

## **Report of the Chair of Climate Change Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

### **Introduction**

1. Our first meeting was in September 2019 and it was the first time this committee had ever met. As a new committee, it took some time to bed in our aims and objectives and work out the approach that was necessary for us to be effective. It was evident from our first meeting that the public interest and participation in this committee was going to be strong and in our first four meetings we have had no less than 22 public speakers.
2. This committee is unique in a traditional scrutiny sense and is more naturally positioned to have a focus on policy and future action. Below is a brief description of the meetings that we have had so far and our hopes for the rest of the municipal year.

### **Meetings of the Committee**

3. The focus of our first meeting was to confirm our Terms of Reference, our approach to working and to identify our priorities. The overwhelming theme to public participation was that the people who spoke wanted to see action and wanted to see things delivered. We agreed that we would theme future meetings of the committee, invite guest speakers who could help us understand, what in most cases are complicated topics, and then make recommendations to the Executive so that action could be instigated.
4. The theme of our October meeting was to establish a baseline, both in terms of understanding the statistics and the position that we were in but also to understand what the Council activity in this area looked like. With that in mind, we received a report from the Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change on current activity and her ambition for the future, which was highly informative and helped focus our future

direction. In addition, the committee received a presentation from the Head of Energy and Sustainability at West Yorkshire Combined Authority on regional climate change activity.

5. Our November meeting of the committee saw guests from First Group and Nestle join a round table discussion on operating zero-carbon fleets and the challenges that this poses. Both our guests and Council officers provided interesting perspectives on this challenge. We also received a report from Mike Bonsall, the Chair of One Planet York, to discuss their future as an independent entity and his hopes for the future of the organisation. Finally, the committee unanimously agreed the co-option of two positions for members of the public to join the committee. The first was for Terry Smithson from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, it was felt as though Terry's knowledge and input on all things climate change but in particular bio-diversity, would be a real asset. The second position was for four young people from the Youth Strike 4 Climate, who the committee felt would add an invaluable voice to the committee, representing the younger members of society. The four young people will rotate their attendance at our meetings.
6. In December, our focus turned to Carbon Budgeting and we were delighted to welcome experts from the Stockholm Environment Institute, Anthesis and the Carbon Disclosure Project to help aid our discussions. Our discussion proved fruitful and the committee agreed to make a recommendation to the Executive at the meeting asking for a commitment to provide a Carbon Budgeting expert and team of officers to co-ordinate work around ensuring that York can be carbon neutral by 2030. The committee also agreed to refer to Full Council, a refreshing of York's commitment to the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. This was agreed at committee and subsequently agreed at Full Council also. In response to the CSMC request that all scrutiny committees look into individual areas of poverty, we also received a scoping report for a review into fuel poverty and accessible transport for which we will receive a feasibility report at our next meeting.
7. In terms of process, the committee has struggled because of a lack of support from within the directorates. We have had no access to a sustainability officer and have had to rely on non-specialist help from within democratic services to produce reports. This is unsatisfactory. Given the importance of climate change, this needs to be addressed with some urgency. We not only need detailed reports from officers on the council's

current practice in the many areas of activity that impact on climate change, we also need reports that enable us to compare the Council's approach with best practice in other local authorities in order to properly understand how others are tackling the challenge of creating a zero carbon future and what opportunities exist for our own Council to do better.

### **Our hopes for the rest of the year**

8. Assuming that the executive accepts our recommendation to transform the Council's ability to manage the process of developing and delivering a zero carbon future, by appointing a serious team with carbon budgeting expertise, we would expect that the committee's work and the response from the directorates to improve significantly in the months ahead. We are under no illusion that responding to the climate emergency requires a step change from all areas of the council. Our invited experts have made it clear that we can count on a lot of help and support, from local experts and businesses and from a variety of national initiatives.
9. In the months ahead we will be looking at and making recommendations to the Executive on a variety of topics including planning, biodiversity, and divestment from fossil fuels.

***Cllr Christian Vassie, Chair***