	Environment and Sustainability Panel	**Item**
		7
	29 October 2020	

Report of	**Place and Client Services**	**Author**	**Ben Plummer** ☎ **508965**
Title	**Climate Emergency and Community Engagement**		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Engaging with the community around the Council's Climate Emergency declaration will be critical to the success of increasing the sustainability and economic prosperity of the Council, and the wider borough as well as achieving the recent remit of zero net carbon by 2030. This paper sets out several methods for community engagement, including case study examples from other local authorities. The findings from the engagements will inform the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

1.2 A brief description of each method is provided below:

- Resident Consultation – Several approaches are discussed including a large scale survey, heatmapping resident views and other online approaches to gauge resident opinions on the climate emergency. A mixture of approaches can reach many participants, and conducting these online will enable participation to occur despite the covid-19 crisis. Considerations to be made will be on cost of procurement of technologies to conduct surveys and ensuring all residents can engage through online survey.

- Citizen's Assemblies – Method allows for both learning and engagement with residents and 'experts' about the climate emergency. Normally done in-person so would have to consider how to conduct online, researching how Brighton and Hove Council are facilitating this.

- Organisational Climate Change Network – Forming a network of influential organisations in Colchester to take action on climate change borough wide, possibly as a break-off group to the established One Colchester group. Work completed through this network could then be fed back to the One Colchester Strategic Board.

- Sub-group(s) to the Environment and Sustainability Panel – Similar to an organisational network, but with engagement from other interested stakeholders and groups established to guide work on the climate emergency under the Council's themes of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

1.3 All of these approaches will consider how to embed the principles of Asset Based Community Development within how they are carried out.

2. Recommended Decision

2.1 That the panel note the contents of the report and decide on an agreed method(s) to engage with the community in a Covid-19 context to gather feedback from a variety of stakeholders to inform the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

3.1 This report is to inform members of the engagement options available in order to guide a decision on the Council's resident engagement plan for sustainability and carbon reduction in order to address the climate emergency.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 Not applicable

5.   Background Information

5.1   Although the Council has engaged previously with some community groups such as Eco Colchester and Extinction Rebellion Colchester, a meaningful dialogue at scale has not been conducted on the climate emergency and that is now the next step for the Council to do. Several methods of community engagement, with examples from other Councils are set out below for consideration.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

5.2   ABCD approaches have been gaining traction in local government, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing. The main premise of ABCD is recognising that communities are full of people with a variety of skills, knowledge and motivation. It champions the idea that if communities are listened to and put front and centre of problems that matter to them, then projects and subsequent actions that are produced are more likely to be successful and sustainable in the long term.

5.3   ABCD approaches however are also relevant to tackling problems related to the climate emergency and the Council is already utilising ABCD in its projects. For example, the Clean Air for Colchester project has been using this approach to ensure the project has been co-designed with the community. Extensive community engagement was carried out at the start of this project to understand resident's awareness of air quality, but also to understand the issues that matter to them and how the project can look to tackle these. In the most recent stages of the project, an advisory group and stakeholder group have been set up, recruiting people from the community to help steer action that is carried out through the project, with the Council providing necessary support to 'facilitate'.

5.4   ABCD is the overarching framework with which many of the below community engagement approaches can be linked to.

Resident Consultation

5.5   As part of an ABCD approach, the Council needs to understand the attitudes, ideas and opinions of the community, and what matters to them. In relation to the climate emergency this could be identifying what environmental 'themes' (e.g. biodiversity, waste and recycling, energy) residents currently engage with most or that they would like to engage with more.

5.6   Consulting residents through a large-scale survey process can establish a better understanding of resident's opinions and behaviours related to climate change. This could be facilitated through a mix of online and in-person/postal questionnaires, with a good example of this done on a large scale by Leeds City Council's 'Big Leeds Climate Conversation'.

