

Cheltenham Borough Council

Council – 20 July 2020

Consideration of a petition entitled “We call for urgency on our climate emergency”

Accountable Member	Councillor Chris Coleman, Cabinet member clean and green environment
Accountable Officer	Mike Redman, Director of Environment
Ward(s) Affected	All
Significant Decision	No
Executive Summary	<p>The following petition was submitted to the Council’s website on 19th September, 2019 and reached 750 signatures on 28th February, 2020, triggering entitlement to a debate on the issue at Council:-</p> <p><i>‘We the undersigned petition the council to prioritise urgent and significant action in its intention to make Cheltenham carbon neutral by 2030. We support your decision in declaring a climate emergency and we would like to press upon you the importance of delivering on that declaration. We expect delivery on these targets within a reasonable yet condensed time-frame and invite utilisation of a greater community involvement in order to achieve this. Climate change is happening whether we like it or not. We as a community and you as our leaders need to take massive and urgent action or we will regret our leisurely pace for many years and generations to come.</i></p> <p><i>We will be holding you accountable for the actions you intend to take and will be following up with you in 6 months time.’</i></p>
Recommendations	<p>Council is recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Consider the submitted petition, having regard to the adopted ‘Process for dealing with petitions at Council’, as set out at Appendix A;2. Note the actions which the authority has taken to date and those proposed, as set out in Section 3;3. Determine any further action or request that it wishes to make in light of the petition, having regard to the options set out under Section 6 of Appendix A and the recommendation at paragraph 3.21.

Financial implications	<p>As part of the 2020/21 budget proposals, Full Council approved an allocation of £425k to a climate emergency fund to help facilitate the Council's ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030.</p> <p>The allocation above included 'seed funding' of £300,000, to fund additional staffing resources in order to create the capacity and capability to develop the business cases for the initiatives outlined in the roadmap and to identify and secure external funding to enable climate emergency projects to progress.</p> <p>Since those recommendations were approved, COVID-19 has presented the greatest financial challenge ever to this Council. The Council must ensure its own financial sustainability and may need to re-prioritise funding to deal with the financial consequences of this pandemic.</p> <p>Until there is greater clarity from Central Government on how it will reimburse this Council for the additional expenditure and lost income, the Council is unable to commit to any further priorities at this time.</p> <p>Contact officer: paul.iones@cheltenham.gov.uk 01242 264365</p>
Legal implications	<p>The petition will be debated at Council in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme (see Appendix A) . The petition will be considered in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, varied in so far as is necessary to comply with the attached process.</p> <p>Contact officer: sarah.farooqi@tewkesbury.gov.uk</p>
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	<p>As the extent of the adaptation work required becomes clearer, the Council will need to determine how best to resource this and which partnerships are likely to produce the most effective and timely contributions. This will inform decisions on recruitment and associated training requirements.</p> <p>Contact officer: julie.mccarthy@publicagroup.uk 01242 264355</p>
Key risks	<p>If the authority does not connect and effectively communicate with and empower the community to take meaningful local action, the Council's ambition of becoming a net zero carbon borough by 2030 will be put in jeopardy.</p>
Corporate and community plan Implications	<p>Addressing the climate emergency is an essential and overarching policy principle, which will need to be consistently applied in relation to all Council services, projects and associated activities.</p> <p>Sustained and active public engagement on climate change will be of critical importance, including the empowerment of local communities to take actions themselves both in relation to carbon emission reductions and in becoming more resilient, by helping to mitigate the impacts which rising temperatures will inevitably have.</p> <p>Contact officer: mike.redman@cheltenham.gov.uk 01242 264160</p>
Environmental and climate change implications	<p>The primary purpose of addressing the climate emergency is to ensure Cheltenham contributes to the aim of limiting global warming to 1.5°C and minimises the associated negative impacts of climate breakdown, in support of the IPCC's special report on global warming.</p> <p>Contact officer: mike.redman@cheltenham.gov.uk 01242 264160</p>

Property/Asset Implications	<p>Whilst the authority has already implemented a number of significant improvements which have reduced the Council's carbon footprint, it is recognised that further adaptation of the Council's property and asset portfolio will be necessary for the organisation to move at pace towards a carbon neutral future. Asset development and associated investment by the authority will be used to encourage our wider community to adapt to climate change and help to mitigate its projected impacts.</p> <p>Work is already being planned to investigate the potential of the Council's asset strategy to contribute directly to carbon emission reduction, including for example, through investment in renewable energy generation.</p> <p>Contact officer: dominic.stead@cheltenham.gov.uk 01242 264151</p>
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1. Background to the Petition Scheme

- 1.1** The Council's Petition Scheme has been designed to ensure that the public has easy access to information about how to petition their local authority and that 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 petition with 750 signatures or more be received.
- 1.2** The Scheme recognises that the issue may be referred to another part of the authority where the matter is not one reserved for 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 that they have the opportunity to hear their local representatives debate their concerns. The outcome of debates will depend on the subject matter of the petition.

