

Cheltenham Borough Council
Council – 21 July 2014
Investing in Badger Vaccination – Petition

Accountable member	Councillor John Rawson – Cabinet Member for Finance
Accountable officer	Andrew North, Chief Executive
Ward(s) affected	All
Significant Decision	No
Executive summary	<p>A petition was received by Council on 10 June 2014 requesting the following:</p> <p><i>"We the undersigned, call on Cheltenham Borough Council to give financial support to local badger vaccination projects being undertaken and to financially assist other badger vaccination projects which may be set up in Gloucestershire."</i></p> <p>As the petition had in excess of 750 signatures it is entitled to a debate at Council.</p>
Recommendation	<p>That the Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accepts that badger vaccination is a potentially useful way of preventing the spread and severity of bovine TB. 2. Is prepared to consider an application for match funding from an organisation that is capable of carrying out badger vaccination in Cheltenham Borough, provided the application sets out a credible plan for a vaccination programme, including clear objectives and costs. 3. Will write to the petition organisers to inform them accordingly.
Financial implications	<p>In the light of Cheltenham Borough Council's tight budget situation, the Council would need to consider whether they want to divert funds to badger vaccination, which could be difficult to justify when this could result in diverting scarce resources from other services.</p> <p>Contact officer: Mark Sheldon, Director of Resources, mark.sheldon@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264123</p>

Legal implications	The petition must be considered in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme made pursuant to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. The petition will be considered in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules varied in so far as necessary to comply with the attached Process. Contact officer: Peter Lewis (OneLegal), peter.lewis@teWKesbury.gov.uk, 01684 272012
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	None arising from this report. Contact officer: Julie McCarthy, GO Shared Service Human Resources Manager (West), julie.mccarthy@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264355
Key risks	None arising from this report.
Corporate and community plan Implications	Not applicable
Environmental and climate change implications	None arising from this report
Property/Asset Implications	None arising specifically from this report. Contact officer: David Roberts, Head of Property & Asset Management, david.roberts@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264151

1. Content of petition received

- 1.1 The Council has received a petition under the heading 'Protect Gloucestershire's Remaining Badgers by Investing in Badger Vaccination Projects in the Cheltenham Borough Council Area.'
- 1.2 The petition includes over 800 signatures. As such, it contains more than the 750 signatories required to trigger a Cheltenham Council debate.
- 1.3 The statement within the petition states:-

"We the undersigned, call on Cheltenham Borough Council to give financial support to local badger vaccination projects being undertaken and to financially assist other badger vaccination projects which may be set up in Gloucestershire."

2. Background to the Petition Scheme

- 2.1 The petition provisions in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 aim to address the perception nationally, as revealed in the results of the Place survey, that the community is unable to influence local decisions.
- 2.2 The Council's Petition Scheme (based on the national model scheme) is designed to ensure that the public has easy access to information about how to petition their local authority and they will know what to expect from their local authority in response. Included within the Scheme is the requirement to have a full Council debate should a certain number of signatures be achieved.

Cheltenham Borough Council has set that threshold lower than that recommended by the legislation at 750 signatures.

- 2.3** The legislation also recommends a 15 minute maximum period for the debate and recognises that the issue may be referred to another committee where the matter is not one reserved for full Council. The purpose of the requirement for Council debate therefore, is not to ensure that the final decision relating to the petition issue is made at that Council meeting but to increase the transparency of the decision making process, ensuring that debates on significant petitions are publicised with sufficient notice to enable the petition organiser and public to attend. It also ensures that local people know that their views have been listened to and they have the opportunity to hear their local representative debate their concerns. The outcome of debates will depend on the subject matter of the petition.

3. The petition

- 3.1** The petition was received on 10 June from Marie Booth on behalf of Gloucestershire Against Badger Shooting (GABS). The wording of the petition is set out the Executive Summary of this report.

- 3.2** The Council is therefore required to debate the petition for a maximum of 15 minutes in accordance with the Petitions Scheme approved by Council on the 13 May 2010. A process for dealing with a petition was produced by officers and is attached as Appendix 1 as a process to be followed for the debate at this meeting. The debate should conclude with one or more decisions taken pursuant to the Petition Scheme as follows

- taking the action requested in the petition (provided the matter is reserved to full Council for decision)
- referring the matter to Cabinet or an appropriate Cabinet Member or Committee (including Overview and Scrutiny) for further consideration
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition
- taking no further action on the matter.

4. Background information to the subject of the petition

- 4.1** Prior to accepting the e-petition as a valid petition, the organisers of the petition had been informed that this matter did not fall into the remit of the Borough Council and therefore there may be limits as to what actions the Council could take.

- 4.2** A petition of over 800 signatures requesting that Cheltenham Borough Council invest in a badger vaccination programme was handed in at Cheltenham's Municipal Offices on 10 June 2014. A valid petition stipulates that the petitioners must live, work or study in Cheltenham and over 300 signatures were found to have postcodes outside of the Borough of Cheltenham. Officers from the council contacted the petition organiser and they gave their assurance that they made it clear to everyone signing the petition that they must live, work or study in Cheltenham and so as far as they knew they were all valid. On that basis the petition was accepted.

4.3 Current situation

In the introduction to the petition, the petitioner states that: "The 'pilot culls' of badgers in Gloucestershire in 2013 have led many people to seriously question the humanity, efficiency and

cost of this method of 'controlling' bovine TB, especially as it has been condemned by so many leading and reputable scientists. This petition calls on Cheltenham Borough Council to assist with an alternative strategy, which is already working across Wales and in many parts of England."

