

# ***Information/Discussion Paper***

## **Overview and Scrutiny – 2 November 2020**

### **Climate emergency – a response to Overview and Scrutiny**

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

#### **1. Why has this come to scrutiny?**

- 1.1 In October 2019, Council considered the ‘Carbon Neutral Cheltenham – Leadership through Stewardship’ report and associated roadmap. In early 2019, the council had approved a motion to declare a climate emergency, which was later formally endorsed by the cabinet. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has asked for a report covering current actions towards the 2030 target for carbon neutrality and the priorities for the coming year. Most recently, in July 2019, Council considered a petition by Cheltenham residents entitled ‘*We call for urgency on our climate emergency*’. The report from that meeting covers much of the existing work being undertaken on climate change and carbon reduction.

#### **2. Summary of the Issue**

- 2.1 The international consensus on climate change is clear and is now acknowledged across the political spectrum, with some notable exceptions. The UK government has set a target for carbon neutrality by 2050. While a commitment is welcomed, the effectiveness of the long-term nature of the target is contested by scientists and campaigners.
- 2.2 In setting a target for carbon neutrality by 2030, Cheltenham Borough Council has shown a commitment to setting a more ambitious environmental target. The baseline for the council’s carbon output as an organisation as outlined by DCA in the Carbon Neutral Cheltenham report, is 5,060 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>. The council’s efforts over its own carbon output should be measurable, but at the moment, processes to do this are not up to date and require refining for accuracy. The target considers carbon emissions not just from within the council, but the wider borough. The baseline for carbon output for the borough, as used in DCA’s Carbon Neutral Cheltenham Report, is 459,491 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>. Therefore, very considerable work will need to be undertaken with partners, businesses and Cheltenham people if significant progress is to be made, including securing behavioural changes which are likely to present a particular challenge.
- 2.3 In the February 2019 council budget funds were allocated to facilitate this work. The funds totalled £425,000, including both revenue and capital funding, to cover the financial years 2020/21 and 2021/22. Demands placed on the council by the COVID-19 pandemic response have slowed progress towards the development of new workstreams, but work towards these is now underway.
- 2.4 On 1 September 2020, I was appointed as cabinet member for Climate and Communities. This brings responsibility for climate emergency response work under one cabinet portfolio. The role had previously been split across the cabinet members for Clean and Green Environment and for Corporate Services.

### **3. Summary of evidence/information**

**3.1** The Carbon Neutral Cheltenham report by DCA sets out in outline detail the scale of the challenge we face as a town. It also sets out some of the sorts of projects that the council needs to consider, including the likely carbon reduction impact which these could have (at page 18). This list includes:

- Ensuring all policies and actions align with the carbon neutral target;
- Procuring 100% renewable electricity at all council-owned sites;
- Introducing a zero carbon sports and leisure experience;
- Upgrading the crematorium to zero carbon operation;
- Providing a 'Net Positive' council office as the headquarters of the Council;
- Developing the business case for renewable energy generation, like wind and solar power on suitable sites;
- Installing solar powered storage and charging infrastructure in Council owned car parks;
- Moving the base of fleet operations to a 'Net Positive' depot;
- Rolling out a zero emission fleet;
- Planting a net one million new trees.

### **3.2 Speeding up progress**

**3.2.1** In the absence of the available staff resourcing level needed to effectively deploy the climate emergency budget during the COVID-19 pandemic, a meeting was held with officers in early October 2020 to discuss how we can speed up our work. It is clear that within existing resource there is little spare capacity to pursue enough new projects. Ongoing uncertainty over the pandemic, including the extra demands placed on the council and financial support from the government, provides further difficulties.

**3.2.2** Since being appointed as cabinet member, I have held numerous meetings with senior officers and cabinet colleagues to establish an outline for the next steps. Progress so far has not been as fast as the public would like and the council has welcomed constructive challenge on this, including the recent petition. In the initial instance, it has been necessary to proceed with plans to use the climate emergency budget to employ new members of staff who can take forward some of the key projects. This includes those listed above, but also to undertake any extra activities that may be needed. Senior officers are working on job descriptions and have identified a reporting structure to provide effective line management arrangements.

