

Engaging with the Climate Emergency – Statement from the Centre for Public Scrutiny

We're hoping to do some work in the coming months on how scrutiny can engage with the climate emergency – engaging with the global challenge to understand the practical local action that can be undertaken to both mitigate and adapt to the crisis. The next meeting of our Advisory Board is devoted to the subject, and we'll report on that discussion in the due course – in the meantime, here are some introductory thoughts.

The nature of climate change, as a topic, is a tough one for scrutiny to tackle. It is urgent, and it is high profile – but it is big, and sometimes the scale and breadth of the challenge makes local action feel either futile or impractical.

While global and national action obviously sits at the forefront, there is a lot of highly local activity which can both raise awareness of the activity, and which can play its part in tackling climate change itself.

A number of councils are declaring “climate emergencies” – this provides an obvious opportunity for the involvement of scrutiny.

Some councils have embarked on “scrutiny reviews of climate change”. **Ryedale** and **North Yorkshire** are two authorities embarking on work of this nature. Often, such work focuses on the council's own carbon footprint – focusing on energy use and emissions. It's one approach, but there are others.

Some other questions or topics might include:

- Practically, what difference will declaring a climate emergency make? What plans does the council have?
- What is the council's role in local leadership on this issue? What work needs to be undertaken with partners, and the community?
- How can an understanding of climate change be mainstreamed into council business (and scrutiny business) more generally?

There are, of course, subject-by-subject issues that scrutiny can look into. Climate change will have an impact on a range of services – planning, housing, social care, children's services and of course environmental services and waste.

The work we have described sits on the “policy development” side of things – but there is clearly a role for scrutiny in monitoring councils' commitments.

Inevitably, there is contention on this subject. In some areas, councillors feel that the leadership may not be going far enough, and may seek to use call-in and motions in council to agitate for further action – as has happened in **Lambeth**. Scrutiny can provide a means of developing a shared understanding of the challenge and of deliberating to develop better policy as a result.

We're keen to hear from any councils who are carrying out scrutiny work on climate change, or who are considering it. What has been your experience of scoping this work? How have you involved the public? What kinds of recommendations has scrutiny been able to make? If you've any thoughts or insights on any of these issues, please contact Ed Hammond on ed.hammond@cfps.org.uk or 020 3866 5109.