

Overview & Scrutiny Management Board

4 September 2023



Report of: Climate Change Working Group

Title: Climate Change Working Group recommendations

Ward: All

Member presenting report: Councillor Katy Grant, Chair of Climate Change Working Group

Recommendations:

OSMB to consider and comment on the recommendations of the Working Group, and to agree that the report be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration.



1. Introduction

The Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) was set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to look at Bristol’s city journey towards its target of Net Zero by 2030, and whether there is more that can be done by the council to reduce carbon generated both by its own emissions, and by those of institutions, households and individuals across the city. The CCWG has focused on identifying any gaps and areas for acceleration, intending to add value to (rather than duplicate) the considerable work already being done, while ensuring the transition is as just as possible.

We have stressed the non-political nature of the climate emergency, hoping to identify some of the blockers to policy change that might be non-technical in nature, and achieve consensus on how to address these. The group has also provided a forum for preparation for the post-May 2024 committee governance model, where it will be necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the proposed Environment and Sustainability Committee in relation to climate policy and delivery. Between now and then, it will be important to clarify how the future committee will interact with the One City Environment Board and Bristol Advisory Committee on Climate Change.

In light of the urgency of the Climate Emergency, we would encourage the council to be ambitious, to aim for step change in all the areas of the city’s emissions, rather than multiple incremental changes. Bristol has the lowest per capita carbon footprint in the core cities, and we should continue to be an example for other cities in terms of innovation and the pace of change.

There is a key role also for councillors, in passing on information in their wards, demonstrating that the goal of carbon neutrality and climate resilience by 2030 is a priority for all representatives from all parties, and supporting businesses to set meaningful targets and to reach them, showcasing success and putting pressure on under-performers.

The group has spent time learning about the state of the city’s and the council’s contribution towards carbon neutrality and climate resilience. We have considered three priority areas for reducing carbon emissions and communicating on both topics, but there is still a lot of ground to cover if we are to think about policy and action in all the areas where emissions are most significant.

The content of this report has been shared with and agreed by all members of the working group. The vast majority of the recommendations gained consensus support; Recommendation A2 was supported by a majority of but not by all members of the group (the minority view in relation to this recommendation is also included).

2. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Group held three ‘deep dive’ sessions covering:

- a. Data/strategic priorities and partnerships
- b. Energy efficiency/home retrofitting/skills and decarbonisation of the residential/civic space
- c. Communications/engagement

The recommendations from the Working Group are set out below.

A. Recommendations in relation to Governance – ‘looking ahead’:

1. Recommendation A1 - Ensure that the new Environment and Sustainability policy committee (to be established as part of the new committee system that will operate from May 2024) has clearly defined responsibility for climate policy and delivery.

It will be crucial to ensure that the new Environment and Sustainability policy committee has clearly defined responsibility for climate policy and delivery. Environment and sustainability need to be at the heart of decision-making by all future council committees and it will be important for the Environment and Sustainability Committee to interact with all other committees, as well as other bodies such as the One City Environment Board and the Advisory Committee on Climate Change in order to ensure a coordinated approach.

2. Recommendation A2 - Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to consider extending the mandate of the Climate Change Working Group to enable it to continue its role during 2023/24.

A majority of the group agreed a recommendation to ask the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to extend the mandate of this group to enable it to continue its role during 2023/24. If agreed, this will enable the group to maintain its role as a forum for preparation/discussion in advance of the new committee governance system coming into place. It is anticipated that the group could identify up to three further ‘deep dive’ topics for inquiry over an approx. 6 month period (likely to be July-December 2023), focused more specifically on hearing from external experts and a range of council services in addition to council climate team involvement. Possible topics could be selected from these options:

- Food
- Transport
- The built environment
- Climate finance and investment
- De-carbonising the work of public service providers
- The natural environment
- Consumption and waste

Achieving step change in the next few years is likely to require significant policy shifts in some areas so every effort should be made to focus on points of consensus and securing political ‘buy-in’. The four year city political/election cycle and new committee system will present an opportunity to build consensus on longer term actions/interventions. If the group continues its role into 2023/24, there will be an opportunity to start building that cross-party consensus on climate policy in advance of the formal changes in Council governance – this could include the involvement of/discussions with the Cabinet Member for Climate, Ecology, Waste and Energy.

Note: this was a recommendation supported by a **majority** of but not by all members of the group. A minority view expressed was that given the other priorities that will inevitably be faced during the year ahead in preparing the authority for the transition to the new committee governance system, it may be preferable to pause the group’s work at this point, on the basis that it may be difficult to secure officer, and in some cases councillor capacity to support the group’s continued activity over the next 12 months. The opportunity cost involved in the continued involvement of the Climate Change Team to support the group in continuing meetings was also noted.

