

Report of:	Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles Head of Governance & Corporate Services
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Key Decision:	Yes
Report Track:	Cabinet: 14/10/21

Cabinet
14 October 2021
Climate Emergency – Consultation and Community Engagement

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report updates Cabinet on the progress regarding the setting up a Citizen's assembly and outlines alternative options for consultation and community engagement, which will form a crucial part of the plans for the District to achieve carbon neutrality.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Cabinet recommend to Council to either:
- (i) Pursue the option of a Climate Change Citizen's Assembly to consider a costed action plan and approve a supplementary estimate of £30,000 to increase the budget to a total of £60,000; or
 - (ii) undertake a procurement to set up a Citizen's Jury within the existing budget of £30,000; or
 - (iii) Set up stakeholder panels and undertake wider consultation and engagement on the costed action plan within the approved £30,000 budget.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendations

Key Issues

- 3.1 Cabinet, in September 2019, approved a range of actions associated with the July 2019 Council Motion that Cannock Chase District becomes carbon neutral by 2030, as part of efforts to address the challenge of climate change. It was proposed that a 10-year costed action plan be prepared with input from a Citizen's Assembly, commissioned as part of this process. The technical work on the costed action plan options is being undertaken separately.
- 3.2 In April this year a specification was issued inviting proposals to develop and facilitate a Citizens' Assembly. This would be created to consider the options included in a costed action plan aiming to achieve carbon neutrality for the entire district. Unfortunately, the Council received no proposals.
- 3.3 Four of the companies that were invited to bid have outlined their reasons for not submitting a bid for the work and have offered advice. Cost has been the main factor, with the estimated minimum cost being £50-£60,000 for running a Citizens' Assembly, which typically consists of 50 people. This is in excess of the £30,000 budget available. The timescale for delivery was also an issue with the work in selecting a panel ("sortition") taking up to 12 weeks.
- 3.4 The Citizens' Jury model is likely to be slightly cheaper with costs ranging from £15,000 - £35,000 but this option utilises a smaller panel of 15-25 members. A Citizens' Jury also requires the "sortition" stage referred to in paragraph 3.3.
- 3.5 An alternative to the Assembly or Jury models, would be to set up stakeholder panels and undertake broader consultation and engagement, with much of the work being undertaken in-house, buying in support where necessary. This approach would directly involve many more people. Panels of different interest groups could consider specific aspects of the costed action plan. This could be managed within the current approved budget of £30,000.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.6 It has not been possible to set up a Citizens Assembly as originally envisaged given the budget available. If this is still required, then a budget provision of circa £60,000 is necessary; this would require a supplementary estimate of £30,000 to be added to the current budget.
- 3.7 As an alternative, other options have been identified which could be delivered within the existing £30,000 budget. The options are set out in section 5.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 This proposal contributes to the delivery of all three of the Council's priorities, which make reference to climate change as part of the Council's aim of the District becoming carbon neutral by 2030. In particular, the Supporting Health & Wellbeing priority has an objective of creating a greener, sustainable community and environment and commitment to developing an Environmental Strategy and to implement a Climate Change Action Plan.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 Cabinet, in September 2019, approved a range of actions associated with the July 2019 Council Motion that Cannock Chase District becomes carbon neutral by 2030, as part of efforts to address the challenge of climate change. It was proposed that a 10-year costed action plan be prepared with input from a Citizen's Assembly, commissioned as part of this process. The technical work on the costed action plan options is being undertaken separately. This report focusses on the progress in commissioning the Citizens' Assembly.
- 5.2 Citizens' Assemblies are typically run by an external organisation so that they are seen as independent in the process. In April this year a specification was issued inviting proposals to develop and facilitate a Citizens' Assembly (CA). The purpose of the CA would be to consider the options included in a costed action plan aiming to achieve carbon neutrality for the entire district. Unfortunately, the Council received no proposals from the organizations invited to bid for the work.
- 5.3 Four of those approached to bid for the work offered to provide more details about their reasons for not bidding and to discuss alternative options. Contact has been made with all four of these organisations. The main reason cited was that the proposal could not be delivered within the £30,000 budget allocated to the project. Their estimates for the creation of a Citizens' Assembly are £50-£60,000, based on the costs incurred in other areas – with one example costing £90,000. Feedback indicates that certain aspects of the process are fixed. One specific aspect of the work is selection of a statistically representative group ("sortition") with costs likely to be £15,000. There are also the payments made to Assembly participants – these can be up to £300 per person (£10 per hour), with an estimated total of £15,000. Professional facilitation fees, expert witnesses and reporting costs are in addition to this. The timescale for delivery of the Assembly was also a concern with the sortition stage being lengthy, typically taking up to 12 weeks.
- 5.4 Given that the estimated cost of a Citizens' Assembly is significantly more than the budget available, the Climate Change Working Group has researched this option further and looked at other options. As part of this work the Group has considered the feedback provided by the four organisations who declined to bid for the work and this included advice in relation to the Council's options going forward. In addition, an expert on community engagement on climate change from Keele University has also provided advice on the matter. Information about the options is set out below, starting with further information about Citizens' Assemblies.

