

ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

6 AUGUST 2019

Climate Change and Public Engagement

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Luke Taylor, Environment
Responsible Officer: Lisa Lewis, Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement

Reason for Report: To consider how best to facilitate increased public engagement in the climate change public policy agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS: To note the report.

Financial Implications: None arising. Implications will arise as a result of any future decision on actions/interventions.

Legal Implications: None. Implications will arise as a result of any future decision on actions/interventions.

Risk Assessment: No risk assessment has been undertaken, although clearly the wider risk of not taking action on matters of climate change, both resilience and adaptation, are significant.

Equality Impact Assessment: Any public events being initiated or hosted by the council will need to consider equality of access to venues as well as the impacts on equality of inclusion.

Impact on Climate Change: This report considers how to facilitate greater public involvement to influence and secure changes in public policy that reduce CO2 emissions.

1.0 Background

1.1 In the context of the emerging climate change activity, Members of the Environment PDG requested that officers produce a report on achieving public participation.

2.0 Context

2.1 The council has signed up to the Devon-wide declaration on climate change, which seeks to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. However, members passed an amendment that sought to achieve this earlier (by 2030) if at all possible.

2.4 This is an area of public policy that is of interest to a significant number of people and, most importantly, is an area in which any public policy decisions are likely to impact significantly on the lives and behaviours of everyone. As such, it is considered that public participation in the emerging public policy

debate is essential to give legitimacy as well as a sense of inclusion beyond the usual democratically-representative roles of elected members.

3.0 Workstreams

3.1 Members should refer to the update report to the Environment PDG also being presented on 06/08/19 (section 3) which outlines the two processes that are now in motion. However, in brief, these are a project to baseline the council's own CO2 emissions so that it can discuss and agree a future action plan to reduce these; and a wider 'area' project that is seeking to reduce CO2 emissions across the whole of Devon – specifically seeking to produce a Devon Carbon Plan. This latter project is being led by Devon County Council.

4.0 Public Participation and Options

4.1 It is important to note that each workstream will have its own approach to public participation. For the council's own emissions action plan it may well be appropriate to consult widely with service users, council tenants and residents more widely if the emerging action plan proposes significant service changes. However, this will most likely take the form of 'standard' consultation to inform what the council as an organisation is doing in terms of leading by example on reducing emissions.

4.2 The Devon project being overseen by the Devon Climate Emergency Resilience Group (DCERG) is in the process of setting up a far more wide-ranging and comprehensive process that will include an expert panel – the Net Zero Task Force (made up of genuine experts from industry and academia) and also includes a proposal for a Citizen's Assembly to ensure public sentiment/input is captured.

4.3 At the point of drafting this report, members of the Task Force had not yet been announced. However, it is likely that details will shortly emerge related to the expert panel, how they will hear evidence, and how they will seek to advise DCERG and its members (which includes the council) – ultimately being tasked with publishing the Devon Carbon Plan. Clearly, there will be a means for the public to input to this process, but the details are still emerging.

4.4 The same is true for the Citizen's Assembly; this is currently in the process of being initiated, but the details of how people will be invited to participate is not yet fully-formed. There will be a need for this to be a valid process from a social research perspective, so this will mean things like representative sampling and the approach to selecting participants will need to be academically robust – it cannot (and will not) just be a self-selecting forum of the willing.

4.5 The Assembly will have the opportunity to develop informed opinions and collectively discuss and review policy recommendations on decarbonising Devon.

4.6 The DCERG and the University of Exeter are committed to working together to ensure that the Assembly is delivered according to best practice, building

upon the latest expert knowledge and research. This will ensure the Assembly operates on a legitimate and credible basis.

4.7 The Assembly will comprise a representative sample of Devon's citizens from different social backgrounds, including young people, who will be paid for their involvement. The process governing how the Assembly's membership will be selected has yet to be agreed.

4.8 The council will have a role in communicating this approach once finalised, and signposting people to the work that is being done and the appropriate way for people to contribute, but it will not be running these processes directly.

5.0 **Local Involvement**

5.1 It is assumed that members have sought advice based on what could be done *additionally* at local level to facilitate public debate in a manner that doesn't undermine the official Devon methodology, but which seeks to provide enhanced opportunities for local involvement.

5.2 To that end, members could facilitate workshops out in their wards, could seek views through Parish and Town council arrangements, or could host discussion events at Phoenix House or at a number of locations across the district.

5.3 The council is not in a position to replicate/duplicate an additional public assembly, however officers would of course be able to provide support if members wish to host either targeted or general access fora across the district to try and enable greater public policy debate.

5.4 Such fora would be an ideal opportunity to test with residents how far they are willing to change behaviour to help reduce emissions. The recent 'Net Zero' Climate Change Committee report states that if we are targeting net zero then 38% of the required reductions in emissions can be achieved (just) by deploying all the known technological solutions. The next 53% require a combination of technology and behaviour change, and the final 9% is largely behaviour change (where we will simply have to stop doing things that we currently do today).

5.5 As members will recall from the brief discussion at the council meeting that considered the declaration; a recognition that 'people' should be flying less often, doesn't mean that an individual is prepared to not take a foreign holiday. A recognition that 'people' should be eating less meat, does not mean that individuals are prepared to adjust their dietary consumption. And a recognition that 'people' should be driving less, does not mean that individuals are prepared to give up the freedom that a car brings (particularly in rural Devon). Testing this through discussion and debate may provide useful feedback to future council policy and decision making.

5.6 It is recommended that the council actively participates in, and promotes, the work being undertaken via the Devon Climate Emergency Resilience Group to facilitate the production of the Devon Carbon Plan, and that members consider how they may best facilitate additional local community engagement

to capture the views of Mid Devon's residents and businesses and use this to shape/inform future council policy discussion and decisions.

Contact for more information: Lisa Lewis, Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement

List of Background Papers:

All related information can be found at:

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/energyandclimatechange/>

Net Zero - The UK's Contribution to Stopping Global Warming, May 2019:

<https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming/>