B. Recommendations arising from Deep Dive 1 – Data/strategic priorities and Partnerships

Data/strategic priorities:

As part of the deep dive into this issue, key points taken into account by the group included:

- a. The UK has a statutory 2050 Net Zero commitment though is currently not on target to meet this.
- b. Bristol has achieved the biggest overall reduction in emissions and has the lowest per capita emissions of the Core Cities. However, public acceptance of the benefits of policies aimed at tackling climate change can take time, therefore it will be essential to engage widely and effectively with the public.
- c. Bristol is on a similar trajectory to other Core Cities in relation to the carbon neutrality challenge. Achieving Net Zero by 2050 requires a step change in activity, including shifting a large number of journeys to low carbon modes, huge investment in decarbonised heat networks, low-carbon heating technologies and insulation of properties. Achieving Net Zero by 2030 requires acceleration of action at an unprecedented scale, but also presents a huge opportunity which must be met by political boldness and careful prioritisation. For Bristol, it means delivering step changes in heating and powering key sectors, leapfrogging incremental improvements to aim directly for zero carbon.
- d. An analytical approach is essential; data and related analysis will be key to understanding policy choices, identifying/informing the development of key actions and in monitoring progress.
- e. The ClimateView model that has been developed should help assess impacts of interventions and inform decision making and prioritisation. The model's purpose is to inform (through transparency and accountability, and scenario modelling for different interventions) and assist engagement. The model can be used to inform and engage within the council and One City boards and some elements are designed to be made publicly available to inform and engage the public.
- f. Taking forward the 'Keep Bristol Cool' framework and management plan as identified in the One City Climate Strategy will be hugely important to the resilience aspect of the strategy.
- g. The success to date of the climate team in securing additional, external resources is recognised.

Recommendation B1 - The council's climate strategy and policy must continue to be data led and evidenced. The ClimateView model/tool should be a key element in supporting a data led approach as the model should help to guide work with the council's locus, assess impacts of interventions and decision making/prioritisation.

Recommendation B2 - Data/evidence should be used to enhance the council's ability to influence wider national government policy with regard to strategic climate outcomes.

Recommendation B3 - 'Net Zero' should be integrated as a key consideration in all council policies and projects in a way consistent with our approach to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. For example:

- 'climate impact' could be included as a required consideration in future committee reports;
- 'carbon assessment' could be integrated alongside future financial business cases for projects.

Recommendation B4 - The development of data dashboards linked to climate strategy should be progressed, to track performance against key metrics and to ensure transparency about the key gaps to be bridged - it will be important to be open about the scale of the major challenges. The council can lead this work, but it is recognised that this is a challenge also for partners and the city as a whole in that ClimateView is one of the few suitable ‘dashboards’ available and it is not currently possible to require city organisations to provide data. The approach could be linked in with the work to develop a City Climate Contract.

Partnerships:

As part of the deep dive into this issue, key points taken into account by the group included:

a. The council has made a public commitment to lead co-ordination of the One City Climate Strategy on behalf of the city. It takes a key role in encouraging action by partners and co-ordinating communications and engagement. There is a focus on how to encourage and empower others (i.e. non-council organisations) to set up and participate actively in this space.

b. Across public sector partners, there is evidenced leadership on climate change. A wide range of Bristol public bodies (the council, health, education, police, fire) have clear climate related commitments – the NHS/Integrated Care System has particularly strong local commitment, with local targets exceeding national targets.

c. Bristol has c.18,100 businesses – approximately 100 businesses have a declared climate goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. Some businesses have been able to take steps to decarbonise via grants awarded through phase 1 of the West of England Combined Authority’s green business grants programme. There is a need to encourage more businesses to go further and show leadership by decarbonising their own operations. Current initiatives supported by the council include the Climate Leaders peer group and the Climate Action Programme geared towards business. These are both run by Bristol Green Capital Partnership. The council is a co-sponsor of the Climate Leaders group alongside NatWest. There is strong energy in this space but more to be done.

d. To help raise ambition, a specific Bristol One City ‘Climate Ask’ of Bristol has been launched, which coincided with COP26. The ask of businesses/organisations is to:

- Declare an ambition to become Net Zero by 2030.
- Commit to developing a plan to reduce carbon emissions within 6 months.
- Start delivering on that plan within 12 months.
- Inspire other businesses by sharing stories.

