

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet meeting – 11th October 2022

Cheltenham's Climate Impact Assessment Tool

Accountable member:

Cabinet Member Climate Emergency, Cllr Alisha Lewis

Accountable officer:

Climate Emergency Programme Lead, Laura Tapping

Director of Climate Change and Place Services, Mike Redman

Accountable scrutiny committee:

n/a

Ward(s) affected:

All

Significant Decision:

Yes

Executive summary:

As part of Cheltenham Borough Council's commitment to becoming a net zero Council and Borough by 2030, environmental and social implications of all projects, policies and decisions need to be considered at the earliest of stages. The introduction of a Climate Impact Assessment Tool will prompt officers and Members to consider such implications and shape robust projects or policies by highlighting climate positive areas and areas with scope for improvement.

Recommendation:

That Cabinet:

- **approve and pilot the use of the Climate Impact Assessment Tool on all projects and policies put forward for a decision and that this should form part of the council's standing reporting process and associated guidance, subject to a review of its practical application after six months.**

1. Implications

1.1. Financial implications

In light of the current economic environment and the budget and resource pressures on the Council, it is more vital than ever that decisions taken are aligned to the Council's corporate priorities. This includes the priority to be carbon net zero by 2030. The climate change impact assessment tool will allow this priority to be considered within all Council key decisions. It will also provide transparency for Members and the public where decisions balance financial resilience and having a positive impact on our carbon goals.

Signed off by: Gemma Bell, Head of Finance and Assets, gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.2. Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Individual decision requests that are brought forward and informed by the assessment tool will be subject to input by One Legal where appropriate.

1.3. HR implications

Officers will be expected to complete the Climate Impact Assessment Tool on any project or policy put forward for a corporate decision. The tool is to be completed by the Project Manager and reviewed by the Project Sponsor and Cabinet Member, with initial input from the Climate team.

For the tool to be used consistently and to its fullest potential, the Climate team will be expected to review completed assessments and provide feedback. Depending on the volume of decisions, there may need to be a review of the resources available within the climate team to support this work.

Signed off by: Clare Jones, HR Business Partner, clare.jones@publicagroup.uk

1.4. Environmental and climate change implications

The Climate Impact Assessment tool, by its very nature, is designed to help reduce the risk of negative environmental impacts stemming from our decisions. The tool will help to ensure projects and policies are aligned to Council commitments to climate action and will make sure that we are appropriately considering climate factors, from biodiversity to air quality, in all of our decisions. This tool will help to shape projects so that they optimise positive impacts on the wellbeing of residents and the environment we live in.

Signed off by: Mike Redman, Director of Climate Change and Place Services
mike.redman@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.5. Property/asset implications

No direct implications arising from this report.

Signed off by: Gemma Bell, Head of Finance and Assets

1.6. Corporate policy framework implications

The Climate Impact Assessment Tool will support the Council's priority of becoming net zero by 2030, aligning with the Climate Emergency Action Plan and the Council's Recovery Strategy

Signed off by: Richard Gibson, Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships,
richard.gibson@cheltenham.gov.uk

2. Promoting equality and reducing discrimination

The Impact Assessment Tool not only covers environmental factors but social factors as well. Similar to the equality impact assessment, the Climate Impact Assessment tool will guide the consideration of what impact or consequences our functions, policies, procedures and projects have on our communities, as well as employees and potential employees. Once considered, improvements in these areas can be made to help reduce inequalities in the Borough.

3. Performance management – monitoring and review

Completed assessments will be stored as a database and act as an audit trail of initial project development and the subsequent improvements, based on the documented outcomes within the assessment. Sharing case studies and examples of where the tool has been used to bring positive change will help officers to understand the benefits of using the tool.

There will be an initial piloting phase in which the tool will be used in relation to several Cabinet decisions and we will continue to review and improve the tool based on feedback received.

There is an intention to return to Cabinet in February 2023 following the pilot phase. The purpose of this is to evaluate how the tool has been embedded, including looking at successful examples and lessons learned and to discuss any future needs, such as additional resource requirements.

4. Background

- 4.1. The Climate Emergency team has developed a Climate Impact Assessment Tool in collaboration with West Oxfordshire District Council that will evaluate projects, policies and decisions in terms of their environmental and social impacts. The tool assesses social and environmental impacts under the assumption that financial implications are more naturally and routinely considered.
- 4.2. The aim is to ensure that CBC officers carefully consider the climate impact (both environmental and social) of proposed projects, decisions and policies, with the intention that all decisions seek to optimise positive impacts on the wellbeing of residents and the environment we live in. To achieve this, the tool asks officers to answer questions on a range of potential impacts which are scored and reviewed, with negative impacts being flagged for improvement, or acknowledged at the very least, ahead of project approval.
- 4.3. The tool should be completed as early as possible to help shape a robust project, service or policy, by highlighting climate positive areas and areas for potential improvement. This will

ensure projects and policies are aligned to the Council's commitments to climate action, as well as other council priorities. Referencing a completed assessment within a Cabinet report will add weight to the environmental implications section and help demonstrate robust thinking.