### **3.3 The different categories of activity**

**3.3.1** Early discussions with officers have focused on a number of projects. Some of these relate to matters entirely within the control of the council; some are matters the council can influence via policy changes; some are items the council can work with partners to achieve; some are matters entirely outside the council's control. For successfully delivering carbon neutrality in projects and activities in all four categories, public engagement will be vitally important.

### **3.4 Priority projects**

- 3.4.1** Discussions about priorities have focused on matters in the Carbon Neutral Cheltenham report. This includes: feasibility studies on energy generation; better resourcing for tree-planting; electric car charging points in council car parks; sustainable transport; and assessing options for council office accommodation.
- 3.4.2** Energy generation investment could take different forms, including direct investment in infrastructure managed by a council-owned company, provision for energy generation within the council's estate, investment in energy generation elsewhere in the borough or further afield and potentially, hybrid options. There are also opportunities for investment in green energy via community bonds.
- 3.4.3** Tree-planting will need to significantly increase if the council is to meet local and national targets. Gloucestershire County Council, via the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership, is suggesting a target of 35 million trees over the next decade, with the ambition of achieving 20% tree cover across the county. That equates to an ambitious target of planting nearly 10,000 trees every day. Cheltenham's share of that tree planting would be about 117 ha of canopy cover. If this area was represented by one single circle on a map of Cheltenham, it would stretch from Montpellier Terrace in the south to the northern tip of the Brewery, and from Overton Park in the west to Hewlett Road in the east. Around 2,500 trees were planted in Cheltenham last year and the Borough Council is seeking to increase tree planting activities, as well as undertaking public engagement on tree-planting.
- 3.4.4** The Municipal Offices is currently a barrier to the council becoming carbon neutral. It is old, draughty, expensive to maintain and energy/carbon inefficient. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the building was only being used to around 10% of its capacity. In addition to the inappropriate size of the building, the costs of turning the Municipal Offices into energy-efficient, modern office accommodation would be prohibitive for a public sector organisation.
- 3.4.5** Much is rightly made of the importance of sustainable transport. The County Council is the Highways Authority and therefore, has the power (and veto) over transport schemes. The Borough Council's 'Connecting Cheltenham' report included ambitious proposals for sustainable transport initiatives in the town, including provision of a Cheltways network of cycle paths. The Borough Council aims to take forward these proposals soon with further studies and consultation. The Borough Council has noted the government's 'Gear Change' report into sustainable transport and endorses much of the content. The Gear Change report urges highways authorities to bring forward plans for fully segregated cycle lanes, ending the 'paint-on-the-road' approach to cycle infrastructure delivery. It is noted that the County Council has not yet responded to this, save for one aborted trial in Gloucester. The Borough Council would like to work with the County Council on the Cheltways cycle network and is seeking meetings to discuss this. CBC members have also led the way on persuading the County Council to introduce School Streets trials to reduce traffic congestion associated with the school run, thereby improving air quality.
- 3.4.6** On wider carbon cutting initiatives, public and business engagement will be very important. The Borough Council is working to facilitate a climate change conference involving local businesses and community organisations later this autumn. A toolkit is being produced to enable residents to measure their own carbon output and identify ways to cut it. A significant revamp of the council's climate web pages is taking place to help support the journey to carbon zero and better signpost people to the considerable level of work already being undertaken. The appointment of an environmental expert to the Cheltenham Economic Recovery Task Force is also expected to take place soon, helping to further embed climate change and carbon

reduction as a key aim of the Task Force. Cheltenham Borough Homes has been developing in its own strategy for carbon neutral homes and is considering demonstration projects in carbon neutral homes to set a local standard for other developers.

### **3.5 More support is needed**

**3.5.1** The initial motion brought to council called for more support from the government to enable local government to pursue ambitious carbon neutral targets. A letter was sent by the council leader to the Secretary of State to ask for more support. A follow-up letter is being drafted to restate the case for changes to legislation and increased funding.

### **4. Next Steps - possible next steps for the committee to consider e.g. potential witnesses, further report, site visit etc.**

**4.1** Update on progress with assessing the contribution the council's property estate can make to the council becoming carbon neutral.

**4.2** Alternative investment options which could help drive the council's green credentials, whilst still providing a healthy return on investment.

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<b>Background Papers</b>	n/a
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