This was accompanied by a business-to-business communications campaign to engage businesses and generate momentum. In some cases, businesses felt unable to commit to Net Zero by 2030 but had set internal targets.

e. Whilst there is much more to do in encouraging and realising a breadth of business participation in climate action, there are some encouraging ‘green shoots’ examples of sectors taking a lead, e.g. the Bristol brewing, law and accountancy sectors.

f. The Council has achieved a significant success in having Bristol (along with Glasgow) join the EU Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Missions. This mission involves supporting 112 cities to reach carbon neutrality by 2030, also with the aim of these cities acting as experimentation and innovation hubs. We recommend the city to produce a City Climate Contract which contains 3 sections - commitments,

action plan and investment plan. The work should be orchestrated by a Transition Team which the council is working to establish to take this exciting opportunity forward.

Recommendation B5 - It will be important for the council to continue to encourage co-ordination and collaborative approaches, e.g. recognising and building further from the work on heat decarbonisation being taken forward through City Leap and other collaborative arrangements that are already in place.

Recommendation B6 - The Council should continue to encourage partners to sign-up to collaborative action – the Group notes and fully supports the essential role that the Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Missions Transition Team will take in developing/co-ordinating further collaborative approaches with partners, including, for example, the city’s universities, the West of England Combined Authority and the private sector utilities. This should also be done in coordination with Bristol City Leap and other council projects such as the Net Zero Investment Co-innovation Lab (due to start in summer 2023 funded by Horizon Europe).

Recommendation B7 - The work already done in engaging businesses in climate action, building on the Bristol One City ‘Climate Ask’ is recognised. However, there is much more to be done in incentivising businesses and securing further positive climate responses and commitments. The Council must set expectations around minimum standards that all organisations/businesses should be encouraged to achieve, for example, actions to reduce carbon emissions. It is recognised that such standards/expectations should be proportionate and may involve a series of steps to be taken over time, mindful of the capacity of individual businesses. There is a role for leadership via council procurement demonstrating to partners what the council does and therefore expects from partners. There is a role also for councillors more generally in supporting businesses to set meaningful targets and to reach them, showcasing success and putting pressure on under-performers. It is recognised that the council’s resources for this are limited and that external funding will be needed to achieve the scale of activities necessary.

C. Recommendations arising from Deep Dive 2 - Energy efficiency/home retrofitting/skills/ decarbonisation of the residential/civic space

As part of the deep dive into these issues, key points taken into account by the group included:

a. It was recognised that the strategy for decarbonising residential buildings must be communicated effectively to the city’s residents, including property owners/private landlords and tenants. Property owners need the right information to make informed choices on the best options available depending on property type and in particular about whether a heat pump or alternative approach is the most appropriate option; it is also important to be aware of social justice considerations and the need for a fair transition, mindful of those, for example, on low to middle incomes; and to address barriers.

b. It was recognised that Bristol has taken many positive steps in facilitating/encouraging the decarbonisation of residential buildings but this is not something that the council alone can achieve.

c. Bristol City Leap will have a key focus on supporting the decarbonisation of the council’s social housing estate. It is anticipated that capacity and supply chains will be developed to feed into wider city initiatives over time.

d. All possible opportunities should be explored through landlord regulation to encourage improved energy efficiency across the private rented homes sector.

e. There are issues around the quality of construction of some new build housing. In the private sector, good quality eco-housing design is not necessarily always followed through by contractors in terms of the construction and quality of finish of properties. This is an industry-wide quality assurance/employment standard issue – the Council can set a standard/example through work carried out on Council owned properties/land.

Recommendation C1 - Residents need further/improved access to information about the options available for decarbonising their homes and about finance options, recognising that these can be barriers to individuals taking action.

Recommendation C2 - It is important to recognise the range of audiences that need to be reached, e.g. private homeowners, private landlords. Communicating positive stories based on lived experiences (e.g. from the Westbury-on-Trym heat pump pilot project) will be important in helping to break down barriers.

Recommendation C3 - The general approach being taken by the council on heat decarbonisation is supported. It will also be important though to go beyond the current approach, e.g. by trying to attract innovative finance mechanisms/options to assist homeowners in making choices. This will also apply in relation to the council's own estate, recognising that whilst the council has the long-term aspiration to decarbonise its housing stock, the Housing Revenue Account does not have the necessary funds currently to achieve this. The Group strongly urges that all possible emphasis be placed on taking forward the decarbonisation of the council's housing estate and exploring new financial mechanisms to enable this. It is noted, however that this will likely require additional officer resource, especially in light of the transfer of a key team to the Bristol City Leap joint venture taking with them experience and resource associated with funding bid writing for decarbonisation work in social housing and the council estate. The importance of ensuring certain skills and training provision to support decarbonisation in the wider city should also be an important consideration to enable a sufficient supply chain to implement decarbonisation work.

