

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 15 November 2023 at the Council Chamber - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Roger Whyborn	Cllr Vernon Smith
Cllr Gill Moseley	Cllr Chloe Turner (Chair)
Cllr Alan Preest	Cllr Emma Nelson (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Sajid Patel	Cllr Wendy Thomas

Substitutes: Cllr Paul Baker

Cabinet Members: Cllr David Gray (Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning) and Cllr Philip Robinson (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Bus Transport)

Apologies: Cllr Susan Williams, Cllr Dr David Willingham, Cllr Dom Morris and Cllr Brian Tipper

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 6 September 2023 were approved as a correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN ANNUAL UPDATE

4.1 The Chair invited Kelly Osbourne, Sustainability and Engagement Officer, to introduce the fourth Climate Change Strategy Annual Report and Action Plan. Members noted the following points:

- This Action Plan update was due to go to Cabinet in January 2024.
- Gloucestershire had improved from sixteenth to tenth place in the Council Climate Scorecards rankings, which was an independent national review system for council climate action. The team were very pleased to have this national recognition that the action plan had improved.
- There were five key components to the report which included an outline of carbon emissions both in the county and within the council estate, highlights from this year, an update on progress against the 2021/22 actions and the five-year action plan.
- The vision and targets for the overall plan remain unchanged.
- Figures 1, 2, 3 and Table 1 in the report outlined carbon emissions within the county. These showed a marked drop in emissions during 2020, which was largely attributable to the Covid pandemic and in 2021,

emissions had bounced back towards the longer-term trend however they did continue to decrease.

- Countywide emissions per capita continued to be lower than the southwest average.
- Corporate emissions continued to decline in line with longer term trends. This year, the council had seen a reduction of 76% in gross emissions against the baseline and net emissions had reduced by 82%, taking account the production renewable electricity from the Energy from Waste facility.
- The report outlined 63 actions planned over the course of this year and gave a RAG rating on progress for each. There was also a distinction on whether the action focused on corporate emissions or countywide action. 92% of these actions were rated amber or green and had therefore seen some progression this year.
- Pages 22 and 23 of the report outlined any change to the action plan from the previous year, highlighting if these were new, changed, or merged actions. Some notable changes were new actions on land use which reflected the council's recruitment of a biodiversity officer, and in the waste section which reflected a recent restructure which brought the waste and sustainability team under one head of service.
- The final section of the report gave a full overview of the five-year action plan.

- 4.2 A member questioned whether the current action plan (at around 100 actions) was realistic and deliverable, particularly noting reference made to capacity and resource pressures, and the inevitable financial pressures coming in the next financial year. It was advised that during the review of actions, the team had considered what was achievable and deliverable within each theme and that was what had been presented today. The reality of climate change meant there was an urgent need to do so much and therefore the right approach was to take action on as broad a front as possible, rather than simply focusing on a few areas. The example was given where national bids were made, the council might submit 5 or 6 bids in different but only have 2 approved, this still meant however that at least 2 areas were still progressing and the opportunity for funding wasn't completely missed due to a narrow focus.
- 4.3 Cllr David Gray, Cabinet Member for Environment, also likened this point to GCC's leadership role, and how the Council needed to be seen as leading in a whole range of areas and then encouraging action from other partners and residents. He recognised the danger of being too diffuse, but equally how important it was for GCC to be alive to all the issues contributing to climate challenge and bidding for funding wherever it was made available.
- 4.4 It was advised that the climate change impact tool had been developed by Cheltenham Borough Council in conjunction with Climate Leadership Gloucestershire (CLG) to be shared and used by all partners. It was publicly available and CLG encouraged use where possible. Officers agreed to share a link to the tool with members. The tool would allow its user to assess

impacts on different areas of climate change, for example, what would a decision impact be on electricity use.