Citizens' Assembly

- 5.5 A Citizens' Assembly involves a representative group of people who are brought together to discuss an issue, or issues, and reach conclusions about what they think should happen. They are supported by facilitators / organisers. Citizens' Assemblies are normally given the time and opportunity to learn from expert witnesses about a topic, which they deliberate on before reaching their conclusions. Assembly members are asked to make trade-offs and arrive at workable recommendations.

- 5.6 An Assembly involves very few people directly, typically only around 50 individuals. The method involves giving this group a deeper understanding of the issues, in order that they can consider the evidence being presented to them from an informed viewpoint and increased understanding. In theory, this allows greater legitimacy to the actions being proposed by the Council as they have been supported by the Assembly.
- 5.7 There have been a number of Climate Change Citizen's Assemblies across the country and at national level, many of these are reaching similar conclusions. The factors in generating CO₂ and other climate changing emissions are well understood and there are established options for tackling these. The learning from these exercises could be used to inform Council's approach without incurring the cost of running our own assembly.
- 5.8 The Cabinet Report in September 2019 noted the strengths and weaknesses of the Assembly model as:

Strengths

- The process can be high profile and provide a good way of drawing attention to an issue.
- Assemblies can bring out diverse perspectives on complex and contested problems.
- Decision makers can be brought face-to-face with citizens or those with lived experience of an issue.
- The learning phase and deliberation with peers can help participants to understand, change and develop their opinions
- Policy makers get an insight on public opinion on a contested issue based on the public having access to thorough and unbiased information and time for deliberation.

Weaknesses

- Gaining a broadly representative group of people can be challenging and expensive.
- The process for developing and planning an assembly is intensive and demanding on human and time resources.
- Running a citizens' assembly is a highly complex process requiring significant expertise.
- There is a danger of being seen as a publicity exercise if not followed by real outcomes.

Citizens' Jury

- 5.9 A Citizens' Jury is a small group of people representative of the demographics of a given area, who come together to deliberate on an issue (generally one clearly framed question), over the period of 2 to 7 days.
- 5.10 Many of the same principles for a Citizens' Assembly apply to the smaller Citizen's Jury model with the key differences being:
- A smaller group of people (typically 15-25 people),
 - It is cheaper with costs ranging from £15,000 - £35,000
 - The area for discussion is narrower

- It takes place over a shorter time period

Stakeholder Panels and wider consultation and engagement

- 5.11 Stakeholder panels and wider consultation and engagement could be set up with much of the work being undertaken in-house. This approach would directly involve many more people with the establishment of stakeholder panels of different interest groups. The panels could consider specific aspects of the costed action plan. The focus and methods of the consultation and engagement work would be informed by the costed action plan. This may require some specialist input procured to support elements of this. For example, administering and analysing large scale surveys; targeting seldom heard groups; setting up and analysing online channels and social media. This approach could be delivered within the approved budget of £30,000.
- 5.12 This approach would provide for early direct and on-going involvement of as many people as possible. This is considered to be key to maximising the potential to influence change in a more effective way. Giving residents as much information as possible that they need to make the choices that reduce their carbon footprint is an effective way of enabling them to contribute to the Council's aim for the District to be carbon neutral.
- 5.13 This model would also directly involve many more stakeholders in the development and delivery of the costed action plan rather than just at the outset in its initial development. This approach which would be underpinned by undertaking a stakeholder mapping exercise to consider who the stakeholders are, what are their specific areas of interest, who will be the most affected/impacted by proposals, and who has the most influence etc. The Council would use this exercise to develop a series of panels including:
- Councillors from the District, Town, Parish and County Councils
 - Community and third sector organisations
 - Businesses / their representatives (Chamber of Commerce, LEPs etc)
 - Young people – schools and college, youth and uniformed groups
 - Partners – e.g. NHS, Fire and Police
 - Residents
 - Employees
 - Environmental interest groups

The Council already works closely with a wide range of partners and organisations and can use these networks as a starting point for consultation and engagement on climate change.

