

Options for a Climate Emergency Implementation Group

Objective of the paper

To consider options for a stakeholder implementation group for the delivery of the Climate Strategy and Action Plan once adopted by Council.

Recommendation

Stakeholder input is needed to provide a high level of public scrutiny and also to engage in meaningful activities to reduce carbon emissions. The report concludes that Council Scrutiny procedures can offer a transparent oversight and steering function, and that **Option 4 is most likely to stimulate the necessary community action to most effectively support delivery, but this option needs to be carefully more fully developed to optimise the chances of success.**

Background

The draft Climate Strategy and Action Plan commits to the formation of a stakeholder implementation group to support the delivery of the action plan. This is particularly important because 98% of the emissions in Merton's greenhouse gas inventory are not in the Council's direct control, and many actions contained within it must be taken by individuals, businesses and service providers and community-based organisation.

The Climate Emergency Working Group was the steering group to deliver the Climate Strategy and Action Plan. We found the group to be highly effective in providing accountability and expert judgement, which significantly improved the quality of the resulting Climate Strategy and Action Plan.

Out of 170 community-based groups that are known to the Council, relatively few groups appear to be active in the climate change space, and these tend to be pressure groups. From recent experience we believe there is significant opportunity to help support community-led projects to deliver a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Four options were considered using the following criteria:

- Potential for stakeholder reach/ confidence
- Potential of replication/ overlap with other activities or groups
- Potential to support other Council/ Borough objectives
- Potential to add value in delivering the action plan
- Cost and resource needed for successful operation

Next steps

Chosen options require further development.

Options appraisal

Option 1: A Steering group model

- Main purpose: To oversee the Council's role in implementation
- Set-up: c12-20 individuals which represent a cross section of interest and expertise.
Quarterly meetings.
Reports to SCTP.
- Main Activities: Operate in a similar way to the Climate Emergency Working Group.
Focused on the Council's progress against the delivery plan. Group will provide advice and steer.
- Resources: Could be managed by Climate Change Officers with no additional resource.
- Discussion:

Stakeholder accountability	Council resources v other priorities	Potential for replication	Potential to support other Council objectives	Add value to delivering the plan
Limited membership likely to be less representative.	Low cost/ low time.	Overlap with Cabinet function to oversee the Delivery Plan	Some opportunities for collaboration though SCTP members	Limited opportunities to develop on the ground projects

A level of scrutiny and transparency is essential to maintain confidence in delivering the plan. The Climate Emergency Working Group has been a successful model to oversee the development of the Climate Strategy and Action Plan, providing appropriate challenge, expert opinion, some out-reach into the community and transparent and accountable recommendations. A group of this nature will be suited to keeping focus on key actions.

The model could be improved by including Academia, a broader range of interests (e.g. better representation of the east of the borough or BAME communities). To address the need for a stronger link into key council officers and the senior leadership of the Council, a formal link the steering group would form a subgroup of SCTP.

A steering group model heavily overlaps with the role of democratically elected Council members who have responsibility for overseeing the delivery of the Climate Strategy and Action Plan.

A group with limited and exclusive membership does not lend itself well to reaching out to the many different communities that could play a part, or building momentum for community ownership of actions.

Option 2: A Citizens Assembly model

Main purpose: To bring a broader range of people into the decision-making process

Likely make up: c20 members randomly selected or one from each ward
 Monthly or bi-monthly meetings, Open to the public.
 Reviews evidence provided by Council and Non-Council groups.
 Reports directly to Cabinet.

Main activities: Review how activities set out in the delivery plan are and managed. The group would debate and recommend which activities should be prioritised for funding and how available money should be spent. The public would be invited to contribute their views to meetings.

Resources: Budget to pay members/ provide expertise and large facilities/ greater level of organisation

Discussion:

Stakeholder accountability	Council resources v other priorities	Potential for replication	Potential to support other Council objectives	Add value to delivering the plan
Exclusive membership but less biased and more publically accountable.	Medium cost/ high time.	No similar group exists in Merton. Performs overlapping function to scrutiny.	Decisions taken may not be limited to Climate Change	Unknown

This model has the potential get a fresh perspective on implementation of the Climate Strategy and Action Plan, and avoid a bias in membership towards groups which are already taking action in the borough on climate change. The governance structure would allow for the recommendations to be formed in a structured way and allow links to officers and senior decision-makers within the Council. The more diverse membership and public scrutiny could lead to greater public accessibility, new ideas and an injection of energy into the process.