ACTION: Kelly Osbourne

- 4.5 There were a few questions about the council's policy towards carbon offsetting, noting its inclusion in the action plan. It was advised that aside from tree planting, the council did not currently buy carbon credits, but this was something it could consider for the future. Officers were clear that offsetting should be last resort and wanted to focus its initial energy on reducing emissions as much as possible. Members requested further information on the Council's offsetting policy, and whether the renewable energy produced at the Energy from Waste facility was considered part of offsetting.
- 4.6 Officers acknowledged that decarbonisation of transport continued to be a real concern locally and nationally. Early results of the council's transport decarbonisation study had recently been reported to CLG and officers were currently drafting a report for the Corporate Leadership Team to consider the next phase of this work. It was added that this was a major example of a challenge that could not be addressed by the Council on his own and relied a lot on changing behaviour.
- 4.7 A member raised concern around wider community understanding of the level of emission reduction needed and how Gloucestershire could achieve this. It was acknowledged that unfortunately climate change was not as important to some people as it should be and there remained a lot of work to be done on behaviour change. However, officers did feel there was a lot of reason for hope, there were more and more people wanting to take action, but a lot were unsure on where to start. Communications were therefore focusing on really simple messages and targeting the right type of information to the correct audiences. They were also creative in finding ways to focus on other issues for residents where change could have a positive impact on emissions, for example, information on reducing energy use which would both save money and reduce your carbon footprint.
- 4.8 There were a few questions on the electric charging point rollout. It was confirmed that there was an aim to have 32 locations for residential on-street points by 31 March 2024 (these were areas where no off-street parking for residents was available). Each of these locations would have 4 charging points installed which resulted in 128 points across the county by that date. This was being done in parallel with introducing a number of locations off-street within the Council Estate for council vehicles such as fire engines and highways vans. The next phase would potentially be delivered by the [Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure](#) funding which GCC had applied to national government for. Further direction on the allocation of this funding was awaited. Officers needed to be careful not to use all Council funds upfront on installations that could potentially be covered by national funding and

therefore leave no leverage funding to support bids for future funding streams.

- 4.9 Officers had also submitted an indication to Government to be considered for [ZEBRA](#) funding which was for zero-emission buses and needed to be a combined bid with bus operators. GCC had indicative approval with Stagecoach and Pulhams to support with their bid to Government and had offered to provide extra funding to implement bus priority infrastructure on the suggested routes. The routes selected for the bids would be focused around the worst polluted areas in Gloucester/Cheltenham and Tewkesbury.
- 4.10 In response a member raised concern that in comparison to national figures, Gloucestershire appeared to be significantly behind on the number of points installed per head of population. It was suggested that it depended how numbers were calculated. A lot of other areas had a higher level of commercial delivery of charging points in commercial areas (for example supermarkets), but this would not cover off-street parking for residential streets. GCC's delivery focus was for residential streets and there was also encouragement given to districts to contribute with installations in public car parks for example.
- 4.11 The Chair raised concern about some specific projects that had not progressed sufficiently such as building with nature standards for GCC construction, the rollout of carbon literacy training and exploration into renewable energy.
- 4.12 More information was requested around how the Council was addressing its Scope 3 emissions and it was queried whether the phrase *'95% of the Council's entire carbon footprint is estimated to be from emissions from the supply of goods and services ('Scope 3' emissions)'* was correct in the report. Officers advised that they were currently working with Procurement to understand this incredibly complex area. An action was taken to confirm whether the above extract was correct and provide further information on this area.

ACTION: Kelly Osbourne

- 4.13 A member highlighted that Action 7.2, covering 20% of Gloucestershire with trees, was a massive target to reach and questioned whether this was realistic. It was advised that the overall tree target was that set by the Local Nature Partnership for Gloucestershire as a whole, not just the Council. As with a previous response, all of the actions had been recently reviewed and confirmed as achievable. This action was currently tracking well with over 200,000 trees already planted.
- 4.14 The Committee were very pleased overall to see how much the Climate change Strategy and Action Plan had developed over these past few years, welcoming the number of workstreams that were currently ongoing and success against targets to date.

5. CLIMATE LEADERSHIP GLOUCESTERSHIRE

- 5.1 Afriqmun Lovejoy and David Sharman gave a brief presentation to introduce this item. The following points were noted:
- CLG had been in existence since November 2021 and brought together all local authorities in Gloucestershire as well as the NHS, Police and Local Enterprise Partnership to act together on shared climate ambitions and countywide action.
 - The associated Greener Gloucestershire Action Plan aimed to be agreed and published in February 2024.
 - There were 10 CLG themes and associated thematic leads. In line with previous discussions, the areas covered within these themes were broad as no one area was more important than the other and needed equal attention.
 - Being considered at the November meeting were bids for: a Green Skills Coordinator, a green economy supplier platform to stimulate in-county skills provision, development of a Gloucestershire Local Area Energy Plan and a bid writer post as a shared resource across the county.
 - At the meeting in February, there will be a discussion around a communication plan for CLG as the Group recognise the need to increase its visibility locally and nationally.
 - Councillors were welcome to join a meeting of the CLG Engagement sub-group to discuss opportunities to engage the public as previously discussed at today's meeting, as well as join CLG in an observer capacity.
- 5.2 In response to a question, it was advised that the Food and Farming theme was more in its infancy compared to the other themes, but it was certainly an intention of that theme to address production and regenerative farming in the county. There was a challenge as to finding the best way to engage with farmers and landowners directly on these issues and the theme leads were exploring utilising existing groups and forums who were already regularly engaged with farmers and landowners, to start those conversations.
- 5.3. A member questioned whether the bid writer post previously mentioned would be available to community groups as well. It was advised that funding for this post was only a proposal at this stage, so the detail had not been worked out but if approved, access for community groups was a great idea to consider. It was added that the Community Fund available via CLG was also a good way for groups to access smaller pots of money for local projects.
- 5.4 Considering the theme around retrofitting, a member asked what support was in place for residents who could not afford to retrofit their own homes. It was advised that this area of the theme was actually more developed which is why there was less focus within CLG's action plan. Severn Wye Energy Agency Ltd had a [Warm and Well project](#) which was aimed at tackling fuel poverty in Gloucestershire and had a very clear and well established offer of

