

## **Report of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Climate Change Standing Overview Group of 28 June 2023**

### **1. Introduction**

The Standing Overview Group of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee meets regularly as an informal information sharing and member development session where issues are presented to the councillors to raise awareness and increase knowledge. The Standing Overview Group considers key updates and pertinent issues from across different services, with the aim of developing Members' knowledge, and bringing to the forefront any areas which may benefit from further scrutiny.

Any action points arising from the sessions are reported back to the next formal Committee meeting.

This report outlines the topic(s) covered at the meeting of 28 June 2023, highlights the key points raised during discussion and details any agreed actions.

### **2. Recommendation(s)**

The Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee accepts this report as an accurate record of the meeting and makes the following recommendations to Cabinet, namely that:

- (a) Cabinet writes to Government to request more robust controls that developers must adhere to under the Future Homes Standard, in relation to the climate including: making solar panels mandatory for new builds on buildings which it is possible and appropriate to do so; and ensuring that new builds are required to put measures in place to reduce water usage below the Building Regulations Part G Optional Requirement of 110 litres per person per day. This would be to reduce the need for new, strategic energy and water infrastructure;
- (b) Cabinet writes to Government and to South West Water asking them to commit to working together to maintain existing infrastructure (particularly applying greater efforts for leakage reduction) before developing new water storage infrastructure and to prioritise these above the energy-intensive process of desalination;
- (c) Cabinet encourages organisations responsible for strategic infrastructure to prioritise collaboration between one another to ensure that management decisions will not negatively affect the integrity or maintenance requirements of nearby or related infrastructure. This would be to ensure the implications of any such decision do not negatively impact community resilience to climate change, and that such decisions are taken in line with the Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Climate Adaption Strategy.

### **3. Attendance**

Councillors: A Dewhirst (Chair), P Bullivant (Vice Chair), C Slade, J Brook, J Trail BEM, and M Squires.

Cabinet Member: Andrea Davis (Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport)

Officers: Doug Eltham (Environment and Sustainability Policy Officer)

Scrutiny Officer: Fred Whitehouse

### **4. Summary of Discussion**

#### **Draft Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Climate Adaptation Strategy**

Prior to the meeting, details of the draft adaptation strategy were made available to Members at [Adaptation Strategy – Climate Resilient Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly \(climateresilient-dcios.org.uk\)](https://climateresilient-dcios.org.uk). The Executive Summary, Quick Read Version and Full Version were all available to look at.

The Adaptation Strategy entails three sections. There are the Risk Assessment (what are the climate risks to the area), the Adaptation Plan (what needs to happen to adapt to these risks), and the Action Plan (more short term, namely five-year, priorities, some sector- and company-specific).

The strategy considers five sectors: Natural Environment; Infrastructure; Health and the built environment; Cross-cutting; and Business and Industry. These broadly correspond with those highlighted in the UK's national climate risk assessment.

#### **Risks to the Area**

Devon and Cornwall are at particular risk of flooding, both from river and surface water and also within coastal areas. In the area, many communities are located at the bottom of steeply sided valleys and/or near river channels. These communities are at significant risk of flooding following heavy rain fall.

The area is also at risk of experiencing more intense and more frequent storms; the former has already been observed - with storms approaching via the Atlantic carrying more water due to the temperature of the ocean rising enabling more evaporation. The increased frequency has not been presently observed but is predicted.

The impacts of climate change pose serious risks to the capacity of the natural environment to maintain the services it provides – such as pollination, food production, filtering water, cleaning air and storing carbon. The destruction of the natural environment also contributes to climate change – for example, peatlands emit methane when they dry out which is highly damaging to the environment, more so than CO<sub>2</sub>.

Warmer weather conditions are also likely to increase the prevalence of certain diseases that survive better in such conditions; and also some that are transmitted via particular insects which also thrive better in such conditions, such as mosquitoes which are predicted to become increasingly common in the South of England as temperatures increase towards 2050.

Of note was the likelihood of increased ‘cascading’ events – namely events with more far-reaching impacts than the initial, for instance, flooding of an area. The example was given of a power station – if flooded, the power outage could have a serious effect on a geographical area wider than that actually touched by the flood.

