

Cheltenham Zero

1. Question from Councillor Chelin to Mark Lawson/Isobel Filipova

Accreditation (p 24) - How is accreditation maintained to ensure ongoing sustainability and authenticity beyond the first approval?

Accreditation is not based on a one-off commitment, but on evidence of action and ongoing progress throughout the system.

The accreditation system requires an annual submission of a company's carbon report to maintain their status as an active Cheltenham Zero business, if they fail to submit the annual reports, they will be demoted to a basic member and must begin the process again.

The final governance and review mechanisms will be confirmed as part of the scheme's launch planned for Autumn 2026.

Once a company reaches Gold they will stay at this level providing, they submit their annual carbon report.

2. Question from Councillor Chelin to Mark Lawson/Isobel Filipova

Events (p 27) - At the events and discussions attended or hosted by CheltenhamZero, what are the key barriers people raise to engaging in more sustainable practices and how can these best be addressed (at the local council level)?

In the first instance, the biggest barriers we see with businesses is understanding of the opportunities for a businesses future if they work on their sustainability.

Once we have overcome the WHY the next barrier is knowing where to start and ensuring they put the time in.

Then it is mainly financial, once a company has worked through the low hanging fruit, the sensible next steps are to upgrade business operations and premises. Some companies can invest whereas others are not, regardless of ROI length.

At the local level we can and do provide education on the WHY, the accreditation system is the where to start, alongside, advice from us and occasionally part-funded audits. The financial barrier is the hardest for us to address and overcome as funding we are able to provide is dependent upon central government funding pots being available for these transitions and upgrades.

At the local level, there may be opportunity to create a funding pot for business upgrades, which when we look at the bigger picture will grow the local economy, paying back in other ways.

3. Question from Councillor Chelin to Mark Lawson/Isobel Filipova

Analytics (p 28) - What are the targets/KPIs for these communications channels and how is the impact measured?

During 2024/25 the focus was on rebuilding the programme, clarifying the offer and establishing a stronger business-facing identity. As such, success has been measured using engagement indicators including:

- *Growth in membership to 204 members.*
- *53 new members over the year.*
- *LinkedIn growth of 127 new Cheltenham Zero followers.*
- *Website traffic to priority pages such as grants, membership and events.*
- *Event attendance and participation.*
- *Sign-ups to carbon audits, grants and Zellar.*

For future years we intend to strengthen the performance framework so that communications are increasingly measured against behavioural outcomes, such as businesses undertaking carbon audits, developing action plans, joining the accreditation scheme and implementing emissions reduction projects.

The target is to ensure ongoing communications with members and business owners such as 3-4 in person events per year regular emails to update members and consistence social comms. The impact is measured by volume of traffic this brings and the reach we achieve with the comms.

4. Question from Councillor Chelin to Mark Lawson/Isobel Filipova

Finally, what role (priority) does net zero play when people apply for council funded initiatives such as the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy?

The review of bids for Neighbourhood CIL is overseen by the Neighbourhood CIL Panel. In assessing bids, due regard is given to the Corporate Plan, which includes key priority 3 (Reducing carbon, achieving council net zero, creating biodiversity). The Neighbourhood CIL Panel is not a decision-making body, this sits with Cabinet, and again in this context the Corporate Plan provides context. Previous awards have included air quality survey, solar panels, eco hub.

All cabinet level decisions have evaluation of environmental and climate change implications using the CIAT (Climate Impact Assessment Tool).

5. Question from Harry Booty (independent co-optee) to Mark Lawson/Isobel Filipova

Any minimum metric tied to deliverables? e.g. an expected % emissions reduction?

At present there is no single minimum percentage emissions reduction required across all Cheltenham Zero activities because participating organisations vary considerably in size, sector and starting point.

For CBC there is no net zero target set for borough wide emissions and therefore there is no minimum requirement although we do align with the global aim of net zero by 2050.

When businesses apply for funding, we require a calculation of the expected reduction from the measures being funded. This directs the funding panel to allot funds to the most advantageous projects.

For the accreditation platform, the aim is to support businesses to get started on the journey in a supportive, achievable way. Getting to Gold means they have made a reduction, then for them to achieve Platinum they must show YOY reductions inline with their carbon reduction plan to achieve net zero by 2050.

6. Question from Harry Booty (independent co-optee) to Mark Lawson/Isobel Filipova

Could you please explain how Zellar works?

Zellar is an online carbon measurement and action-planning platform aimed primarily at small and medium-sized businesses.

Businesses enter operational information relating to their activities, such as energy use, travel and other business inputs. The platform then estimates their carbon footprint, establishes a baseline and provides suggested actions and projects to reduce emissions.

Cheltenham Zero uses the platform to help businesses move from understanding their emissions to developing practical reduction plans. The revised model will provide a one-month licence for businesses to calculate their baseline, after which they may choose to continue for a full year, subject to engagement milestones and agreed actions. This approach is intended to improve utilisation and provide better value for money, and improved decision making.

7. Question from Harry Booty (independent co-optee) to Mark Lawson/Isobel Filipova

What are the opportunities and risks of LGR and how this is being prepared for in relation to climate goals?

Local Government Reorganisation presents both opportunities and risks for climate delivery.

Potential opportunities include:

- *Greater strategic coordination across a wider geography.*
- *Consistent climate policies and programmes.*
- *Increased organisational capacity and expertise.*
- *Better alignment of transport, planning, housing and economic development functions.*

Potential risks include:

- *Loss of local focus and established relationships.*
- *Transition-related delays to climate programmes.*
- *Competing organisational priorities.*
- *Uncertainty around future governance and funding arrangements.*

Cheltenham Zero is therefore focusing on building approaches that are scalable and transferable. The accreditation model is being developed with the potential to expand beyond Cheltenham across Gloucestershire, and ongoing partnership working with countywide business networks helps prepare for broader delivery arrangements in future.

8. Question from Harry Booty (independent co-optee) to Mark Lawson/Isobel Filipova

What evidence is there that accreditation is an appealing reward for those businesses who aren't already committed to the goal?

The accreditation programme has not yet launched, so we do not yet have local evidence on uptake or behavioural impact.

However, accreditation schemes are widely used in other sectors because they provide external recognition, support reputation, demonstrate credibility to customers and suppliers and can support tendering and procurement opportunities. The aim of the Cheltenham Zero accreditation is to create a visible and trusted framework that recognises progress and encourages businesses that may not otherwise engage purely for environmental reasons.

This will be a welcome initiative evidenced by the interest from businesses we have spoken to about it, as well as the business groups we collaborate with who represent a wide variety of businesses across Gloucestershire and have solid insights into their needs.

9. Question from Harry Booty (independent co-optee) to Mark Lawson/Isobel Filipova

In relation to comms: what is known about the attitudes of businesses – e.g. what they think and feel about this work?

Our engagement over the past year suggests attitudes vary significantly across the business community. Although when businesses are spoken to directly about their challenges, needs and the support we can offer, their attitude, which may have started as sceptical, quickly becomes interested in how approaching their business with the driver of achieving net zero and sustainability can future proof their operations.

Many businesses already engaged through Cheltenham Zero are motivated by reducing environmental impact, but businesses consistently tell us they are also concerned about:

- reducing operating costs;*
- future-proofing their businesses;*
- customer expectations;*
- supply-chain requirements;*
- recruitment and retention;*
- emerging procurement and compliance requirements.*

The strategic repositioning of Cheltenham Zero has therefore deliberately moved away from a purely environmental message and towards a business-support offer focused on resilience, competitiveness and cost reduction. This reflects what we have heard through engagement with local businesses and business representative organisations.