successfully achieve this. The CN2030 meeting occurs monthly, chaired by the Climate Change County-wide Co-ordinators, with the relevant teams from each Council. The councils that are members of the Publica group also have monthly meetings to discuss ongoing projects, knowledge share and align working on projects across councils. The CBC Climate Team has a strong presence in the Cheltenham community, collaborating with Vision 21, aligning community and SME support through Planet Cheltenham and CheltZero.