support in place. It was added that working with landlords in retrofitting rented property was on CLG's radar but was a more complex area to address.

- 5.5 Noting the final slide on member engagement it was suggested that officers could consider producing a 'member toolkit' aimed at supporting members to do outreach within their local communities and encourage engagement with CLG themes and workstreams. This could be a hard copy presentation pack or digital materials which would help members feel confident and have enough knowledge available to engage and signpost residents/community leads.

6. UPDATE ON AIR QUALITY

- 6.1 The Chair invited Sophia Beglinger, Climate Change and Air Quality Officer, to introduce this item. Members noted the following points:
- The DEFRA Air Quality grant project involved the use of e-cargo bikes by an organisation that had operations across Cheltenham and Gloucester, which included air quality management areas (AQMA's). £40,000 had been requested and the NHS were engaged as an interested partner.
 - The Air Quality monitoring webpage was being developed to provide accessible data on air quality monitoring. The team would continue to look into what else could be presented on this webpage including particulate matter data for example.
 - The report also gave a summary of the outcomes from the Air Quality Workshop held in October 2022. The key points were listed at point 12 and further detail provided at Annex 2 of the report.
 - The Air Quality District Grant would seek to offer funding opportunities to assist district with monitoring equipment and studies. The detail of the grant was still being agreed but officers hoped to have this ready as soon as possible.
 - In summary, GCC had made progress with projects seeking to improve air quality for the county.
- 6.2 A member highlighted that in July 2010, Lydney was afforded an AQM status and with this, the Forest of Dean District Council received a £44,000 grant from DEFRA to help address the issue. Since then, however, the town had grown substantially and the traffic issues in Lydney town (the centre of the AQM area) had only become worse. Noting paragraph 16 in the report, whilst the member welcomed research into a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for air quality, local planners had not taken much if any note of the AQM status back in 2010 and therefore felt an SPD would have a similar impact. Another member added that SPDs often involved a huge amount of resource and resulted in limited impact, suggesting it would be better for local authorities to work together and look at a policy during local plan development that was enforceable.

- 6.3 It was advised that there would be a 'two-pronged' approach in terms of planning. The SPD would be produced and would be a material consideration on planning application determination once agreed. In addition, during the development of local plans for the district councils, GCC would carry out its role as a statutory consultee to the local plans and ensure all relevant aspects of its roles and responsibilities were reflected in those documents. The team responsible would liaise with all relevant departments at GCC, including the air quality team, and ensure comments on these aspects were fed back to the district for their plan development.
- 6.4 A member stated that it would be useful to have geographical maps for members detailing areas of air quality hot spots and management areas.

ACTION: Sophia Beglinger

- 6.5 The Chair shared an example of a local project with Berkeley Green students to programme low-cost air quality monitors, which were then hoped to be rolled out across the district. As a similar project had been mentioned in this report, the Chair urged officers to ensure they were liaising with Stroud on which monitors would be used. It was added that officers were exploring the use of Power BI by Microsoft to map the monitors, collate and analyse the raw data.

7. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT: ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE

- 7.1 The report was taken as read and opened up to questions from members.
- 7.2 It was advised that two pre-submitted questions had been received from Cllr Baker, the responses to which can be found as an annex to these minutes.
- 7.3 Referencing the previous questions on Arle Court Transport Hub, a member questioned whether there was any intention for the national coach services to depart from here, rather than the centre of Cheltenham. The member raised concern that if this was the case, it would discourage people from travelling to Cheltenham due to the Hub's distance from the town centre.
- 7.4 Officers understood these concerns however the Interchange Hubs across Gloucestershire were aimed at providing a central coordination of transport in its towns and cities. Particularly for Cheltenham, there were serious air quality concerns on the main route into the centre and removing the need for coaches to travel in would help towards this. There would also be cleaner electric vehicle connections into the centre from the Hub.
- 7.5 A member raised concern that the waste performance indicators were not ambitious enough as they were targets that had been consistently met with ease. It was suggested that the member meet with the team to discuss how

these targets could be made more challenging, but this would need to be balanced with its resulting impact on an already under-resourced team.