2. The Petition

- 2.1** The Council received an on-line petition via its website on 19th September, 2019 and the number of signatories has passed 750, which triggers a debate on the issue at Council. The wording of the petition is set out in the Executive Summary of this report.
- 2.2** Yolande Booyse was nominated as the petition organiser.
- 2.3** 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 A 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.

3. Actions taken and proposed to date

- 3.1** The report 'Carbon Neutral Cheltenham: Leadership through Stewardship' was presented to Full Council in October 2019, outlining the actions needed to address the climate emergency and to locally achieve net zero carbon by 2030. The report included an indicative timetable and recommendations about the initial resources required for the authority to take meaningful steps to deliver the scale of actions required by 2030.
- 3.2** The Leader of the Council has expressed his intent to have a Cabinet member dedicated to the climate change agenda.
- 3.3** The Council will not be able to achieve the ambition of a net zero carbon borough without community ownership of that ambition and therefore, the request from the community for greater involvement is welcomed. Both the Executive Director for People and Change and the Director of Environment have been responding to requests to meet groups to discuss the council's plan.
- 3.4** A comprehensive study has been commissioned and is about to begin to analyse all the council's building and land holdings, to consider their potential for renewable energy production and storage. Subject to the outcomes of this study, business cases will be developed for those with the most promise and funding will be sought to move these to implementation.
- 3.5** In October 2019, the Leader wrote to to the government, on behalf of the council, calling for access to sustainable funding; a mechanism to enable easy and timely access to government funding; a favourable financial landscape which supports zero carbon investment; devolved powers to enable the council to set local standards and requirements and the introduction of national policies to support faster local climate change mitigation. The council has not received a reply to this and a follow-up letter will be sent to re-affirm these requests.
- 3.6** In term of the specific petition requests, the Council has made a firm commitment to act in relation to the declared climate emergency and has stated its intent to work to achieve carbon neutrality for both the Council and the Cheltenham Borough by 2030. This is 20 years sooner than the target which the UK government has set for itself and demonstrates the Council's view of the urgency of the situation. The commitment to the 2030 target has also been re-confirmed through the publication of the Council's Covid-19 Recovery Strategy.
- 3.7** The authority has also committed to reporting annually on progress towards achieving the carbon neutrality objective, whilst highlighting the need for government funding support, powers and appropriate national policies to help drive the carbon reduction agenda.
- 3.8** Until further analysis has been completed on the feasibility, funding implications and relative priority of the required actions at a local level, it would be premature and ill-advised to make any further commitments on the trajectory and likely timescale for achieving local carbon reductions.
- 3.9** It is important to highlight that the impact of Covid-19 has meant that since March, attention and focus has been on business continuity, supporting the emergency planning response including the Cheltenham Community Hub as well as leading recovery efforts. In addition, like all Councils throughout the UK, our finances have been significantly affected through the loss of income and additional expenditure. Whilst the Council welcomes the funding it has received from Government, this has not fully replaced the income that has been lost. At the present time, therefore, the Council is considering how best it can support the achievement of a net zero carbon borough within the funds available.
- 3.10** Despite the significant pressures that Covid-19 has created on resources, the Council has still been able to progress several initiatives, which are briefly summarised below.
- 3.11** The Council's parks team together with Ubico, have been encouraging pollinating insects and wild flowers by allowing grass to grow in some areas;
<https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/news/article/2432/bees-and-butterflies-to-benefit-from-longer-grass-in-some-green-spaces-around-the-borough>

