

TITLE	Climate Emergency Community Deliberative Processes
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions - Gregor Murray

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

This report describes the work undertaken to identify effective deliberative engagement processes with the community on climate emergency and establishes the commitment to develop a proposal for delivering these processes and to report back to Council in October 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Executive:

- 1) notes the extensive review that has been undertaken regarding community deliberative processes in climate emergency (as set out in Appendix A to the report);
- 2) supports progressing the development of focus groups and e-panels to engage the community with climate emergency;
- 3) notes that a fully worked-up proposal with financial implications will be presented to Executive in October 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines:

- The work done to assess different community deliberative processes to inform the future engagement methodologies for the climate emergency agenda. The extensive research carried out (Appendix A) includes the identification and assessment of different public deliberative methods, reviewed case studies of engagement approaches used by other local councils, presents evaluation criteria to assess the relative merits of each method, and provides the recommended approaches to be adopted following the results of this evaluation.
- Based on the results from this research (Appendix A), the recommended public deliberative methods to engage the community with the climate emergency agenda are focus groups and e-panels. These methods will engage a wide variety of stakeholders, have low-cost delivery implications, have a relatively quick turnaround, and will provide a large amount of usable data which can be utilised not just for

developing a greater understanding of residents' thoughts, but also for important carbon accounting figures and potentially for use in future engagement programmes.

- Following the research and the recommendations, the next steps are to develop a detailed proposal to deliver public deliberative processes as mentioned above (focus groups and e-panels), to be presented to Executive on October 2021. The proposal will establish the financial implications, timelines and expected outcomes from the delivery of this process. There are key topic areas that need to be addressed with the community to achieve a greater impact on carbon emissions reduction. This report describes these topic areas and how through deliberative processes they can be addressed.

BACKGROUND

Following the climate emergency declaration made in July 2019 and the commitment to reduce the borough's carbon footprint to net-zero carbon by 2030, Wokingham Borough Council adopted a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) in January 2020. This was followed by a detailed progress report in July 2020. The council also committed to communicate and engage with residents and other stakeholders to work together to initiate education programmes and encourage behaviour change.

The Climate Emergency Action Plan was reviewed by the Task and Finish Group established by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. Their September 2020 report recommended that the council works with schools, businesses, and community stakeholders to develop a 2030 Vision for a Net Zero Borough.

At a council meeting in January 2021, a Motion was submitted proposing that the council set up a citizens' assembly to consider the climate emergency. The council decided not to support the Motion on the grounds that a citizens' assembly was only one of several deliberative processes and that other options should be considered to find an appropriate and cost-effective solution to successfully engaged the public.

In April 2021, an extensive review of climate emergency community deliberative processes was carried out by the council's climate emergency team. The Climate Emergency Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal Report (Appendix A) aims to inform the next steps the council should take to engage the public.

In February 2021 the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group reconvened and agreed to review the Action Plan and to focus on four key elements of the CEAP: transport, homes, renewable energy and behaviour change. The Group requested that:

- The Climate Emergency Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal (Appendix A) be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee meeting on the 16th of June for evaluation and scrutiny before implementation;
- The council publishes updates on the process; and
- To incorporate findings from the chosen deliberative process into the annual CEAP update.

Because climate emergency is a high profile issue the value of public engagement to inform decision making has been given a lot of current emphasis by both local and central government. However, public deliberative process should be a corporate response, and the council should look at engaging with the community across a number of topics going forward.

BUSINESS CASE

Overall, the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) aims to deliver “warmer homes, cleaner air, better health, more green spaces and support green job opportunities – as well as reduced carbon emissions”. However, even with the Councils best efforts, delivery of many of the outcomes of the CEAP rely on factors that are outside the Council's control. The effective delivery of this action plan therefore depends on the influence and support of multiple agencies. To increase citizen-led transitions to a non-carbon future the community must be engaged through effective frameworks for

discussion that empower residents and lead to real behavioural change. Tackling the climate emergency in Wokingham will need active participation from its residents, who must be consulted and involved in the big changes that will affect the way they live their lives. Through the right consultative and participation methods, the council will be able to hear their voices, collect their views and gather insight to inform future decisions.

