

Climate Emergency Taskforce - Public evidence session

24 January 2020 (6pm – 7.30pm)

Present: Councillor Matt Bryan (Chairman), Councillors Paul Bowers, Bob Cernik, Simon Eardley, Gillian Edwards, Jill Houlbrook, Gina Lewis, Karen Shore (Cabinet Member) and Christine Warner

Officers in attendance:

Andrew Lewis, Chief Executive
Charlie Seward, Deputy Chief Executive (Place)
Laurence Ainsworth, Director of Public Service Reform
Will Pearson, Strategy and Innovation Manager
Lyn Brown, Democracy and Elections Officer

Welcome, Introductions, Apologies for absence, Declarations of interest and minutes of the last meeting

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the fourth meeting of the Council's Climate Emergency Taskforce which was a public evidence session to hear views from residents, partners and businesses on the issue of Climate Change.

There were no apologies for absence.

In the interests of transparency, Councillor Gina Lewis declared that she was a member of the Cheshire Fire Authority and Councillor Jill Houlbrook declared that she was in receipt of a pension from the Cheshire Pension Fund, as these organisations were due to make contributions under the "partner organisations/sectoral representatives verbal responses" item.

Decided: That the minutes of the Climate Emergency Taskforce held on 14 October 2019 be approved as a correct record.

Background to the Climate Emergency Taskforce

The Chairman reminded Members of the aims and objectives of the Taskforce and summarised the work that had been completed to date. He highlighted that the Council's commitment to act now had been reaffirmed at the Council meeting on 21 January 2020 and an ambitious target had been set for the Council to be carbon neutral in its activities by 2030 and take responsibility for supporting the borough as a whole to be carbon neutral by 2045. Given the breadth of impact of the climate emergency, the Taskforce was keen to focus on practical actions the Council could take both as an organisation and how it could use funding, policy and influence to support the borough to decarbonise.

Call for evidence overview

The Chairman provided a short summary of the process undertaken for partners, businesses and local residents to submit evidence to the Taskforce and thanked everyone for their submissions to date. Given the volume of submissions (108 in total) and attendance at the session, it was clear the approach to promotion via the Climate Emergency Newsletter and via social media was a successful means of engagement. He took the opportunity to thank everyone for their attendance and for making a submission and highlighted that the quality of the submissions had been exemplary and would prove invaluable in supporting the Council's approach.

Verbal responses (individual)

The following points were captured from "individual" speakers who were each given up to three minutes to contribute to the call for evidence session and address the Taskforce:-

1. Councillor Andrew Dawson urged the Taskforce to consider the installation of solar panels on school buildings as it was essential that the public sector should be seen to take the lead with regard to energy usage and decarbonisation. He also raised the issue of lack of electric charging points and the need to eliminate all cars from city centres. He felt the bus station in Chester city was in the wrong place and called for additional funding for measures to mitigate the climate emergency.
2. Jim Cameron, CPRE, was pleased to support the Climate Emergency report received by Full Council on 21 January 2020 and had already submitted several comments to the Taskforce. He endorsed the content of the Council report which proposed actions and targets for meeting carbon neutrality. It also recognised the costs and difficulties in taking the required actions to achieve this. He also felt the Local Plan should be reviewed.
3. Councillor Phil Marshall read out a statement from Councillor Elton Watson who couldn't attend the Taskforce, reinforcing the importance of trees and woodland to climate change. It was crucial to maximise the planting of trees where people live, work and play and also along polluted transport corridors to reduce the impact of vehicle emissions on people's health. However, the Council would need to find the equivalent of 150 full sized football pitches per year to plant enough trees to meet targets set.
4. Cliff Hall had an interest in building, construction and planning and felt that Planning Inspectors seemed to be more interested in commenting on bats, newts and noise abatement than on carbon footprint assessments in relation to new developments. He felt that developers should pay the true cost of the impact of their construction. He was encouraged by the words of the Taskforce but felt there could be more "task" and "force" applied in areas directly controlled by the Council such as Planning if it wants to have an

immediate impact.

