

Information/Discussion Paper

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 6th June, 2022

Climate Emergency Overview

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 2021, the Council employed two new Climate Emergency Officers to support its ambition to become a net zero carbon Council and Borough by the year 2030. The Climate Emergency team is presenting this report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to offer an oversight of work undertaken to date and to make known the proposed priority actions for the coming year.
- 1.2 The priorities and actions of the Climate Emergency team are transparently presented here, based on the understanding that there is cross-party support for local action to help tackle the climate emergency and therefore, positive input and scrutiny of the proposals by this committee is welcome.

2. Summary of the Issue

- 2.1 As the recently published Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) is significantly relevant to Corporate Priority 3: 'Achieving a cleaner and greener sustainable environment for residents and visitors', the Climate Emergency team wishes to provide the opportunity for this committee to provide collective input, ensuring that all decisions are transparently made or challenged where appropriate, with carbon reduction considerations being paramount.
- 2.2 There is a need for greater understanding that reaching net zero will be incredibly challenging. The chances are that we will fall short, but we must continue to be ambitious to maximise the chances of getting as close as we can to the council's stated ambition. The entirety of the council must play a part in mitigating our contributions to climate change and a cultural shift is clearly needed to ensure **all** decisions take climate implications seriously into consideration. On top of this, CBC will require support and change from all those living and working in Cheltenham, as well as businesses and partner organisations like the County Council and the National Health Service.
- 2.3 For a significant reduction in our carbon footprint, a shift away from non-renewable energy sources, such as gas, will be an absolute priority. This transition is likely to lead to increased revenue costs as a result of the current energy crisis. Residents and businesses of Cheltenham have experienced utility bill price increases of up to 400%, and the Council has not been excluded from this pressure. To help mitigate this, we will all need to change the way we live and work in order to reduce our

consumption and the deployment of additional renewable energy generation opportunities will have to be prioritised.

3. Summary of evidence/information

3.1 To date, the Climate Emergency team has made some significant strides towards understanding the scale of the net zero 2030 target and on delivering key actions in the CEAP. Some of the key achievements are outlined below:

- Publication of the 'Climate Emergency Action Plan: Pathway to Net Zero' which sets out the key steps needed to achieve the 2030 goal.
- Development of a Climate Supplementary Planning Document to help drive change within the construction and retrofit industry – this has been out to public consultation and responses are currently being considered.
- Approving the use of HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil) fuel for the Ubico refuse fleet, to reduce current diesel-generated emissions by up to 90%.
- Installing over 200 electricity and gas sub-meters across our general fund property portfolio, to more accurately measure the council's energy use (electricity and gas), which will underpin the development of a work programme to reduce our consumption. Critically, this will also help to mitigate the impact of rising energy costs, which are projected to be significantly higher than originally budgeted for in 2022-23, primarily as a consequence of the war in Ukraine.
- The creation of the CheltenhamZero partnership, which already has over 80 Cheltenham-based businesses and community organisations signed up to our shared ambition to reduce carbon emissions.

3.2 Looking ahead to the next 12 months, the Climate Team will prioritise reducing the direct energy consumption of CBC and its closest delivery partners. There is a direct link between energy consumption and carbon emissions, so with the higher costs resulting from the current energy crisis, it is imperative that we take action now. Key priorities will be:

- Introducing a socio-environmental impact assessment tool, to ensure that projects and policies being delivered either directly or indirectly by CBC support social well-being and are as environmentally sustainable as possible.
- Development of an energy policy and a behaviour change programme to actively reduce CBC's energy consumption.
- Working with county partners on the planned 'Innovate to Renovate' project, which will look to support households to retrofit their homes with improved energy efficiency and renewable energy generation measures. This will have the added benefit of helping households to become more resilient to the uncertainties of the current energy market and help to mitigate the likely surge in fuel poverty which has already taken place and is likely to worsen later this year.
- Assessing the feasibility of introducing a Heat Network in the town, to provide an alternative to gas as the means by which the majority of buildings are

currently heated (we have already secured funding from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to help support this work).

- Exploring investment opportunities and potential funding strands, one of which will be the recently approved £10 million capital budget to support 'Cheltenham's Green Deal', which could be used to provide renewable energy generation schemes on CBC-owned property and land assets. This has the potential to significantly reduce CBC's own carbon footprint.
- Working collaboratively with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) and other partners to provide EV charging points to support residents and visitors in Cheltenham move away from fossil-fuel powered vehicles.
- Driving the wider adoption of the CheltenhamZero Partnership across our businesses, voluntary sector and residential communities, influencing behaviour change, collaboration and the sharing of information and best practice.

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

- 4.1** Whilst we have made an internal assessment of the authority's Scope 3 related emissions, it is becoming increasingly clear that this is likely to be a considerable underestimate. It may be advisable to have these emissions assessed independently, to help ensure transparency as we seek to persuade others to effectively tackle their carbon emissions. Without soundly based emissions data, our ability to effectively prioritise actions and mitigation schemes will be undermined.
- 4.2** A decision will be needed in due course as to whether we should proceed further with the development of a local heat network. In due course, there is likely to be significant up-front financial investment available for this from central government and the initiative is likely to be backed by legal requirements to make it mandatory to connect new buildings to a heat network where one is available.
- 4.3** Any transition to low or zero carbon emissions vehicles is unlikely to reduce the number of vehicles on the road, or necessarily improve air quality to the extent required (particulates are still generated from tyre-road abrasion). Many of the existing problems associated with personal transport such as cluttered streets and congestion are likely to remain, or intensify. There is also a significant up-front carbon cost associated with the production of new vehicles.
- 4.4** Our approach to EV charge point installation will also need careful consideration and greater effort will need to go into prioritising a transition to active or shared travel options. Greater public understanding of the scale of the ambition in relation to this is needed, as well as support in campaigning for behaviour change.
- 4.5** Serious consideration will need to be given to the current staffing capacity of the Climate Emergency team, for it to meet the level of ambition required by the CEAP, notwithstanding the parallel need for all staff to consider the impact of their services on the authority's carbon footprint.

Background Papers**Contact Officer**

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Accountability

Cllr Alisha Lewis, Cabinet Member for Climate
Emergency