- 4.4** Members of the public have been signing online and street petitions in each of the District Councils asking them to put some money into badger vaccination to help reduce the spread of bovine TB. This is the second petition to be presented, together with Gloucestershire County Council's petition of 1000 signatures handed in in May.
- 4.5** Marie Booth who handed in the petition, said, "The response from the public in Cheltenham has been overwhelmingly positive. Many are shocked to hear the cull is still going ahead, after what they had read about the costs and inhumane results from last year's pilot. People want an end to the cull, but also a solution for farmers, and this should be it."
- 4.6** It may be useful for members to have an understanding of how other councils in Gloucestershire have dealt with this issue.
- Stroud District Council voted to support badger vaccination in the District at their council meeting on 10 October 2013. In summary they resolved to support the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's proposal to extend its badger vaccination programme in Stroud over 5 years and to provide a sum not in excess of £12,500 to fund this 5 year programme to be matched £ for £ by money raised by the Wildlife Trust.
 - Several district councils including Stroud and the Forest of Dean have voted to refuse culling of badgers on their land during the last 2 years.
 - At a full meeting of Gloucestershire County Council on 22 January 2014, a motion was passed agreeing to create a Badger Cull Task Group to establish the social and economic impact of the cull of Gloucestershire and to identify lessons to be learnt. The task group looked at the impact on Gloucestershire communities and produced a series of learning points and recommendations to public bodies setting out some simple actions which would address the concerns of local people. The Badger Cull Task Group report went to Gloucestershire County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 10 June 2014.
 - Tewkesbury Borough Council will be considering a similar petition on 29 July 2014

5. Acceptability and current status of badger vaccination

- 5.1** Badger vaccination is widely accepted as a potentially useful way to combat bovine TB and is being used in Gloucestershire with Government support. The DEFRA website sets out the Government's position as follows:

Badger vaccination could help reduce the prevalence and severity of bovine TB in a badger population and thereby reduce the rate of transmission to cattle.

The first injectable badger vaccine, BadgerBCG, was licensed in March 2010 and is available for use on prescription. Badgers need to be trapped by trained operators under licence by Natural England and the vaccine must be administered by a veterinarian or accredited lay vaccinator. An oral badger vaccine, which may be a more practical option in terms of field deployment, is at the research stage and is still several years away.

Defra are funding a Badger Vaccine Deployment Project (BVDP) in an area in Gloucestershire, near Stroud. This project is the first practical use of an injectable vaccine for TB in badgers outside research trials, aimed at assessing the logistical issues of the use of such a vaccine. Badger vaccination using the injectable BCG vaccine began in July 2010 and will continue for 5 years.

6 Reasons for recommendations

- 6.1 This petition is unusual, in that it requests money for vaccination without specifying which organisation is applying for the money or precisely what programmes it is intended to support. It is understood that GABS itself does not itself carry out badger vaccination, though some other organisations in Gloucestershire do, including the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.
- 6.2 The petition is not in any precise sense an application for funding. However, should such an application be made by an organisation that is capable of carrying out badger vaccinations within Cheltenham Borough, there is no reason why the Council should not consider it. The application would need to set out a credible plan of action, including clear objectives and costs. If this was done, the Council could consider offering match funding the work up to a certain amount, as Stroud District Council has done in its area.

Contact officer	Rosalind Reeves Democratic Services Manager, Rosalind.reeves@cheltenham.gov.uk Tel : 01242 77 4937
Appendices	Process for dealing with a petition at council
Background information	Council's petition scheme – report to Council 13 May 2010

Process for dealing with petitions at Council

The following is the recommended process to be followed for the debate of a petition at the Council meeting in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme. The Council Procedure Rules shall be suspended in so far as necessary to facilitate this process.

1. The Mayor will remind members of the procedure to be followed

2. Statement by the petition organiser

The Mayor will invite the petitioner organiser or their representative to come to the microphone and speak for up to 5 minutes on the petition.

There will be no questions and the petition organiser/their representative will take no further part in the proceedings.

3. Clarification on the background information in the officer's report

Members will be invited to ask any questions for clarification as to the facts in the officer's report.

4. Statement by the relevant Cabinet Member

The Cabinet Member whose portfolio is most relevant to the petition will be invited by the Mayor to speak for a maximum of 5 minutes on the subject of the petition. They may wish to refer to the background report from officers circulated with the papers for the meeting.

They may also wish to propose a motion at this point; if so, the motion must be seconded.

5. Debate by members

Where a member has proposed a motion (which is seconded), the usual Rules of Debate (Rule 13) will apply.

If there is no motion, the Mayor will invite any member who wishes to speak on the petition to address Council for up to a maximum of 3 minutes.

When the 15 minutes set aside for the debate (as laid down in the Council's Petition Scheme) is up, the Mayor may decide to extend the time allowed for the debate but will bring it to a close when they feel sufficient time has been allowed.

6. Conclusion of Debate

The debate should conclude with one or more decisions taken pursuant to the Petition Scheme as follows:

- taking the action requested in the petition (provided the matter is reserved to full council for decision)
- referring the matter to Cabinet or an Appropriate Cabinet Member or Committee (including Overview and Scrutiny) for further consideration
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition
- taking no further action on the matter