5. Colin Watson acknowledged it was early days and supported the last speakers' comments on planning issues. He felt there were huge gains to be made in the planning area and stressed the need to focus on the end date of 2050 when the fossil fuel industry needed to be closed and he felt efforts should be focused on how to make that happen.
6. Ruth Basden spoke on behalf of Helen Hand who had spoken at Full Council on 21 January 2020 in support of renewable green energy installations such as solar panels on school buildings across the borough. Helen had ascertained that the cost of installing solar panels on the school her son attended would pay for itself over 9 years and was a popular, cost-effective idea with respondents to a local survey she had undertaken. Helen felt that children should be a focus of any action taken in order to engage, educate and empower them to address climate change and this would in turn have a ripple effect, changing attitudes and behaviours. She urged the council to agree to fund this project.
7. Stuart Murray, a resident and loft insulator, raised the issue of insulation materials which he felt was under the radar and not an issue of concern presently. He had read the Anthesis report and agreed with the sentiment that reducing demand should always come first. The Council should focus on the areas it can influence such as Planning and Building Control. Databases would give a good indication of where work was likely to take place and where wastage of building materials would occur. He felt the focus needed to be on off-cuts and uncontaminated material and estimated that the volume of wastage was massive in terms of materials generated which just ended up in landfill.
8. Ashley McCraight, an Industrial Chemist and resident of Frodsham, had spoken at Full Council on 21 January 2020 about vehicle emissions. His primary focus was the need for CO₂ levels to come down and felt that cars and freight caused large amounts of pollution. He felt that the Council had missed an opportunity to consider a clean air zone for Chester which would be a win for pollution and the climate emergency declaration and very sellable certainly for those living in urban areas.
9. A public speaker agreed with many of the points raised, however criticised the Taskforce for using biodegradable cups at the meeting rather than ceramic mugs which could be washed and reused. She felt new mothers needed to be targeted to switch to real nappies rather than use disposable nappies and that children should walk to school.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their excellent contributions which would all be fed into the work of the Taskforce.

Verbal responses (partner organisations / sectoral responses)

The following points were captured from “partner organisations/ sectoral responses” who were each given up to five minutes to contribute to the call for evidence session and address the Taskforce:

1. Hannah, a pupil at Upton High School, highlighted that it was her generation that must live with the effects of climate change. She outlined her ideas for fighting the climate emergency including:
 - more bike sheds and racks to encourage people to cycle, be healthier and reduce carbon emissions;
 - introduce “living walls” which attract bees, increase green spaces and were valuable in lowering carbon emissions;
 - eco-friendly policies around water and gas usage to help change mind sets;
 - combat ignorance with constant reminders about plastic straws, plastic bags and single use cups as uneducated individuals choose not to listen;
 - change diets in schools and introduce sustainable seasonal food on certain days of the week to reduce the CO2 footprint.

Hannah also mentioned that her school had taken part in the Youth Parliament “Make Your Mark” campaign and that half the pupils in her school (over 600 pupils) had voted to support “protecting the environment” as their UK issue.

2. Dave Plunkett, Cheshire Pension Fund Members Forum, explained that the fund was massive but he felt it was being invested unwisely into organisations involved in the likes of gaming, gambling, gas, oil and fracking. There were many projects which could benefit from funding from this fund if we could just use our imagination more. He felt the Cheshire Pension Fund needed better direction as it was being led by London-based advisers who were influencing investment without challenge. Whilst the profits and bonuses were good, he felt attitudes needed to change and more wise investments made.
3. Steve Densley, Active Cheshire (the lead body for physical activity across Cheshire and Warrington) spoke about promoting active travel as an alternative option and getting people out of cars and onto public transport. He felt that children didn't cycle because of roads and infrastructure and this was what needed to change and this would require investment and a culture change. The Council's Smile for a Mile initiative in schools encouraged children to become more active and he felt there was a clear link with active

children becoming more active adults. He felt we needed to build the right infrastructure and involve and engage communities.

