

Interim Climate Change Emergency Task and Finish Report

Report to Cabinet – 23 March 2021

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Board established a Climate Change Emergency Task and Finish Group in July 2019, which comprised of Councillors Atiya-Alla, Barrand, Brown, Bye, Mandy Darling, Foster, Kennedy and Loxton, Chaired by Councillor Howgate. The Task and Finish Group was launched with a short video filmed by the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator which was shared as part of the call for evidence.
2. The call for evidence generated the following online response:
 - Facebook
 - Reached 5,800 accounts
 - Was shared 31 times
 - Received 7 comments
 - Twitter
 - 3,206 impressions
 - 15 retweets
 - 14 likes
 - Linkedin
 - 871 impressions
 - No shares
 - 6 likes
 - No comments
3. The Task and Finish Group considered this feedback at its inaugural meeting and Members appreciated the time and effort that members of the public had taken to make their submissions. During this call for evidence it became apparent that Torbay Council was missing out on the opportunity to be part of a Devon wide approach to tackling climate change.
4. Devon Climate Emergency. The Devon Climate Emergency Response Group (DCERG) is made up of senior officers from 25 organisations including councils, emergency services, businesses and voluntary organisations and was established to provide the strategic coordination of a collaborative response to the Devon Climate Emergency.
5. The DCERG provided a considerable evidence base and has established that Torbay's biggest carbon contributors were housing and transport. During November and December a number of thematic hearings were held and topics included; land, sea and food, the built environment, mobility, energy and waste, spatial planning, behaviour change and procurement/consumption. The key findings of these hearings can be found on the following webpage: [Thematic Hearings – Devon Climate Emergency](#). The findings of these hearings along with all other evidence that has been gathered was considered by a series of Citizen's Assemblies, these then fed into the Devon Carbon Plan. Upon the completion of the Devon Carbon Plan

the member organisations would be expected to produce a climate change action plan.

6. DCERG process aside, the Task and Finish Group recognised that in the meantime, there were steps that could be taken to reduce carbon. Teams across the Council were asked to 'take stock' of previous and current organisational activity on tackling climate change in terms of reducing emissions and improving climate change resilience. The response helped to add detail to the current organisational understanding of the issue and helped to inform ongoing and upcoming work both within Torbay and across wider Devon.
7. Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, officers from Torbay Council were only able to support the wider Devon work, pending the appointment of a dedicated Climate Emergency Officer, Jacqui Warren, who started work at Torbay Council on 16 December 2020.
8. Following a verbal update on climate change at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 16 September 2020, the Task and Finish Group met again on 23 November 2020 and considered the following documents:
 - Ten questions to ask if you are scrutinising climate change – with some initial feedback from the Senior Planning and Public Health Officer;
 - Paper on Devon Climate Declaration;
 - Paper on Devon's Timeline to Net-Zero Carbon; and
 - Confidential draft Devon Carbon Plan – due to go to public consultation from 7 December 2020 to 15 February 2021 (all Members were invited to an event on 7 December 2020 to launch the draft Devon Carbon Plan and ask questions).
9. Members acknowledged the positive work already being undertaken by the Council such as the retrofitting of energy measures to existing buildings through the Cosy Devon Partnership, new solar farms and looking to install charging points in some of the Council car parks to enable overnight charging of electric or hybrid vehicles.
10. The Panel recognised the importance of addressing climate change in all decision making and felt that this should be emphasised further through report templates and guidance documents to ensure maximum impact. The Council should also lead by example to encourage the public to engage in the changes required to reduce carbon and improve health across Torbay such as electric cars, greater take up of walking, cycling and use of public transport, changes to the way our homes and buildings are heated and insulated. Members noted that whilst Councillor Atiya-Alla had been appointed as the Climate Change Champion there was not a Cabinet Member with a specific role to lead on this important issue to ensure that it is developed at the highest political level within the Council.
11. Members discussed in detail the proposed target date of 2030 for Torbay Council and Torbay as an area being carbon neutral and the work needed to assess what would be required to achieve this and the possibility that there may be two different target dates.

12. The Panel welcomed the Cabinet's final Revenue and Capital Budget proposals for 2021/2022 included the following in respect of climate change but felt that larger investment would be needed in order to become Carbon Neutral by 2030:

Our **commitment to tackle climate change** continues with £150,000 available over three years to develop and deliver a proactive and effective tree planning scheme, which will include community participation and the launch of a supportive Tree Warden scheme.

We will seek to establish a portal to help residents across Torbay to make energy efficient changes to their homes. Our Climate Change Reserve will also be increased so that we are able to develop a range of other initiatives to help us meet our ambition of being a Carbon Neutral Council (£90,000).

Capital Budget – A Climate Fit for the Future - £4.8m through the investment of solar farms at Brokenbury and Nightingale Park.