Engaging with climate change will be a long-term activity. Climate change has been happening for a long time but it is only recently that its impact is gaining the level of attention its seriousness merits. Therefore, our response to it must be both immediate and long-term. The Climate Emergency Action Plan is a ten-year action plan, and a living document and our engagement strategies will run through the duration of the plan and probably longer.

Wokingham Borough Council has extensive experience of public engagement and consultation and frequently undertakes such activities as a key element of policy or project delivery. Some of the engagement initiatives delivered since the climate emergency declaration include: a climate emergency consultation to inform the initial action plan; the Youth Climate Conference; Climate Drop-in Sessions with towns and parish councils; Climate Conversations Event with businesses; consultations on greenways, walking and cycling infrastructure; and electric vehicles off-street charging points, amongst others. The council has also increased external communication around climate emergency and progress on projects within the CEAP.

However, achieving a net-zero carbon Wokingham Borough will require big changes to every aspect of its residents' lives. It will involve, for example, upgrading the housing stock, replacing gas boilers and transitioning to electric vehicles and modal shift from the private car to active and public transport. Public engagement has significant value in informing decision making throughout this agenda and in promoting opportunities and options for positive change.

Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal

The Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal Report (Appendix A) outlines fifteen of the existing options for community engagement recently used for climate emergency and scores them based on the policy stage, cost, length of the process, number of participants, participant's selection and delivery form.

With a 10-year climate emergency action plan, it is important to cover both the short and long-term community engagement methods. Because of this, several methods which cover all potential timeframes have been outlined here, so that they can be compared and selected depending on the priorities and resources available.

Selection of deliberative processes

The deliberative processes reviewed include opinion polls, community appraisal, user panels, participatory strategy planning, focus groups, feedback kiosks, citizen advisory groups, 21st century town meetings, area forums, positive deviance, conversations cafés, crowd wise, crowdsourcing, and e-panels. This comparison not only highlights the breadth of options available but also enables the best solution to be chosen for engagement on the climate emergency agenda taking into account timescales and resources.

Existing successful case studies from other local authorities engaging their residents with the climate emergency agenda have also been sourced to demonstrate the potential effectiveness of these approaches. For example, Camden Council delivered a Citizen Assembly, while Doncaster and Durham County Council used Opinion Polls, and South Gloucestershire and Leeds City Council used Citizen Advisory Groups. The results from these community deliberative processes vary in terms of the number of residents involved, length and cost of delivery, but produce similar results on engaging the community, producing recommendations for action and informing the climate emergency action plans.

Evaluation methodology

Evaluation criteria were established to assess the identified community deliberative methods through key variables which include cost, length of the process, number of participants, feedback detail, discussion potential, participant variation, and communication of results.

A scoring matrix was used to quantify these variables to allow comparison between the different deliberative methods (Table 1, Appendix A). Each method was then compared against the scoring matrix based on the information available, to give an initial value (Table 2, Appendix A).

Additionally, to factor in the different importance of each variable, a weighting was assigned to each in a separate matrix (Table 3, Appendix A). While all these variables are important, higher weighting was attributed to the methods that allow capturing as many views of the community, and in the most detail, as possible, with a lower time of delivery and reduced cost implications.

Finally, each deliberative method was graded by multiplying the variables scores against the weighting (Table 4, Appendix A). This evaluation methodology aims to provide a reasonable comparison between the assessed options.

Recommended Community Deliberative Processes for climate emergency

Based on this research (Appendix A), the recommended public deliberative methods to engage the community with the climate emergency agenda are focus groups and e-panels.

Focus groups were the only option to score over 100 points. This method provides great opportunities for detailed discussion on a number of topics, where attendees can bounce ideas off each other and generate new unique solutions to issues which the council may not have considered previously. Such highly detailed qualitative data is particularly useful to fully understand the motivations behind behaviours, what influences decisions and some of the barriers which may be preventing the adoption of measures.

