

Bristol deputy mayor says inflation 'real risk' to green business goals

Bristol's deputy mayor has said there is a "real risk" increased economic strains could mean businesses make pivoting to greener operations less of a priority.

Cllr Craig Cheney revealed only about 100 firms out of 18,000 operating in the city had signed up to a Bristol City Council climate change initiative launched in October.

The Bristol One City Climate Change Ask called on organisations to commit to net zero carbon emissions by 2030 and make an action plan to achieve it.

Cllr Cheney acknowledged the target was a "very difficult" one for small businesses, with the latest inflation figures showing producer input price inflation at a record high of 18.6%.

"It's a real risk, but at this moment in time with rising energy prices it's actually in [businesses'] interest to drive down their energy usage and so tackling windows, leakage from your building, reducing your energy usage overall is only going to be beneficial to a business too. I think there is an opportunity there too as well as a risk."

Bristol became the first UK city to declare a climate emergency in 2018, while the city is also set to introduce a [clean air zone](#) this year in a bid to curb air traffic pollution in the city centre.

Cllr Cheney said: "There's a lot of fear if you're a small business owner when you see these big phrases like 'climate emergencies', and actually how do you deliver the few, small

tangible steps in your business that can make a massive difference that you didn't realise.

"If you've got a building there are probably things you could be doing to help tackle the climate emergency. But knowing it and understanding how to do it and understanding where to find the right paperwork and the right advice and information is not so easy.

"It's something we have been working on as a council. If we can get the big businesses in the region involved it would be really helpful."

The council's cabinet member for finance and culture was speaking at a round table event which saw representatives of smaller businesses in Bristol discuss work they have done to cut their carbon footprint.

Brewery Wiper and True; vertical farming company Lettus Grow; architect Stride Treglown; consultancy Archus UK; and data firm Sustain IT joined Natwest's head of climate change James Close at the meeting in City Hall.

Mr Close said the bank was looking to continue to offer its support to businesses in the area to help them gain access to the capital needed for them to move towards more sustainable operations.

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He said: “We really empathise with the situation that many of our customers find themselves in. We’re doing what we can to help deal with the cost of living crisis and the increase of input costs.

“We do have an opportunity here to pivot away from these high input costs to lower input costs. That’s where this an opportunity for some real ingenuity and innovation.

“The great thing about business is they are able to look at these problems through a solution mindset. What we want to do is make sure they have the tools to enable them to do that from a low carbon perspective and tell the story of how they are advancing that so others can follow.”

Mr Close added Bristol and its business community’s green agenda had “real momentum” and was recognised “across the climate community both in the UK and internationally

“There are clearly some great peer exchange networks [in Bristol],” he said. “The climate leaders here today have been really positive about what they’re doing and how they can help each other. The whole green branding of Bristol creates a pull for these kinds of things.

“I think [sustainable operations] can be a sort of competitive advantage in terms of your cost base and customer acquisition. In a city like Bristol which as got such a large graduate

population, you've got a lot of people who really want to engage in this agenda. They feel as though they want to be part of the solution and they want to have their businesses on their side and their bank on their side as well, which is part of the reason why we are doing this work and not just with our business customers but our retail customers as well."

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Cllr Cheney said organisations like NatWest could "lever in capacity and support" for more organisations in Bristol looking to become more environmentally friendly.

The deputy mayor reiterated concerns that attracting this kind of support for businesses and the city's environmental agenda could become harder following [Bristol's vote to ditch its mayoral system](#) in favour of a committee system.

He said: "I think big, national or international organisations like to have a person they know they can speak to, who will still be there in six months' time. That will be very difficult with the committee system where those chairs might change regularly or where it's unclear where that single point of contact really is.

"There are benefits too, we just need to work through how the new system will look like and quite how that will join together is still to be confirmed."

Factions of those who campaigned in favour of changing the way Bristol City Council is run argued West of England's Metro Mayor Dan Norris could step into the breach and work to attract big organisations and investment.

Cllr Cheney said: "I guess the risk for Bristol is, who that might be in the future? Will they be driving a rural or a city agenda? What does that mean for climate change and are Bristol's priorities getting diluted in that?"

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