

# ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 29 November 2021 at the Council Chamber - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Roger Whyborn	Cllr Gill Moseley
Cllr Susan Williams	Cllr Phil Awford
Cllr Chris McFarling	Cllr Paul Baker
Cllr Dominic Morris (Chair)	

Substitutes: Cllrs Nick Housden and Mark McKenzie-Charrington

Officers in attendance: Colin Chick, Philip Williams, Cllr David Gray and Liz Kirkham

Apologies: Cllrs Sajid Patel and Alan Preest

## 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2021 were approved

## 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

## 4. CLIMATE CHANGE

4.1 Philip Williams, Lead Commissioner for Community Infrastructure, introduced this item. Members noted the following points:

- The Council declared a Climate Emergency in May 2019, and in December 2019 Cabinet agreed the Climate Change Strategy for GCC, alongside the first set of resources to help deliver its objectives.
- Cabinet also confirmed a commitment to consider an annual review on the Strategy's progress. This was now confirmed on the Council's Forward Plan and the next review was due at Cabinet on 22 December 2021.
- The Lead Cabinet Member wanted to use today's opportunity to gain feedback from scrutiny prior to the Cabinet consideration later next month.
- It had been a difficult year for staffing in the department, the Lead Officer had unfortunately been off for most of the period, which meant an already very big and growing portfolio had to be covered through existing resources.
- During this time however, three new and additional posts were successfully appointed to. The team welcomed Kelly Osbourne and Emily Woodger-Smith as Sustainability and Engagement officers and Hannah Jacobs was the new Climate Change and Air Quality officer. Interviews

were also due in the next few weeks to appoint to a post focused on the tree planting strategy.

- In terms of the climate change goals for the Council as an organisation, the cut in emissions was almost at 80% which meant it was well ahead of the projected path for net zero by 2030.
- The challenge was now trying to apply this learning to how the Council can engage more broadly across Gloucestershire, to ensure the county can reach its net zero target by 2045. This remained a very difficult task and there was a long way to go.
- The recent COP26 was important for the county as it showed the commitments in terms of policy, funding, and the transfer of power local authorities need to get from central Govt. to help achieve its targets.
- The team were also working with the newly appointed Afriqnmun Lovejoy, who was the Countywide Climate Change Coordinator, to engage more broadly and work in partnership across the county under Climate Leadership Gloucestershire.
- There had been some good 'on the ground' progress this year such as, tree planting via the Ash Dieback programme and wider, cycling infrastructure, improvements to public transport services and electric vehicle investment and infrastructure.
- The report also recorded those areas of work that still remained a challenge such as delivering local heat networks.
- Overall, there had been good progress on many areas but there remained a huge challenge that relied very much on partners and national government providing a coordinated effort.
- The Committee also noted a presentation from Afriqnmun Lovejoy on the set up and workings of the new Climate Leadership Gloucestershire group. Details can be found in the attached PDF document.

## **Questions**

- 4.2 Noting how impressive the statistics looked for GCC's emission reductions since 2006/7, it was stressed that if Gloucestershire was going to take a national lead, it would be important to share with other councils and businesses, how they have achieved these targets. The Member felt it would be helpful to have a simple table that included baseline emissions at 2006/7 from each source within GCC's control, what action was taken and the resulting CO2 reduction. This should include details of how each figure was calculated and verified in order to allow others to learn from best practice.
- 4.3 Officers agreed that consistency of language and clear science was really important on sharing GCC's success to date. In terms of calculations and data sharing, the Council was following the approach required by BEIS for councils to compile and publish data. This process had gone through member scrutiny (via Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee) who had asked for assurances from the performance team. An independent verification of the data had also raised no concerns.

