

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	COUNCIL		
DATE:	22 MARCH 2022		
TITLE:	PROPOSAL FOR READING BOROUGH COUNCIL TO JOIN THE GLOBAL COVENANT OF MAYORS FOR ENERGY AND CLIMATE		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	CLIMATE CHANGE & SUSTAINABILITY	WARDS:	ALL
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Global Covenant of Mayors for Energy and Climate (GCoM) is the largest global alliance for city climate leadership, built upon the commitment of over 11,500 cities and local governments around the world. These cities, drawn from 6 continents and 142 countries, collectively represent more than 1 billion people and are united by a shared long-term vision to support voluntary action to combat climate change. The stated mission of GCoM is as follows:

'We envision a world where committed mayors and local governments - in alliance with partners - accelerate, ambitious, measurable climate and energy initiatives that lead to a low-emission and climate-resilient future'.

- 1.2 This report proposes that Reading Borough Council join GCoM as a further expression of its commitment to ambitious climate action, and to access the practical benefits associated with joining. Joining GCoM requires a letter of commitment (attached at Appendix 1) to be 'signed by an appropriately mandated official according to local governmental procedure'.
- 1.3 Appendix 1: letter of commitment to the Global Covenant of Mayors on Energy and Climate Change.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council:

- 2.1.1 Note the achievements of the Council and its partners in the Reading Climate Change Partnership in taking forward successive climate change strategies for Reading as summarised in 3.5-3.6;
- 2.1.2 Join the Global Covenant of Mayors for Energy and Climate and delegate authority to the Leader of the Council to sign the letter of commitment (attached at Appendix 1) enabling the Council to do so.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In 2008, following the adoption of the UK Climate Change Act 2008, the Council launched its first climate change strategy, '*Stepping Forward for Climate Change*'. A key commitment within this was to reduce the Council's carbon footprint by 50% by 2020. This target, and an action plan for its delivery, were later included in successive iterations of the Council's corporate Carbon Plan, and the 50% reduction target was ultimately delivered three years early.
- 3.2 Government has more recently committed to a national target of 'net zero carbon' by 2050, having updated the Climate Change Act to aim for a 100% reduction in emissions compared to the 1990 baseline. In December 2020 the Committee on Climate Change, established to advise the Government on how to meet its carbon reduction targets, published the sixth UK carbon budget report setting the country on a path to achieve a 68% reduction in emissions by 2030 (and 78% by 2035).
- 3.3 Prior to the adoption of the national 'net zero by 2050' target, Reading Borough Council had declared a climate emergency at its meeting in February 2019, committing to the more ambitious aim of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030. In November 2020, the Council subsequently endorsed the new Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 (prepared by the Reading Climate Change Partnership) based on the headline objective of 'a net zero, resilient Reading by 2030'. At the same time the Council adopted a new Corporate Carbon Plan for the period 2020-25, including a more ambitious target to reduce the Council's own emissions by 85% by 2025 *en route* to becoming a net zero organisation by 2030.
- 3.4 As part of its commitment to transparency, in 2021 the Council submitted details of its climate change action programme for assessment by the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), an international NGO whose reporting system is regarded as 'the gold standard' in environmental reporting and transparency. Part of the feedback from CDP following the assessment process was that the Council should consider joining GCoM. The implications of doing so are set out in this report, concluding with a recommendation that the Council now join GCoM by signing the necessary letter of commitment.

Climate action and achievements in Reading to date

- 3.5 Reading has a long track record of taking action on climate change, with the Council having been an early signatory to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change in 2006. Since 2007 the Council has worked with partners in the Reading Climate Change Partnership to take this forward. The Partnership's previous Climate Change Strategy, *Reading Means Business on Climate Change 2013-20*, set a target of a 34% reduction in Borough emissions by 2020, which was achieved several years early.
- 3.6 More recent climate action and achievements by the Council, residents and other partners include the following:
- Reading Borough Council was named in 2021 as one of only 11 UK local authorities, and one of just 95 across the world to make CDP's coveted 'A' list on climate action - an accolade awarded for bold climate leadership (source: CDP)
 - As a result of action set out in consecutive corporate Carbon Plans, Reading Borough Council has cut its carbon footprint by 69.8% since 2008/09 (source: RBC).
 - Reading borough's overall carbon footprint has fallen by 49% since 2005 - the 5th largest reduction of 379 UK local authority areas (source: National Statistics)
 - The Council's continued support for Reading Buses and investment in bus priority measures have seen Reading buck national (pre-pandemic) trends for bus use, with ridership per head in 2019/20 second only to Brighton & Hove (source: DfT).
 - In November 2021 the Council launched the first fully electric waste collection vehicle in Berkshire making collections from 1,400 houses daily and driving 8,000

miles a year with no tailpipe emissions - saving 32,200kg of greenhouse gas emissions annually compared to a diesel equivalent (source: RBC).