5.7   Other examples include Cheshire West Council which created an online platform for residents to share their ideas publicly with others. They hosted a survey to gauge resident opinions about the climate emergency, and also created a 'forum' where residents could share ideas about how the Council could tackle the Climate Emergency, and how themselves as residents could contribute. Residents could then 'upvote' ideas they agreed with, meaning similarities in opinions could be gauged.

5.8   Similar forms of engagement have been used by London Borough of Waltham Forest and Bristol City Council who have used the software CommonPlace, which allows residents to pinpoint problems or ideas of interest on a map. Others can then agree with the suggested ideas, and it has demonstrated wide engagement and an ability to identify key matters that are important to residents. These forms of 'crowdsourcing' engagement can be effective for reaching a wide variety of people, as they can be conducted more informally and will be more accessible for some. Tools that allow 'heatmapping' are good for understanding collective opinion, and may receive greater engagement than a survey as it will be less time-consuming for people to complete and is more 'novel'.

5.9   Another form of consultation that is more 'interactive' for the community is participatory budgeting approaches. Traditionally these approaches are focussed around asking people how they would decide to allocate a monetary budget to spend on local issues, therefore understanding the issues that matter most to them. Similar tools have been developed around this approach to decide priorities on particular issues. For example, Redbridge Council, Glasgow City Council and Bristol City Council have all used this kind of method to assess resident priorities for issues around climate change and transport. Within these tools, there is the opportunity for residents to both learn about each of the actions they could take, but to also understand the trade-offs within decision making (by being set to a 'budget'). Disadvantages of this method are that they tend to be conducted online (which can be exclusive to some members of the community), they can be expensive to procure and you may struggle to reach residents beyond those that are concerned about the environment as they may perceive the tool to be too 'specialist' for them.

5.10   For all of the above approaches, a balance between online and in-person engagement would have to be sought, considering the restraints covid-19 puts on in-person interaction. However, the Council will seek to ensure that residents will be given support to access services digitally through the alliance team and other partners.

Citizen's Assemblies/People's Juries

5.11   A specific form of community engagement are Citizen's Assemblies and People's Juries. They have become increasingly common in recent years, especially in relation to climate change. The general format is that a group of around 30-50 people are selected from a larger invite pool as 'representative' of the population in an area, and are invited to attend a series of workshops to debate a broad question. Related to this question, 'expert' or 'professional' speakers are typically brought in to provide the assembly with some background information and questions to discuss key topics related to the broad question. The group then debate between themselves about what they have heard and come up with recommendations to answer the original question.

5.12   The most prominent example of this method, related to climate change, is 'Climate Assembly UK', the citizen assembly created by the UK government to answer the question 'How should the UK meet its target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050?'. 108 representative members of the UK population were brought together to debate this question, hearing from several speakers on topics such as 'how we travel', 'what we buy' and 'in the home'.

5.13   Citizen's assemblies have also been conducted at local authority level in relation to the climate emergency, with examples from Lancaster, Oxford, Leeds, Newham and many more. Previously, Extinction Rebellion Colchester ran a People's Assembly in August 2019, which generated ideas that were then brought to the Council.

5.14   Citizen's assemblies are effective at both increasing resident understanding of issues that face them and enabling them to voice their thoughts and concerns. This form of engagement can provide lots of qualitative feedback so that Council's can understand in detail what matters to residents the most. It also enables you to hear from a wide variety of people, not just those who are extremely concerned about the issue being debated.

5.15   A potential downside of citizen assemblies is that they can be time consuming to run, and costly compared to other engagement approaches. This approach also normally requires face to face engagement for brainstorming sessions. However, these are not impossible to facilitate online, as shown by Climate Assembly UK, and the citizens assembly Brighton and Hove City Council are currently running during Covid-19. The Council could learn from these examples on how well each event gained community views and compare to other approaches available.

Organisational Climate Change Network

5.16   One form of engagement that could be used to reach many stakeholders and influential organisations is by setting up a sub-group(s) of organisations that discuss tackling climate change in Colchester borough-wide. It is known that many organisations in the borough are already taking action on climate change, but it could be effective to bring them altogether to tackle climate change and come up with joint solutions that create synergies and mutually beneficial outcomes.