- 4.4 Regarding the purchase of Green Energy, it was asked who GCC's supplier was and whether we could identify the source of the energy supplied. It was noted that unfortunately, many councils bought their energy from a third-party operator who themselves then bought energy off the open market, purchasing the Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGOs) separately. This meant that more often than not, the actual source of energy generation could not be directly identified.
- 4.5 It was stressed that much of the work connected to tackling climate change was evolving, and the more work done, the more that was uncovered. In early 2020, GCC made its move to start using greener energy and signed up with a supplier called WME who procured their energy through REGOs.
- 4.6 Whilst officers recognised that REGOs were not as green as was hoped, the energy market was extremely volatile at the moment, the renewable sector was constantly evolving, and discussions continued with energy experts to understand the best avenue for renewable energy. It was added that there was a just as important need to reduce the energy demand in first instance, then avenues to generate the remaining energy need 'in house' would be explored.
- 4.7 Members questioned the impact Javelin Park had on the county's emissions. It was reiterated that for the Council as an organisation, the progress on emissions reduction had gone very well to date. The figure in the report referred to a 77% gross (not including the impacts of Javelin Park) and 83% net (including the impacts of Javelin Park) reduction. 50% of energy produced by Javelin Park was classed as renewable under the current Govt. rules, it produced enough energy for around 25,000 houses and there was a massive carbon reduction achieved through stopping the waste going into landfill (which resulted in methane release). Last year it also returned 40,000 tonnes of metals through the grate for recycling that would have otherwise been lost to landfill forever, the bottom fuel ash was also being used to make building blocks.
- 4.8 Whilst it was accepted that there was still a level of CO2 being produced through the process of burning materials, this was still less than what would have been emitted through using landfill, plus there was also research looking into how this could be captured and used for other purposes.
- 4.9 The environmental impact of landfill was incredibly detrimental, as a result of Javelin Park, Gloucestershire now only diverted around 3% of waste to landfill, almost all waste went through the facility where it was possible and safe to do so. One of the main substances that still went to landfill at the moment was the material from scrubbing (the process used to filter out harmful gases emitted during the burning process at Javelin Park) as it was regarded as toxic, but again there was now research into how the material left over could be cleaned and reused instead.

- 4.10 It was stressed by members that the use of carbon offsetting should be a last resort, used for the most stubborn emissions that could not be removed by any other means. It should not be used to create a distraction as it meant the emissions were still being created. Officers acknowledged this view but suggested that was an ideal scenario. Discounting carbon offsetting would only be acceptable if we were ahead of our carbon zero targets, the reality was we (and the world) were not, so anything that could contribute to reducing our emissions at this moment in time should be on the table.
- 4.11 There was a discussion about the GCC estate and how the council was looking at improving buildings such as highway depots and existing schools to become carbon neutral. It was advised that officers were reviewing all EPC ratings across council properties, including for example, gypsy and traveller site accommodation as well as commissioning a contract to look for opportunities such as using solar energy. This review would include understanding how to enable private individuals to invest their own money in such initiatives, such as private landlords.
- 4.12 There remained a lot of debate on the meaning of carbon neutral buildings. There were two definitions often used interchangeably; carbon neutral 'in operation' meant the energy used to run the building, which was different to the 'whole asset' which meant that the embedded carbon in its entirety was neutralised e.g., carbon emitted from the manufacture of materials used in creation of the foundations etc. The latter clearly required a significant amount of work and remained a challenge to understand how this could be achieved in practice. 70% of emissions ever emitted on this planet were attributed to infrastructure.
- 4.13 Members noted a recent item at the Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee regarding to use of Modern Methods of Construction to reduce carbon and waste in the building industry. Whilst recognised as good opportunity, It was explained that GCC did not have the power to influence the private building sector to raise their standards and implement greener policies on new builds.

**ACTION:** Provide a list of new schools which were being built to be operationally carbon neutral – Philip Williams

- 4.14 It was asked whether the council were considering adopting the [PAS 2060](#) standard, which was an internationally recognised standard specification designed to verify the accuracy of carbon neutrality claims by providing a common definition and recognised method of achieving this status. In response, officers would like to understand more about the benefits and implications of adopting this standard and give serious consideration to adopting it, whilst also taking into account any capacity implications. The Committee agreed to consider a briefing paper on this issue at a future meeting.

**ACTION:** Philip Williams

- 4.15 On the issue of tree planting, it was confirmed this was being done in accordance with best practice by working closely with groups such as the Woodlands Trust and included all manner of planting suitable for the area, including hedgerows.
- 4.16 As a follow up, a member highlighted that there was a need to understand the carbon sequestration tonnage from the trees planted, and how this would be verified. It was questioned whether the council tree planting would be registered via the Government backed [woodland carbon code](#).
- 4.17 In response, it was stressed that the climate was changing and would continue to, biodiversity improvements as a whole remained absolutely critical to tackling this, as well as helping communities adapt to the changing weather patterns. Officers would confirm regarding the woodland carbon code.