- The EV refuse truck will be the first of many as part of our vehicle replacement programme which should see virtually the entire Council fleet electrified by 2028.
- Reading's recycling rate increased from 32% up to 52% between April 2020 and April 2021 thanks to the introduction of food waste collections (Source: RBC)
- Reading Borough Council's own housing has achieved an average Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'C' compared to the national average of 'D', with plans to invest an additional £34m over the next 5 years in measures which will further improve energy efficiency (Source: RBC)
- The Council's 'Zero Carbon Homes' Local Plan policy, adopted in 2019, was identified by the environmental campaign groups Friends of the Earth and Ashden as a best practice case study in local authority climate action in March 2022
- In February 2022 Reading was ranked equal second most 'cycle-friendly city' in the UK based on an assessment of distance of mapped cycle ways versus total road distance, total number of cycle routes and number of road accidents involving cyclists per head of population (source: COLAS)
- A number of 'nature-based climate solutions' have been deployed in Reading: the Trees for Reading scheme has been launched, 're-wilding' trials in greenspaces have been extended across the town; and 'living' bus shelters have been installed on the A33, opposite Kennet Island and at Christchurch Green, helping to absorb traffic fumes and rainwater.
- Community-led action to promote 'plastic-free' initiatives has been taken forward such as Refill Reading, with Caversham working towards Plastic Free Community accreditation.
- The Reading Hydro scheme opened in September 2021 - driven forward by the volunteer-led Reading Hydro Community Benefit Society, the scheme harnesses the power of the Thames saving approximately 5,600 tonnes of CO2 over its 40-year design life (source: Reading Hydro).

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position: RBC is not currently a signatory to GCoM. Following Reading's addition to the international 'A' list of cities taking 'bold climate action'), CDP encouraged the Council to consider joining GCoM. CDP advised that by virtue of our 'A' list status we would already be delivering on the obligations associated with joining GCoM, but joining would represent an additional sign of our commitment and give us access to the benefits of being part of the wider GCoM network.

4.2 Options Proposed: it is proposed that Reading Borough Council join GCoM as we are already meeting the obligations associated with joining, but would additionally gain from the benefits of membership.

4.3 Signing the GCoM letter of commitment obliges signatories to:

- **Commit** to setting ambitious carbon reduction targets at least as ambitious as our national goals: Reading is already working towards net zero by 2030, compared to the UK target of net zero by 2050.
- **Engage** citizens, business and governments at all levels in implementation: Reading is already doing so through the multi-agency, cross-sector Reading Climate Change Partnership and has plans to extend engagement in 2022 and beyond.
- **Act** now to develop, implement and report on progress: Reading is already doing so via its Climate Emergency Strategy, annual progress reporting including via the CDP platform.

- **Network** with fellow local authorities and leaders to support each other: Reading is already doing so via various local government forums in the UK and beyond.

4.4 GCoM defines additional specific obligations as follows, alongside a summary of how Reading is currently meeting these obligations:

- ‘Develop a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory’: we already have this in the form of the Borough carbon footprint data and calculations on which the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy is based, and we report on these annually via SEPT Committee and via the CDP platform, which is one of the official reporting platforms recognised by GCoM.
- ‘Assess climate risks and vulnerabilities of your city’: we have already done this in the form of the Reading Climate Adaptation Plan produced by the Reading Climate Change Partnership in 2020, which informed development of the Climate Emergency Strategy and is now being reflected in our corporate risk management framework.
- ‘Define ambitious climate mitigation, resilience and energy targets’: we have already set this out in the form of our Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and corporate Carbon Plan.
- ‘Create full climate action plans’: the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy includes detailed action plans for key themes.

4.5 GCoM defines the benefits as joining as follows:

- ‘Cooperation Through City Networks & Regional Covenants: GCoM serves cities and local governments by mobilizing and supporting ambitious, measurable, and planned climate and energy action in their communities by working with city/regional networks, national governments, and other partners to achieve our vision’
- ‘Guidance & Practical Support: GCoM ensures that signatories are continuously supported in their efforts. Cities receive step-by-step guidance and have access to tools, materials, and a dedicated regional/national helpdesk’
- ‘Better Financial Opportunities: GCoM works to provide value to participating cities by mobilizing the critical financing and technical assistance cities require to access investment’
- ‘Visibility & Recognition: GCoM seeks to amplify the visibility of signatory commitments and actions in the region and globally’
- ‘Encouragement & Inspiration: GCoM helps cities maintain a long-term vision on climate action through collective ambition and achievement.’

4.6 In view of these benefits, the recommendation is for Reading Borough Council to join GCoM at the earliest opportunity.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 Joining GCoM would support the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- **Healthy environment:** joining the Global Covenant of Mayors will support the Council’s commitments to tackle climate change and work towards our goal of a net zero carbon town and Council by 2030.

5.2 Joining GCoM also aligns with TEAM Reading values as follows:

- **Together** - joining GCoM promotes working together with other local authorities
- **Efficiency** - climate action promotes efficient use of resources (energy/carbon)
- **Ambitious** - joining GCoM underlines our ambition to take bold climate action
- **Make a Difference** - joining GCoM supports our commitment to making a difference by tackling one of the greatest global and local challenges we face.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a climate emergency at its meeting in February 2019 (minute 48 refers). This commits to the ambitious goal of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030. Joining the Global Covenant of Mayors as proposed does not have any material environmental or climate implications in and of itself, though it does reiterate the Council's commitments to ambitious climate action, and would provide benefits (recognition, resources and networking opportunities) to help take these forward.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or 'involving in another way'. While there is no requirement to consult on the subject of this report, related initiatives, such as the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy, have been the subject of extensive public consultation and engagement prior to publication in November 2020. We will also promote our signature of the Covenant to raise awareness and promote engagement in climate action as one of the obligations of joining.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 This decision will not have a differential impact on any group with protected characteristics. As such an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required. That said, joining GCoM commits the Council to be mindful of 'fairness and inclusiveness' in the action it takes to address climate change, which aligns with our existing commitment as set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy to pursue a 'just transition' to net zero.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no legal implications arising from this decision.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no financial implications arising from the decision and there are no costs associated with joining the Global Covenant of Mayors.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 There are none.