5.17   Examples of this kind of model from UK councils include Leeds Climate Commission, Croydon Climate Commission and Lincoln Climate Commission amongst others. Leeds Climate Commission has been going the longest, and the member organisations have been able to share learning and best practice effectively to tackle climate change. Innovations may arise through joining up of different sectors and disciplines across the Borough.

5.18   Similar networks or groups already exist in Colchester, for example the One Colchester group, that is made up of several large organisations within Colchester, such as the University of Essex, Colchester Garrison, Community 360 and many more, to help empower the community to tackle issues affecting them. The group has been effective at doing this, and is playing a vital role in helping to deliver work that is part of the 'Communities cell' of the Council's recovery programme, such as ensuring residents are safe and have access to food, medicines etc. Eco Colchester also co-ordinate an informal social media network of key local environmental organisations to share and debate different actions related to tackling climate change.

5.19   Therefore, a proposed model for engagement here is that a sub-group to the existing One Colchester is set up to debate and create joint solutions to tackle climate change across the borough called the One Colchester Climate Change Network. The group already provides a platform for this engagement to occur, and contains a diverse range of organisations, meaning engagement and collaboration can be productive. The group would not be accountable to the Environment and Sustainability Panel, but instead to the One Colchester Strategic Board of which the Council is a member. This offers the CBC real value in that agreed actions will have buy in, be sustainable and little cost will be associated to administering any surveys or other methods listed above.

Sub-group to the Environment and Sustainability Panel

5.20   An alternative, but similar idea to the One Colchester Climate Change Network is creating a sub-group to the Environment and Sustainability Panel. The group could be set up to discuss the Council's work on the climate emergency, and relevant partners, experts and individuals could be invited to contribute to discussion.

5.21   A key difference between this approach and the One Colchester Climate Change Network would be that the Environment and Sustainability Panel would lead the sub-group, and work done by the group would feed into the Panel. The cost implication here is that CBC would be required to organise, host (online) and facilitate the sessions. There is a risk also of sending the message that the Council would like to lead instead of help to facilitate community driven responses. To combat this, the Council could bring organisations and stakeholders together around themed workshops, and play an 'observer' role in the discussions.

6.   **Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

6.1   Although community engagement attempts to give a voice to the community and naturally aims to be 'inclusive', some methods can unintentionally exclude others from the discussion. Different approaches will impact who and how people can participate and input into Council decision making around climate change.

6.2   Any approach(es) that the Council takes to engage with the community should consider the best ways that residents can be involved in contributing their thoughts around the Council's Climate Emergency declaration. As such, targeting invitation into sub-groups offers a means to balance out issues of representation from online platforms. A combination of online and sub-group/expert engagement can ensure that different segments of society are included, considering different groups (i.e. age, gender, ethnic, religious and economic status).

7.   **Strategic Plan References**

7.1   This piece of work relates strongly to two themes of the Strategic Plan, Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability, and Creating safe, healthy and active communities.

8.   **Consultation**

8.1   There are no consultation implications.

9.   **Publicity Considerations**

9.1   There are no publicity implications.

10.   **Financial implications**

10.1   Each of the different forms of community engagement will have various costs associated with them. The costs of these approaches will have to be considered and a budget decided for them appropriately.

11. Community Safety Implications

11.1   There are no Community Safety implications at this stage.

12. Health and Safety Implications

12.1   Any face to face engagement approaches that are taken will have to follow Government guidelines to ensure the health of participants is protected.

13. Risk Management Implications

13.1   There are no Risk Management implications.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

14.1   This piece will help drive forward work on the climate emergency, within the Council and the borough. Ultimately, the hope will be that through different forms of community engagement we will be able to engage, bring together and hear from a range of individuals around the topic of climate change. Through engagement and collective action, we can get more people acting in an environmentally responsible manner in the Council and the borough, contributing to tackling climate change and reducing carbon emissions.