**ACTION: Philip Williams**

- 4.18 It was added that in the recent call to private landowners able to offer their land for tree planting, the council received 116,000 responses and this had continued to rise. Officers were currently working through these offers to understand their locations etc. but it was an incredible response that showed the scale of land was out there to meet the tree challenge. It was also understood that maintenance payments would follow up for those landowners who eventually had trees planted on their land.
- 4.19 A member raised the issue of effectively connecting and prompting resources, noting that as a councillor they were generally aware, but the wider population may not be aware of resources available. It was very important that such resources, e.g., websites/social media posts regarding climate action became mainstream and more accessible.
- 4.20 In response, the Committee noted that the Council produced a lot of content on this area which was shared via its Greener Gloucestershire [website](#) and newsletter email. There were currently 13,000 signed up to the regular newsletter and the website had gained 1.2m reads. In addition, one of the new officers recently appointed had skills linked to social media influencing which would be a vital resource moving forward.
- 4.21 To summarise the discussion on the Council's first target of reducing its own, organisational emissions by 2030, the Committee questioned whether we were on the right path.
- 4.22 Officers confirmed that the baseline of measurements from 2006 was chosen due to the need for robust datasets of work to be available in order to measure against, historically the quality of information available on this topic had been insufficient. The Council remained absolutely on target to meet its commitment in terms of the corporate body emissions and the report

reflected the type of work that had been carried out to reach the reductions to date.

- 4.23 Members felt the report was unclear however on methodology, how the data had been used to reach the numbers and percentages shown. It was requested that a short annex be added to future versions of this report to make this clearer.

**ACTION: Philip Williams**

- 4.24 The Chair then opened up the debate on the wider commitment of reducing the county's emissions as a whole. This was clearly the bigger challenge and what was emphasised to begin with was GCC's power, ability, and influence to deliver the second commitment was massively reduced. It was much easier to change what we had direct control over, whereas the wider Gloucestershire commitment was very much reliant on partnership working across the county, residents being enthusiastic and on board with making change, and Govt. support in terms of policy and grants.
- 4.25 One of the major ongoing issues for Gloucestershire was the way in which it delivered new housing. Due to the system of planning approvals in two-tier authorities, each district council was responsible for delivering their own housing quota, GCC was a statutory consultee responsible for delivering the infrastructure for the new settlements.
- 4.26 Historically Gloucestershire had become stuck in a process of incremental growth around existing towns, meaning that eventually these new housing developments were being created miles away from existing facilities and infrastructure. This meant that these settlements became unsustainable without the use of car, GCC would need to spend a lot of money to produce the missing provisions and public transport offers often remained unattractive against the use of a private car due to budget restrictions etc.
- 4.27 The Cabinet Member responsible for this area added that local politicians needed to act, and it was a role they took very seriously. Over their years of government liaison, the need for sustainable communities had been a key issue voiced and pushed with Ministers the importance of, new developments which had adequate access to alternative transport options and accessible facilities that did not require the use of a car.
- 4.28 GCC was committed to the aspiration of working to join up communities and help address climate change by reducing the impact of successive communities on the planet. Local communities needed to have a coordinated voice when speaking to Govt. to maximise its impact on where they wanted future finances to be directed. Housing development was not the only issue that needed addressing however, the council needed to understand and take account of climate implications on every decision it made through its governance structure. The need for a greener Gloucestershire had to be in the back of everyone's minds on any decision taken.

- 4.29 A member highlighted that the emission figures for Gloucestershire were just short of 5m tonnes per annum. This meant if it wanted to reach the target of becoming carbon neutral by 2045, we would have to be cutting 206,000 tonnes per annum at a minimum, and we were already behind on this.
- 4.30 It was confirmed that carbon literacy training was currently being finalised and would be rolled out to members and officers at GCC during 2022.
- 4.31 There had been a recent member visit to one of GCC's county farms and they had been very impressed with the improvements the owners had made in decarbonising their farm. It was stressed that the county farms were an important asset for the county in tackling climate change as they could show leadership in the industry through these exemplar examples.
- 4.32 On the issue of decarbonising transport, it was questioned whether GCC had calculated the policy emissions for programmes within the Local Transport Plan, as a result of GCC policies in the LTP enabling more people to switch to active travel or use public transport.
- 4.33 Officers advised that early in the New Year there would be a piece of work looking into transport decarbonisation. They were aware that this was an important but incredibly challenging area of work and a reality check was needed on how much it would take to achieve the targets. The members' questions were exactly the sort of things they would look into, to make sure any discussion on the topic going forward was informed.
- 4.34 A member asked where we were on Clear Air Zones in the county. It was explained that Zones were only established where there had been a serious breach on the legal limits of emissions set by Govt., and there was currently nowhere in Gloucestershire that reached that threshold. When this was last reviewed, the only area that needed action in Gloucestershire was the area outside GCHQ on the A40, and a change by Stagecoach to lower emission buses was enough to bring emissions back below the threshold. It was highlighted therefore that areas who had implemented expensive air pollution projects will have received funding from Govt. to do so due to very serious emission breaches. GCC had however recently supported district/borough councils in a number of bids for small areas in the county where air pollution was moderately high.
- 4.35 Concern was raised on how many residents would actually end up using the new Gloucester to Cheltenham cycle route, and whether the money would have been better spent on active travel and cycle routes within communities and for schools. Members noted that the cycle programme was currently trying to create a core network, it was not necessarily designed for residents to cycle the whole route, but take shorter trips using it. Officers continued to work on the Local Cycle and Walking Investment Plans to create local networks.