4. Helen Tandy, Friends of the Earth, acknowledged that the Council was stretched financially and highlighted community and voluntary sector organisations who supported many initiatives and were keen to help the council with its climate change aims. She highlighted the need to find ways to engage with all residents across the borough on this potentially overwhelming topic. She suggested changing the Council's Plastic Free Chester initiative to Plastic Free Cheshire West and Chester and rewrite the document as plastic is a huge issue and more joined up thinking was required. She suggested more co-ordinated thinking on household waste and business waste collection as the infrastructures were different. She suggested producing a CWAC paper straw for bulk buying which would lower the costs for small businesses.
5. Catherine Green highlighted comments made about tree planting and welcomed the policy on two for one replacement, however raised concerns about ageing large trees gradually coming down but only being replaced by smaller trees. She also felt that the Planning Committee had more powers than perhaps it thought and could turn down development applications which were not suitable sustainable.

Issues raised by Members included:

- looking at schools in terms of how pupils were developing as citizens – children have a lot of influence over their parents;
- new developments around pensions and investments and there does seem to be some change and progress, but change does take time;
- suggestion that a young person, maybe Hannah (Upton High School pupil), join the Taskgroup;
- Planning Committee members were unbelievably constrained by what they can and can't do and can only work within the confines of the system and make judgements on the applications before them. Suggested lobbying nationally in relation to building regulations and lean on developers to raise standards;
- Local Plan parts 1 and 2 were being revised, could we look to strengthen what we could demand from developers going forward;
- communications have been good so far around this whole agenda, now a strong emphasis was needed on action. The Council needed to be an outspoken voice on issues such as single use plastics and potentially "call out" activity from the likes of McDonalds with their single use sauce pots as this flies in the face of the progress we're trying to make;

- how do we engage with and help communities who are struggling financially and support them to buy sustainably and those harder to reach communities where climate change is not high on their radar;
- strategies and plans invariably have more of an urban focus and we must bear in mind our rural areas, particularly in terms of lack of public transport and sustainable options and integrate rural areas for a more rounded approach;
- Elected Members could assist with communication and engagement through presentations in schools to cascade the climate emergency message;
- welcomed the idea of a CWAC paper straw;
- noted that the Cheshire Fire Authority was very aware of the Council's activities around the climate emergency and was currently looking at its own range of vehicles, buildings and Fire Service activity which included responding to wildfires and floods across other regions;
- comments around the new Fire Station in Chester being inadequate in terms of its sustainability and the need to be bolder and more imaginative going forward;
- the need to make cycle lanes enforceable as parents are parking on cycle lanes outside schools for convenience when dropping off/picking up their children.

Written responses - overview

The Chairman confirmed receipt of 108 written submissions as part of the submission of evidence to the Taskforce. It was hoped GDPR would allow this information to be made more widely available as it was seen as a positive academic study.

Any other business / date of next meeting / next steps

Cllr Karen Shore, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Strategic Transport, made some closing remarks and thanked everyone who had attended the session and all those who had provided submissions. She also took the opportunity to thank the members of the cross-party Taskforce for working well together and focusing on achieving the best for the borough. She acknowledged that the real work started now with the development of an action plan to put ideas into motion.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions and confirmed that the session was about listening and consolidating the information which would now be transferred into an action plan required to deliver on what was promised at Full Council on 21 January 2020. If anyone had any further comments they were encouraged to share them via

climatechange@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

The Chairman also confirmed that a finalised plan would be prepared for the end of the year, however this didn't stop action in the meantime and he highlighted the work of the Council's Carbon Reduction Team.

The next meeting of the Taskforce was noted as Friday 27 February 2020, 6pm - 8pm, in the First Floor Committee Meeting Room at Ellesmere Port Library.