Recommendation C4 - It will be important to pursue all available innovation opportunities such as the 'Pathfinder Places Bristol Mission Net Zero' work (funded by Innovate UK) - this may lead to further options around scale-up and levels of collaboration.

Recommendation C5 - A review should be carried out to ensure that all possible opportunities are being taken through landlord regulation and advice to landlords to encourage improved energy efficiency and climate-related environmental improvements across the private rented homes sector.

Recommendation C6 - The Group recognises and supports the policies included in the draft Bristol Local Plan around Net Zero and climate, and biodiversity and nature recovery. The Group also recommends that further work is needed:

- in terms of new build eco-housing, to work towards an outcome whereby contractors have a minimum number of employees qualified in green construction skills (mindful that a number of developments have not been built to the standards in respect of which consent has been granted).

- to investigate what action can be taken to ensure new build developments meet the eco/environmental standards set through planning consent, and with an eye on the future sustainability standards which will be more rigorous than they have been.
- to investigate requirements in terms of contractor green skills levels that could be applied in respect of developments taking place on council-owned land.

D. Recommendations arising from Deep Dive 3 - Communications / engagement

As part of the deep dive into this issue, a key point taken into account by the group is that the Council has made a public commitment to lead climate engagement, culture and inclusion on behalf of the city. This enabling condition is to help achieve all objectives set out in the One City Climate Strategy.

Through this deep dive, the current community-led and business engagement initiatives were reviewed in detail. It was recognised that it can take time for public acceptance of the benefits that can be brought through policy/initiatives that require behaviour change, and that effective communications are critical to this. It is also critical to engage widely and effectively with the public/communities to emphasise the multiple benefits that change could enable.

Recommendation D1 - The current community-led and business engagement initiatives are strongly supported and must be maintained/enhanced. In particular, Community Climate Action plans (such as those developed by the Climate Action Programme led by Bristol Green Capital Partnership) should continue to be developed and grown across all areas of the city with whatever support they need.

Recommendation D2 - Options should be examined to maximise how local groups can be supported. Some initial community actions will be very specific and less impactful (e.g. litter picking initiatives) but may be capable of further development to take more substantial (climate-related) action if supported by an element of low-level funding/micro-grants or community development support or if the action demonstrated is influential, for example, where the actor has a significant following in the community. Through amplifying the communications and activities of groups, examples of good practice may be shared more widely.

Recommendation D3 - In highlighting community actions, it is also critical to communicate clearly how they are making an impact on carbon emissions and climate.

Recommendation D4 - It is recognised that a significant amount of the communications activity around climate is currently sourced from within the Climate Change Team and could have more impact if supported by adequate communications professional resources. Consideration should be given to ensuring there is appropriate investment/capacity from the council in climate-related communications activity. A large-scale communications campaign possibly with public and private sector partners should be considered.

Recommendation D5 - It is particularly important to encourage

- engagement with schools, and children and young people to help them feel empowered to engage with climate change
- the investigation of concerns about engaging children with climate change leading to climate anxiety; and exploring ways to educate children effectively without increasing climate anxiety.

- Innovative initiatives - e.g. tree planting to provide summer shading.

Recommendation D6 - Through communications and engagement, the opportunity should be taken to highlight the 'suite' of different levels of climate activity needed – e.g. actions that individuals and households can take; actions that can be taken at the neighbourhood and community level; actions for business; and the actions that the council and the West of England Combined Authority can/are taking. In terms of communications, some 'blanket' messaging will be needed, with more tailored, specific messages for different audiences (drawing on the Britain Talks Climate work by Climate Outreach). The council should seek to work on this in an integrated way across teams. For example, Community Development teams and processes may be able to contribute as part of their role and this should also be supported via the work of Bristol Green Capital Partnership. Different areas of the city and communities will need tailored messages to encourage local climate action.

Recommendation D7 - It will be important to be flexible and supportive in engaging with businesses. Some SMEs, for example, may not have the capacity to engage directly in specific climate actions but might be willing to engage in 'practical offsetting' by making a financial contribution to support action taking place locally but outside of their core business activity.

Councillor Katy Grant
Chair, Climate Change Working Group
June 2023