- 4.4. The assessment is to be completed by the Project Manager and reviewed by the Project Sponsor and Cabinet Member. During the initial pilot stages, the climate team will provide guidance and assistance in completing the tool and will review completed assessments.
- 4.5. The officer team will be prompted to consider each aspect of their project, e.g. traffic and materials, and input the level of climate impact (positive or negative) that their current approach would have. Based on their inputs, they are presented with a colour-coded report wheel as a visual representation of the likely climate impacts. This clear visual tool showcases opportunities for improvement and mitigation.
- 4.6. The outcome of using Cheltenham's tool does not determine any decision, therefore it has been labelled as an impact assessment tool.
- 4.7. To ensure transparent use of the tool, segments coloured red (conveying negative impacts) are not enough for the dismissal of a project. Although red segments are a cause for concern, officers have an opportunity to make changes to this area of focus, or to mitigate negative impacts elsewhere. At the very least, if changes cannot be made, the officer will need to justify and explain why. The tool was designed to be thought provoking and to prompt conversation around different topics such as biodiversity, air quality and health & wellbeing, pushing officers to consider where positive changes can be made.
- 4.8. As a result of feedback from Cabinet, officers are looking to review the specific colours used in the tool to make it more user-friendly for those who are red/green colour blind.

5. Reasons for recommendations

- 5.1. Cheltenham Borough Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and subsequently established a pathway to become a net zero Council and Borough by 2030. In the Council's 'Climate Emergency Action Plan: Pathway to Net Zero', the council outlined how it would rise to the challenge by undertaking mitigation and adaptation projects across the council's service and property portfolio.
- 5.2. Despite best efforts to reduce our climate impact, projects and policies are continuing through the decision-making process without adequate consideration of social and environmental implications. Teams are only actively prompted to consider these issues late in the day by our standard Cabinet report template. When a proposal is presented to Cabinet Members for approval, it was often too late to make any significant changes and improvements. Almost instinctively, officers and Members consider the financial implications of any decision - but social and environmental impacts are less naturally reflected upon.
- 5.3. The Climate Impact Assessment Tool presses officers to consider a range of potential social and environmental impacts stemming from a planned project or policy. This consideration will be embedded in our decision-pathway from the very start, encouraging up-front thinking on these issues and thereby providing earlier opportunity for mitigation and adaptation measures to be taken.
- 5.4. While the financial implications of a project remain a key consideration for officers, the tool will press officers to think about how we can positively impact the environment and our communities with the decisions we make. Officers will begin to openly discuss and gain a

greater understanding of wider climate and social implications of their projects. Members will be consulted at the initial stages of project design and with this new early-stage approach, have adequate opportunity to shape a robust project with minimal negative social and environmental considerations.

6. Alternative options considered

6.1. Officers have looked at tools developed by other authorities and have taken some ideas from these approaches, most notably the decision wheel developed by Cornwall Council.

7. Consultation and feedback

7.1. Input from officers across the organisation and the Publica Group has been considered throughout the development of the tool through focus group sessions.

7.2. The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency was consulted at very early design stages.

7.3. The tool was presented to and feedback received from Executive Director of Place & Communities and Director of Climate Change and Place Services.

7.4. The tool was presented at an Informal Cabinet meeting on 6th September 2022.

7.5. The tool was presented at an All Managers briefing on 14th September 2022.

7.6. The tool has also been demonstrated at the county CN2030 group and is to be promoted further at Climate Leadership Gloucestershire. Both these groups have expressed interest in seeing the tool used more widely by other authorities within the county.

8. Key risk

8.1. The key risk relating to the recommendation in this report, is that the tool is either not adopted, or that it is inconsistently or poorly applied, resulting in poorer decision making which could be damaging to the Council's progress in meeting its aspirations for the organisation and the borough to be net zero by 2030.

Report author:

Laura Tapping, Climate Emergency Programme Officer, 01242 264263, email:
laura.tapping@cheltenham.gov.uk

Mike Redman, Director of Climate Change and Place Services, 01242 264160, email:
mike.redman@cheltenham.gov.uk

Appendices:

- i. Risk Assessment

Background information:

- ii. [Climate Emergency Action Plan: Pathway to Net Zero – Cheltenham Borough Council](#)
- iii. Climate Change Assessment Tool

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
127	Climate Emergency: Failure to make Cheltenham carbon neutral by 2030	Mike Redman	4	4	16	Reduce	<p>Adopt Climate Impact Assessment Tool to better inform environmental and social implications of all CBC decision-making</p> <p>Implement actions outlined in the Council's adopted Climate Emergency Action Plan: Pathway to Net Zero</p> <p>Monitor progress in reducing the town's carbon footprint and take corrective actions as required</p> <p>Ensure sufficient resources are requested and allocated to climate mitigation measures</p>	<p>Cabinet</p> <p>Climate team and other service teams within CBC</p> <p>Leadership Team</p> <p>Leadership Team</p>	<p>October 2022</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>Annually</p>