

Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee

Climate Change Standing Overview Group

2:30pm, 9th March 2021

Virtual Meeting on Teams

Notes from the session

Membership – all Members of CIRS Committee

Present
Councillors A Dewhurst (Chair), P Colthorpe (Vice-Chair), Y Atkinson, J Berry, J Hodgson, J Hook, C Slade and C Whitton.

Initial Summary of the Consultation on the Interim Devon Carbon Plan by Doug Eltham

Members were provided with a report and presentation that highlighted numerous outcomes from the public consultation on the Interim Devon Carbon Plan, which ran from December 2020 to February 2021. The main purpose of the consultation was to gather public feedback and opinion on the Interim Devon Carbon Plan.

The report covered a large part of the process including: the measures taken to raise public awareness of the consultation, including various forms of marketing through parish and town councils, schools, and social media; the form that feedback took, including the holding of 9 public webinars and the distribution of two questionnaires (one short and one long); the level of overall support for the plan; and, looking forwards, examining points of discussion for the Citizens' Assembly to take place in July 2021.

Some of the key points of the presentation included:

- The difficulties in involving young people in the consultation, despite targeted social media advertising.
- 76% of respondents 'broadly support the plan,' with 18% supporting some parts of the plan but not others, and 6% not supporting the plan. Of those that did not support the plan, a large number expressed disbelief in the reality of climate change.
- There is a roughly equal split in the issues, signposted by the Interim Devon Carbon Plan, that people would prioritise for the upcoming Citizens' Assembly.
- 51% of respondents support net-zero by 2030; comments provided alongside these responses acknowledge the difficulty of achieving net-zero.

Overall, it was highlighted that, upon initial analysis, there is widespread support in Devon for early action on climate change and that the consultation document was well received.

Themes of discussion from Members included:

What about the cost? For example, the previously reported figure of Devon reaching net-zero by 2030 to cost £1,992 per resident per year. What funding mechanisms are available; and how do we ensure the cost does not fall on the average resident?

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) reported in December 2020 that the cost, taken as an average across the UK, of going carbon neutral, is approximately neutral (i.e. net cost, when considering what needs to be spent vs potential benefits in terms of investment in technology and so on). Also, the rapid development of new technology and skills, and supply chains adapting, is constantly reducing costs.

There is a recognition that this cost will not be equally spread in terms of cost vs benefit (e.g. a resident putting solar panels on their house is expensive, for relatively little savings on their end) and this is where the government needs to come in and offer financial support to balance things out as well as larger investment in development of technology and so forth.

The Citizens' Assembly: live or virtual; recruitment; purpose; etc.

The Citizens' Assembly will take place in July 2021 virtually. Recruitment is a large undertaking – 14,000 letters will be sent out with a focused campaign on groups that are traditionally under-involved (youth, BAME, and so on) with the 70 members of the Citizens' Assembly being demographically representative of Devon.

There will be 24 hours of deliberations ranging across numerous meetings, with each taking up a maximum of 3 hours. There are people experienced with organising and running citizens' assemblies involved in the process.

People are not chosen on any kind of expertise; they are supposed to be 'lay' people, representative of the population of Devon, but they will be 'upskilled' beforehand in sessions with climate experts to ensure accurate and informed conversations can be had.

Local planning teams; what thought has been given, or actions taken, to involve local planning teams; problems of planning being on a district level; and problems surrounding existing legislation.

There have been quite a lot of meetings with Devon planning officers which is promising moving forward. However, there are issues that need to be addressed – the broken-up, district-focused planning mechanisms as they do not necessarily lend themselves to tackling climate change.

Also the legislation, where climate change is concerned, is lagging; where we consider the 'three pillars' of planning (environment, society, economy) as equal, their ought to be more focus on environmental if large-scale progress is to be made in tackling climate change.

Culture change – what are we doing, and can we do, to incentivise culture changes, to increase community engagement and involvement; consideration of a 'flagship campaign' to raise awareness?

Culture is undeniably important. The CCC have estimated that around 65% of the transition to net-zero carbon will come from behavioural changes and so this is

definitely something that requires constant attention. There is room to develop a fun, involved culture; various suggestions have been made like 'Climate Points' (similar to supermarket points), where involvement and conscious choices are rewarded.

On the positive side, Devon's 'climate brand' has received good feedback and an ever-growing number of businesses are signing the Devon Climate Declaration which is promising.

The target year for net-zero carbon; 2030 is popular, but is this realistic?

Various businesses and people are committing to an honest attempt to become carbon-neutral by 2030 and there is a recognition that this is difficult; financially and in requiring an enormous culture shift. But early-as-possible should be incentivised, and organisations that are aiming for later than 2030 should still be encouraged to support rapid improvements in their sectors.

Note that there is a risk of being too focused on a number – what is in many ways more important is a *rapid initial carbon reduction* – as much work needs to be done on fighting climate change as early as possible, no matter which year is determined as the target.