13. The Panel met on 3 February 2021 with the new Climate Emergency Officer, Jacqui Warren, in order to progress and finalise the initial work of the Panel and to agree a way forward. Jacqui presented the submitted paper which outlined an initial approach to be achieved in 2021 - April 2022 to deliver 10 key actions (an interim draft of the proposed key actions was shared on screen at the meeting) to tackle the Climate Emergency whilst also allowing some time to refresh the Torbay Climate Change Strategy (2014-2019) and co-design and develop with partners, new longer term action plans to work towards a Carbon Neutral (CN) council and CN Torbay (community). By April 2022 this approach would enable the Council to demonstrate progress in working towards achieving the Community and Corporate Plan's priority to become a CN Council and work with others to create a CN community.
14. The proposed approach would also allow Torbay Council to take into consideration further evidence that was being developed through the [Devon Carbon Plan](#) (the Panel considered the Council's draft response to the Interim Devon Carbon Plan as set out in Appendix 2 to the submitted briefing paper). This work was ongoing and would conclude by the end of 2021. This would help the Council to understand, at a strategic level, how Devon would achieve net zero carbon by 2050 and the role(s) it would need to play in achieving this work locally. It would also provide further evidence on the deliverability of achieving carbon neutrality in Torbay by 2030.
15. The briefing identified the following longer term actions (to be completed by April 2022):

Council Operations

- Created a new Corporate Carbon Neutral (CN) programme including:
 - New CN Policy (to set out some CN principles for all of the Council to follow).
 - New CN Officer Group and senior responsible officer (to be responsible for developing and delivering council actions and Council Action Plan).
 - Established the carbon footprint for the Council (the amount of carbon dioxide released as a result of council

- operations/activities. It will be vital to monitor this and establish annual reduction targets in line with Torbay's CN target).
- Explored strengthening decision making processes in light of the Climate Emergency (including the use of CN Impact Assessment tool).
 - Explored carbon literacy training for staff and members (to raise staff and members awareness).
 - Developed a Torbay Council CN Action Plan 2022 - 2030 (including a list of prioritised actions that the Council commits to deliver up to 2030).
 - Gain approval from Cabinet to deliver the Torbay Council CN Action Plan.

Torbay-wide

- Developed with partners and community groups a review of the existing Torbay Climate Change Strategy (2014 – 2019) and developed a new Torbay-wide CN Action Plan 2022 – 2030 (list of resourced, prioritised actions, pipeline of projects and future funding strategy).
- Supported the development of the Devon Carbon Plan (including active engagement in the Devon Citizen Assembly).
- Embed the results of the Devon Carbon Plan into the new Torbay-wide CN Action Plan.
- Developed a CN pipeline of projects (this is designed to create a list of investment ready projects capable of securing future funding as it arises).
- Held a public consultation and series of events to develop the new Torbay-wide CN Action Plan (this is to test the draft plans and gauge the appetite of residents and businesses to deliver certain actions) – extent determined by available resources.
- Created a coalition of partners to deliver the plans.
- Gained approval from Cabinet for the new Torbay-wide Strategy and CN Action Plan.

(The full documents from this meeting can be found at [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Task-and-Finish Group on Wednesday, 3 February 2021, 5.00 pm \(torbay.gov.uk\).](#))

16. The Panel received a verbal update on the Local Transport Action Plan and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan which had recently been launched for consultation – further details can be found at [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan - Torbay Council](#). Members also noted a Statement on Environmental Sustainability provided by the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, whom the Council was working with as well as South Devon College to see how we can take action to reduce the impact of the climate change across Torbay.
17. The Task and Finish Group reflected and debated all of the information provided to them, both in writing and orally. On being put to the vote, the following recommendations were proposed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board (unanimously).

The Board recommends to the Cabinet:

- (i) that all reports to Councillors include enhanced information on how the decision will impact on climate change;
- (ii) that, in order to achieve consistency in the application of our Environmental Policies, the Assistant Director Planning, Housing and Climate Emergency be requested to develop and issue a guidance document setting out how Policies in the Local Plan relating to climate change should be complied with. That guidance should explain compliance will mean submitting a statement, similar to the design and access statement, explaining how the policy is being considered;
- (iii) that the Panel would welcome a Cabinet Member to be responsible for taking the lead on driving forward mitigations and preventative actions to address the climate change emergency;
- (iv) that the Torbay Council draft consultation response to the Interim Devon Carbon Plan set out at Appendix 2 to the submitted report be endorsed;
- (v) that the Climate Emergency Officer be requested to ensure the proposed initial 10 key actions are prioritised to show the actions that will achieve the biggest impact at the top of the list and that future action plans be also prioritised in this way;
- (vi) that the Climate Emergency Officer be requested to work with relevant lead officers to ensure wider publication of the Cosy Devon Partnership and Exeter Community Energy schemes to ensure that Councillors and residents are aware of what is on offer;
- (vii) that the proposed approach outlined in the submitted report to address the climate change emergency and enable Torbay to be Carbon Neutral by 2030 be endorsed; and
- (viii) that a cross party climate change emergency working group be established to include the relevant Cabinet Member and other interested parties to take this important issue forward.