- 3.12** The Council has put forward ambitious proposals to increase walking and cycling in the town to create space for social distancing. The latest plans have been drawn up by the council in response to the government's Active Travel Fund – a new emergency fund created to support local authorities to implement temporary interventions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and to assist longer term projects that will improve local walking and cycling facilities. These plans are ideas at this stage and will need to be tested if they are supported by the county council; https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/news/article/2428/cheltenham_prioritises_walking_and_cycling_as_high_street_reopens
- 3.13** On the 23rd of June, Officers from the Council met with representatives from Vision 21 and have agreed to plan and organise a workshop to develop an action plan of initiatives and projects to underpin the 'Carbon Neutral Cheltenham – Leadership through Stewardship' report. This workshop will look to involve a range of stakeholders who are keen to lead and support work to help meet the 2030 target. The Council recognises that a partnership approach will be essential in meeting this challenge.
- 3.14** Since the changes to the kerbside collection of recycling in October 2017, and ongoing promotion of waste reduction, the Council's recycling rate has increased from 48.39% in 2017/18 to 51.23% at the end of 2019/20. All domestic residual waste now goes to Javelin Park, the County Council's Energy from Waste plant via a local waste transfer station, and no longer goes to landfill. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council has continued to promote waste reduction including increasing reuse and recycling diverted from the kerbside waste stream.
- 3.15** Between 1 March and 31 May 2020 the amount of recycling collected at kerbside has increased by 47% compared to the same period the previous year, whilst residual waste has only seen an 11% increase compared to the same period the previous year. 19% more food waste was collected at kerbside in the same period and 37% more garden waste. Residents also put 7% more recycling into the recycling bring banks between 1 March and 31 May compared to this time last year and it is hoped this behaviour change will continue.
- 3.16** The Council's environmental services partner, Ubico, has worked closely with the Council and performed incredibly well during these very difficult past few months, managing to continue delivering all kerbside collection services for residents, collecting much higher amounts of waste and recycling.
- 3.17** In terms of the Council's own carbon reduction efforts the Council's property team has been:
- Working with the council's electricity supplier on getting more green electricity production into the market, as the council moves to replacing gas with electrical heaters
 - Enhancing the recycling in the Municipal Offices, including looking at food waste as part of this approach
 - Working with the Cheltenham Trust on how to reduce energy consumption in the buildings they operate, for example working on getting quotations for the installation of Photo Voltaic panels at Leisure@ and replacing the gas boiler to the Pittville Pump Room with an electrical one
- 3.18** The impact of Covid-19 has also reduced commuting and business mileage by Council staff and the intention is to retain these benefits as far as possible by adopting the working practices necessitated by the pandemic, such as remote working and virtual meetings, into the council's 'new normal' way of working.
- 3.19** The Council's ALMO Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) has commenced a four stage process, to be delivered between now and December. The key stages are:
- Stage 1 – Carbon Footprint Assessment
 - Stage 2 – Carbon Management Plan
 - Stage 3 - CBH Carbon Strategy

- Stage 4 – Action Plan delivery

Stage 1 – Carbon Footprint Assessment: In May, quotations and proposals were received from four companies to support CBH to measure and define its carbon reduction aspirations. Following a quality/cost evaluation SussHousing were appointed as the successful consultant. Working with them, the scope of the carbon to be included in the carbon footprint assessment and the basis for the assessment has been determined. This first stage will establish a baseline, based on both measured and assumed data and will include the current and future comparisons around any changes planned for the way in which CBH works. Initial analysis will determine the challenges and potential opportunities for immediate emission reduction. The footprint assessment will be completed later this month and lead to the development of a Carbon Management Plan.

Stage 2 – develop carbon reduction activities via a Carbon Management Plan: The scope of the Management Plan will be agreed following consideration of the outcomes from Stage 1. The Carbon Management Plan will include short term targets for carbon reduction, a rationale for what areas the Plan will address (and those it will not – if any), focus on CBC/CBH’s specific circumstances and alignment with the CBC plan, the financial implications/requirements to implement the carbon reduction, the inclusion of the potential for carbon off-setting, a consideration of the changes likely in external factors over the timespan of the plan, eg likely de-carbonisation of the grid, and consideration of electric heating use in the stock, set against affordability for tenants.

3.20 It is anticipated that the plan is likely to be detailed and short term (up to three years) with a longer overview (outline targets), because it is expected that there will be significant development/changes in the technologies, relevant Government legislation/policies and local approaches in the short term, so changes may be needed. The Management Plan will be completed in September 2020. In the Autumn CBC will look to develop the Plan into a CBH Carbon Strategy and Action Plan, providing CBH with the framework to deliver carbon reduction over the next few years.

3.21 It is therefore recommended that Council does not currently need to take any further action, or request any additional commitment from Cabinet in respect of this petition.

Report author	Contact officer: Mike Redman, Director of Environment mike.redman@cheltenham.gov.uk, Tel: 01242 264160
Appendices	A. Process for dealing with a petition at council
Background information	1. Council’s petition scheme – report to Council 13 May 2010 2. Report to Cabinet on 5 November 2019 entitled ‘Carbon Neutral Cheltenham – Leadership through Stewardship’

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;
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