- 4.36 Noting reference made to the new Climate Leadership Gloucestershire, it was questioned what the makeup of this Group was. Members were advised that it was a partnership aimed at cooperation across the county. It was not for GCC to impose upon other elected bodies, it was more about working to find common ground, show leadership, share best practise and ambitions, as well as showing a united front when trying to attract Govt. funding. The Group had only met once, and its next meeting was due in February 2022.
- 4.37 It was reinforced that the reduction targets set for Gloucestershire-wide emissions remained extremely ambitious, the council was committed to doing its part towards this, but it would require much wider partnership action if they were going to be reached. The Committee paid thanks to officers for their tireless work in bringing this piece of work together to date.

**Following a lengthy and in-depth discussion, members of the Committee requested the Cabinet Member to feedback the following comments at the next Cabinet meeting in December:**

- To commend GCC on the substantial reduction in its own emissions, with the added action of proving clarification around the baseline and methodology used to measure this reduction.
- To provide a briefing paper on the pros and cons of adopting the PAS 2060 standard and whether the team had sufficient resources to deliver this, if appropriate.
- To understand whether there were any additional actions that could be taken to help reach the targets committed to for the Gloucestershire wide reduction, noting specifically whether GCC had the resource, powers or structures in place to deliver this.
- The need for integration as well as coordination in order to effectively deliver against these shared targets.

## **5. MOTION 876 UPDATE**

- 5.1 Members noted that the attached report included a table of actions that were approved at the meeting in September, and any additional requests following the Committee's discussion. Officers had made progress on most of them to date and the key points were as follows:
- There was a Road Safety workshop taking place on 15 December 2021 which members will have been invited to, it would cover all topics on this issue including those raised in motion 876.
  - The questionnaire to the district and parish councils was due to be sent out in January 2022 and would include questions such as; the effectiveness of any existing 20mph zones in their localities, whether there had been any community engagement on this issue and whether their council had recently passed a similar motion.



*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

- The questionnaire would form part of the useful guidance for GCC officers in their future planning.
- 5.2 The Committee were reminded that a full response to the actions outlined in this report would be brought to their meeting in January and this item was a brief update on the position.
- 5.3 Members stressed that the questions in the questionnaire needed to be sufficiently open and include an ask for those councils receiving it to carry out consultation on the issue within their communities.
- 5.4 It was noted that the questionnaire was just one of the actions being used to produce this piece of work and inform any future policy. Questions had been left general in order to avoid expectation as this more about gaining an understanding of people's views at this stage.
- 5.5 There was a discussion about potential cost savings for localities through the use of batching. Some members were keen to have this information as upfront as possible as it may be that many localities were put off the idea of TRO schemes at the moment due to the cost.
- 5.6 As any future policy had not yet been worked up, it was difficult to comment on exact costings at this stage, however, a general example would be that to raise one legal order for a TRO cost around 10K and then the associated works to implement the change cost anything upwards from 5K. The benefit of batching may be a reduction in the initial legal order cost. Any associated works costs would remain the same regardless.
- 5.7 In exploring this point, a member suggested that if this was a GCC policy in the future, would it not be that the expense of the legal TRO would be borne by GCC as the policy implementer. It was confirmed that once the policy had been finalised, it would be up to Cabinet to discuss any finance attached to it, plus further approval from full Council to be implemented. It was not a case of applying blanket funding approaches, the policy as it stood was safety led and any money spent on such schemes needed to go through priority assessments prior to approval.

## **6. WORK PLAN**

Members noted the future items in the attached work plan and suggested the following to be added:

- School street trials
- Climate Leadership Gloucestershire update
- E-scooter trial update
- Restoring our Rivers Task Group update (to note)
- Natural Flood Management

*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

**CHAIR**

Meeting concluded at 13:05.