This approach requires careful development of the governance structure and member section to enable the group to have a strong voice within the Council, without inadvertently derailing important Council priorities or processes. The higher level of public exposure increases the risk of conflict or discord and/or recommendations which do not result in effective delivery of the Climate Strategy and Action Plan.

Management of a citizens assembly will require much more time and potentially a budget for the provision of facilities and provision of experts or evidence. Because individuals will not necessarily have any expert knowledge of climate change or current Council policies, more time will be needed to build the capacity of the members to make good quality recommendations. It is likely to involve a wider range of council officers who may take time to adjust to a new way of working.

Assembly meetings allow for networking opportunities to help accelerate climate change activity, but are not specifically designed to do so.

Option 3: A Public Accountability model

Main purpose: To keep the Council and wider decision-makers accountable

Likely make up: Open membership
Quarterly meetings with Senior Council team in attendance
No specific formal tasks.

Main activities: Council officers present on progress against the delivery plan and consider responses from attendees.

Resources: Could be managed by Climate Change Officers with no additional resource.

Discussion:

Stakeholder accountability	Council resources v other priorities	Potential for replication	Potential to support other Council objectives	Add value to delivering the plan
Open membership but hard to reach groups unlikely to attend	Medium cost/ Low time.	Similar to community forums or the Residents transport group.	Low, unless specific effort made to include them.	Pressure may change Council's approach to delivery plan

This options would enable anyone who wishes to comment on progress on the delivery plan to do so directly to the senior team in the Council responsible for its delivery.

The structure of such meetings may inadvertently set up a focus which is almost exclusively based on what the Council is doing, as opposed to the borough as a whole. This could be mitigated by inclusion of a range of partners or more focussed discussion of specific topics as opposed to consideration of the whole delivery plan in each session.

Attendance at public forms may have a strong overlap with individuals who already attend Council organised meetings and tend to be less well attended by groups that are harder to reach. The lack of core membership may make it difficult for a concrete set of actions or recommendations to be formed, risking a lack of perceptible action and loss of confidence in the process.

This structure may work better if the group is not led by the council, but the Council agrees to attend when invited.

Option 4: Action Group

Main purpose: To facilitate the set up and support for community-led climate projects.

Likely make up: Open membership or assignment of project leads with open invitation.
Monthly meetings attended by officers depending on the focus of activity.
No specific formal tasks.

Main activities: Focus on developing and building community projects which present as major gaps in the action plan.
Building credible climate projects, sharing knowledge/ skills and identification and bidding for funding opportunities.
Ad Hoc inclusion of Council Officers/ Councillors who can facilitate community action or want help to deliver programmes.

Resources: Resource intensive to support wide-ranging community action and individual project development.

Discussion:

Stakeholder accountability	Council resources v other priorities	Potential for replication	Potential to support other Council objectives	Add value to delivering the plan
Open membership could target people seeking to take action in their community/ neighbourhood	High cost/ High time.	No similar groups that we are aware of.	High because it encourages collaborative working.	Community-based action is essential for the delivery of the plan.

Instead of meetings which summarise progress against activities in the delivery plan, this format would invite the community to help solve major technical, societal or funding gaps which are currently present in the Climate Strategy and Action Plan and help to pool the skills and resources needed to facilitate the project. There appears to be a desire for greater community level action in Merton that goes beyond lobbying for system change and faster action. If successful, this model would encourage greater ownership of Merton Citizens, channel effort into positive action, and fill a major gap by fostering genuine Council/ community collaboration on climate change projects which would lead to greater public confidence and an acceleration in emission reduction.

Actions undertaken as part of this group are not intended to prescriptive, but where possible matched with opportunities to meet Council objectives and funding opportunities. Examples could include community-led campaigns to reduce waste, the design and implementation of low-traffic neighbourhoods, community energy, supporting active engagement with young residents, tree planting and habitat restoration, support for specific communities or businesses or spaces.

The main risks would be managing the high expectation of the public for the Council to provide financial and practical support, the long timescales needed for the development of genuine community projects, and if Council officers who lack time or not feel this is an effective approach.

This can be mitigated with effective steer from Climate Change Officers, who would provide practical support and appropriate links into the Council. This role requires expertise in climate change and building community projects and if not done properly will result in a failed exercise and reputational damage.

The group would not monitor the delivery of the Climate Strategy and action plan, which would need to happen using a separate process.

Future Merton

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