- 5.14 This model would use a variety of engagement methods during the initial phase and throughout the implementation of the costed action plan. These could include:
- Traditional surveys, focus groups and workshops
 - Projects within schools/youth groups linked to campaign elements
 - Social media engagement
 - Online platforms such as commonplace, polis etc.
 - Piggybacking onto local events

- Continue to work with Staffordshire County Council and neighbouring local authorities on this agenda
 - Engaging with local interest groups
- 5.15 Following the initial engagement, the Council would look to focus our consultation and engagement based on the themes that arise from the costed action plan e.g., Transport, Non-Residential Buildings, Energy, Natural Capital, Residential Buildings etc.
- 5.16 Ongoing consultation and engagement will be undertaken across the life of the action plan and would be factored into the costs associated with specific actions and projects within the action plan.
- 5.17 Alongside the engagement work would sit an information campaign prepared by the Council’s Communications team focussing on changes that people can make to contribute towards the net zero. These two pieces of work would then become an integral part of the whole ten-year plan.
- 5.18 The Council is already undertaking and planning a range of actions which contribute towards achieving carbon neutrality. While much of this need not be subject to consultation, it is important that the Council communicates what it is doing to promote examples of good practice to its residents and other organisations, in addition to reinforcing its commitment to becoming net carbon zero.
- 5.19 **Assessment of options**

Factor	Citizen’s Assembly (and Jury)	Stakeholder Panels and wider consultation and engagement
Method	A statistically representative group of people brought together, usually over a number of days, to learn about and reach conclusions on a topic. Assembly members are asked to make trade-offs and arrive at workable recommendations.	Broad consultation and engagement involving a large number and wide range of people in giving their views about options but not necessarily statistically representative
Outcome	Report of recommendations of Assembly (or Jury)	Range of feedback from questionnaires, events, responses to opportunities to comment on proposals
Cost	£50-60,000 (Jury would be less – possibly delivery within £30,000 budget)	Would be limited to agreed budget of £30,000

Who is involved	Statistically representative group of local people – typically an Assembly would be 50 people (Jury up to 25)	Anyone from the local community, stakeholder organisations and businesses that wants to be involved – so no upper limit
Method of delivery	Commissioned specialist consultants recruiting Assembly (or Jury) and facilitating the sessions then supporting the drafting of the report on the recommendations.	Would be project managed in-house with some capacity and expertise bought in for elements of the work.
Link to Costed Action Plan work	The draft costed action plan will form a major part of the information presented to the Assembly (or Jury) – includes information on the sources of emissions, and the cost of options for reducing these for deliberation.	The whole of the draft costed action plan can be available for consultation. Some stakeholders and individuals may wish to focus and comment on the specific aspects of the action plan most relevant to them.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

There is a budget of £30,000 available for work on consultation and engagement on the costed action plan. In order to commission a Citizen's Assembly, in accordance with the information received back from the market this provision would need to increase to circa £60,000; this would require a supplementary estimate of £30,000.

The other options can be delivered within the constraints of the agreed £30,000, by commissioning a Citizen's Jury or limiting any external work and undertaking much of the work in-house.

Whichever option is chosen, any spending required beyond the initial consultation stage for the costed action plan and future climate change work must be built into future cost models and project planning.

6.2 Legal

None.

6.3 Human Resources

All three options will have an impact on the existing work of the Policy & Communications Team. The Assembly and Jury models would have a more limited impact and can be accommodated within existing resources.

The setting up of stakeholder panels and undertaking wider consultation and engagement would have a bigger impact on the work of the team but this could be managed through the procurement of specialist support and skills met from within the agreed budget.

6.4 Risk Management

The key risks include:

- Needing to reach the whole community, particularly those who are seldom heard
- Having to sustain the momentum working with the networks once they are engaged
- Ensuring there is sufficient capacity and funding to deliver change
- Securing behavioural and organisational change

Mitigation of these risks will need to be managed through whichever engagement model is chosen.

6.5 Equality & Diversity

An equality impact assessment on the overall climate change programme has been initiated, although it is too early to assess specific issues.

The Council will need to ensure that the whole community is represented in any consultation and engagement on these matters.

The fact that climate change is happening means that there is a disproportionate effect on younger people and future generations who will have to live longer with the effects of climate change.

6.6 Climate Change

The proposed costed action plan, Citizens Assembly or other form of consultation / engagement will underpin the commitment to achieving carbon neutrality.

7 Appendices to the Report

None

Previous Consideration

None

Background Papers

Report to Cabinet 19 September 2019 – Implications of the Council Motion on Climate Emergency.