Overall, 62 broad impacts are covered in the report.

### Adaptation – what needs to happen?

The strategy includes a number of Strategic Directions (objectives) that have been developed which outline how the region can create the enabling conditions and capacity for everyone to adapt to climate change together. The majority of these objectives are at the Policy/Regulator- and Organisational-level, with some Community- and Individual-level directions also included.

Many are about how a group or organisation can improve ‘adaptive capacity’ to climate events, essentially meaning improving resilience to such events. For instance, a community that is at risk of flooding is deemed to have a higher ‘adaptive capacity’ if it has been fitted with flood gates and robust, associated plans in the face of a flood, versus a community which does not have such plans and infrastructure in place.

Sensitivity to such events is also important; contained within this is developing better intelligence systems that warn the region of incoming or likely climate events – namely, building up institutional intelligence so that warnings can be issued appropriately.

### Priority actions

The Action Plan identifies priority impacts and actions for 2023-2027, for regional collaboration. These are primarily aimed at policymakers, regional and local government and associated bodies; and for organisations, NGOs, businesses, infrastructure operators, charities and trusts. However some proposals for community groups and local hubs are also included.

Of the actions, some are company specific; for instance, those around water would naturally fall to South West Water to act on and develop.

### Next steps

The strategy in its current draft form is going to Devon County Council's Cabinet, with the intention of demonstrating the authority's support of the strategy.

The Standing Overview Group was welcomed to make comments that could be incorporated into the next version of the strategy. It is intended to have a finalised version by Autumn 2023, with all partnership organisations then invited to endorse it and align their resources to help deliver it.

### **Member discussion**

Water was a particular area of member discussion, particularly the risk of future shortages as climate change continues and the need to ensure reduced consumption across the board, including on an individual level. The Standing Overview Group felt that given the current issue of water scarcity, Government was not doing enough to ensure that resilience was built up in this area and that the scope of the Future Homes Standard should be expanded to include water targets to ensure new homes are providing communities and individuals with the necessary home infrastructure to reduce water consumption. It was expressed that, with the Future Homes Standard effectively reducing the powers of Local Authorities to impact building standards locally, then more robust national controls of the sector were required. In particular, Members stressed the importance of dropping water usage below the 110 litres per person per day Optional Requirement in Part G of the Building Regulations and requiring new houses to be built with this in mind, incorporating, for instance, water storage systems and spray fittings on taps. The Members also viewed that solar panels should be mandated for all new builds to reduce the need for new strategic-scale energy infrastructure. The Standing Overview Group's concerns are reflected in recommendation (a) to this report.

Members were also disappointed to hear from officers that South West Water's Water Resource Management Plan, which was out for consultation at the time of this meeting, considers desalination for mainland Devon and Cornwall ahead of developing new reservoir capacity in parts of the region. The Standing Overview Group felt that desalination should not be a priority in relation to water scarcity above and beyond developing further storage capacity – and that, as an incredibly energy-heavy process, it poses its own problems, and reduces resilience should a power failure occur at a time of high water demand. Their concerns are reflected in recommendation (b) to this report.

Councillors also raised concerns around the lack of collaboration between organisations that have responsibility for infrastructure across the region, and the potential ramifications of this lack of collaboration. The example of Dawlish Warren was brought up, with a recent consultation proposing removal of existing coastal defences; Members were concerned that this had not taken into consideration the wider potential impact on other adjacent communities, including on railway infrastructure. These concerns are reflected in recommendation (c).

Problems of sewage, well reported in national media, were also raised; in particular the heightened risk of flooding of a sewage system in response to climate change.

Specifically related to amending the policy, Members proposed that the strategy be altered to incorporate more explicit connection between Devon priorities, and development of strategies, and work being done nationally (for instance, that although South West Water is the water provider for the region, it is involved in national climate response that is not being headed by Devon). Officers agreed that this would be incorporated.

Members also expressed interest in having a future scrutiny session on flood management.

Councillor A Dewhirst  
Chair, Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee

Electoral Divisions: All

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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

Nil

The meeting began at 2.33pm and ended at 3.38pm.