This method will allow targeting relevant stakeholders to join specific workshops on a topic they may specialise or have an interest in. Focus groups are also a low-cost option with a relatively quick turnaround for conception and analysis stages, as well as for the sessions themselves, being reasonably short and so causing minimal disruption to the council and residents involved. Responses from these groups could also be used as starting points for other engagement options to gauge the wider responses to suggestions, such as integrating them into e-panels, for maximum effectiveness.

The e-panels are the second recommended option to be implemented as a starting point, scoring 90 out of a possible 130. These are particularly easy to use, both for the council in terms of analysis and for residents to participate. The process is all done online so is COVID 19 secure and also saves the running costs of printing, delivery, staff and venues required with other approaches.

The proposed engagement via e-panels will provide a large amount of data which can be utilised not just for developing a greater understanding of residents' thoughts, but also for important carbon accounting figures and potentially for use in marketing material. This option is one of the simplest and most open available, meaning it should be accessible by all, enabling everyone to input their ideas and feel included in the process, greatly increasing the likelihood they will be engaged in any climate-related actions.

Additionally, combining focus groups with e-panels and using the ideas garnered from the focus groups within the questionnaires, ensures high-quality feedback. This remains one of the lowest cost options and a very quick process in terms of creating the questions and gathering results, alongside easy completion for users, meaning engagement will be higher thanks to this simplicity.

Next Steps

Following the research and the recommendations (Appendix A), officers will develop a detailed proposal to deliver community deliberative processes as mentioned above (focus groups and e-panels). The proposal will include comprehensive information on how these methods will be set up and delivered, including:

- Stakeholder mapping and selection
- Delivery partners
- Key topics for discussion
- Steering groups selection
- Number of focus groups to be delivered
- Timeline of delivery
- Cost implications
- Platform for e-panels
- Other resources needed (internal and external)

The deliberative processes aim to help better understand the views of our residents and community groups on the council's response to climate change while raising the profile of the Climate Emergency Action Plan. Therefore, key topics for discussion will reflect the behaviour change needed to achieve Net Zero, including:

- Drive less – reducing car ownership, modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling more, transitioning to electric vehicles;
- Energy– reduce energy consumption by adopting better behaviours, improving our homes, adopting green technologies;
- Waste - reduce the amount of waste generated and improve our recycling behaviours;
- Food - eat less meat and dairy products, consume seasonal produce;
- Conscious consumption - shop local, use less plastic, avoid fast fashion, staycation;

- Support biodiversity - plant or adopt a tree, support local gardens, give home to nature.

A better-engaged community will help to deliver the actions within the Climate Emergency Action Plan and help identify new actions to close the carbon emissions shortfall identified in the CEAP. Moreover, simply engaging with the public and businesses effectively will help both raise awareness of issues and can promote behavioural changes towards this goal.

Officers will report back to Executive in October 2021 with the fully costed proposal for the delivery of focus groups and e-panels.

Finance

There are no cost implications for the process to develop the proposal to deliver the recommended public deliberative processes as This can be done with existing staff resources.

However, the Executive should note that the proposal to be submitted in October 2021 will present financial implications for the actual delivery of this project. It is anticipated that there will be associated costs for delivery that may include engaging skilled facilitators with experience in planning the discussion guides, selection and recruitment of relevant and diverse participants and supporting the delivery of the focus groups. Some costs may also arise from producing marketing materials, administrative capabilities and potential use of venues if the events are hosted publicly.

There is an assumption that participants will be volunteers, a scenario that is not unlikely due to the level of interest in this topic within the community. However, were incentives to be required, this would increase the cost.

Internally, it will require significant staff time in preparation, support, delivery, and analysis of data. Some of these engagement methods are expected to be more resource-intensive than others and will require the support of multiple teams within the council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	No	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	No	

Other Financial Information
The Council will need to support the delivery of community deliberative processes. This may lead to resource implications.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
The Climate Emergency Action Plan is a council-wide project. Community deliberative processes will allow the council to strengthen stakeholder engagement and consultation within the climate emergency agenda.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Equalities assessment has been completed and can be found at Appendix B

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
This project will support the Council target to become net-zero carbon by 2030 and the delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

List of Background Papers
Appendix A. Community Deliberative Processes Options Appraisal Report Appendix B. Equality Impact Assessment

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