- 7.6 An update on the Community Infrastructure Levy payments advised members that Stroud District Council had now implemented a process which GCC had submitted its annual bids to, and Cotswolds District Council had recently set up a bidding system which GCC were actively engaging with. The combined authorities of Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury were currently considering governance arrangements for a future process to be implemented, which GCC hoped would be in place as soon as possible.

8. WORK PLAN

Members made the following amendments to their work plan:

- Items on e-scooters, Traffic Regulation Orders, and the Bus Improvement Scrutiny Task Group were added to its meeting in January 2024.
- An in-depth item on waste management and reduction was requested for the May 2024 meeting.
- The next update on the Electric Vehicle Charging Point rollout was scheduled for July 2024.
- A future item was added on the process for allocating bus subsidy.

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 12:11

Executive Director Report – 15 November 2023

Pre-submitted questions and written answers

Arle Court Transport Hub

- 1. I note the business case for the operation of the hub has been submitted to BCAG – who are they?** The business case was presented at the Business Case Assurance Group (BCAG) last week, BCAG are a group of GCC support services staff that offers feedback on business cases, prior to attending Cabinet.
- 2. What input will CBC and Councillors have into this, can we see it, and will it include things like pricing policy to ensure the offer is sufficiently attractive to ensure maximum patronage?** The cabinet paper will be published, and CBC will be able to ask questions about the paper in line with the council cabinet question process. The current parking arrangements/pricing policy will continue at the site e.g. free parking if catching the bus, £6.40 to park and walk off site, with pricing potentially to be reviewed in April or earlier depending on Member decisions and existing Lead Cabinet Member process for agreeing pricing.
- 3. What is the capacity of the facility?** Prior to the development there were 576 spaces, once phase 3 is delivered this will increase to just over 1,000. Currently there are 2 bus bays on site, the new development will have 5. 100 EV Charge Points are being provided on the site. The site will have adequate numbers of disabled bays the ground floor of the car park with easy access to the hub.
- 4. How is that split between commuter and shopper/tourist use?** Demand forecast modelling was undertaken for the site, which given timescale uncertainties around a number of developments and transport post covid focused on the core P&R service, we don't have figures on the split of use between commuters, shoppers and tourists however the facility is designed with all in mind, we have the park and walk/cycle offer on site for employees of local businesses and are currently in talks with a number of well-known coach operators regarding using the site for inter urban coach services.
- 5. Who will sign off the business case?** Cabinet are being asked to authorise the procurement and award of the relevant contracts. Delegated powers would normally be granted to Colin Chick (Executive Director of Economy, Environment & Infrastructure) or Jason Humm (Director of Transport & Highways) to award the contract and enact any extension options (via Delegated Decision Reports).

City Fibre

- 6. Do we know when fibre works by the likes of City Fibre will be completed within our county?**
Pinpointing the exact completion date for fibre network installations in Gloucestershire, such as those by City Fibre, is challenging due to the complexities involved.

The uncertainty in completion dates and what can be publicly stated stems from several factors:

- **Commercial Sensitivity:** Suppliers keep detailed commercial plans confidential. While we may access some information through BDUK, non-disclosure agreements prevent us from disclosing it.

- **Public Disclosure:** Information about fibre rollout plans is typically shared directly with residents or made available on the supplier's website or through an availability checker.
- **Commercial Builds:** The county council focuses on public subsidy-funded builds, as commercial builds involve suppliers defining areas or premises for development without subsidies.
- **Unforeseen Challenges:** Factors like survey discoveries, cost increases, budgeted build costs, investment availability, build complexity, wayleave refusals, and internal release processes can impact timelines.
- **Permits and Resource Availability:** Obtaining necessary permits and securing sufficient resources can also influence project schedules.
- **Focus on Urban and Semi-Urban Areas:** Commercial builds tend to prioritize urban and semi-urban areas rather than rural areas.

Despite these uncertainties, the overall expectation is that commercial fibre builds in Gloucestershire will be largely completed by late 2026, with Project Gigabit potentially extending this timeframe to 2027-2030. Those premises at the end of builds are likely to be the harder to reach.

With specific regard to City Fibre the company is stating that their rollout in Gloucestershire is due to be completed at the end of 2024. It is worth noting that City Fibre and their contractor Kier Group, parted ways, and we do not have any up-to-date information on the delay this might bring to the build.