

**Environment and
Sustainable Communities
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**



21 July 2023

**Overview and Scrutiny
Response to the Climate and
Emergency Response Plan 2
Workshop**

Report of Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ESCOSC) with the Overview and Scrutiny response from the Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP) 2 Workshop for their information.

Executive summary

- 2 Members of ESCOSC agreed when determining their work programme for 2022/23 that they wanted to have an opportunity to discuss and feed into the future development of CERP2. A workshop event was arranged to allow members the opportunity to undertake focused group work in relation to the various sections included within CERP 2.
- 3 In discussion with the Chair and Vice Chair regarding the importance of CERP2 it was agreed that the workshop would be open to all Overview and Scrutiny and their comments and suggestions from the event would be formulated into an Overview and Scrutiny response which would be used to inform the future development of the CERP.
- 4 An Overview and Scrutiny response was sent to the service following sign off by the Chair and Vice Chair of ESCOSC and is attached at Appendix 2 for members information.

Recommendations

- 5 That Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive and note for their information the Overview and Scrutiny response as attached at Appendix 2.

Background

- 6 At its meeting on 22 July 2022 ESCOSC agreed its work programme for 2022/2023, included within the work programme was a workshop for members to discuss and feed into the further development of CERP 2.
- 7 Arrangements were made with the Low Carbon Team in relation to the various sections of CERP2 that would be discussed and considered during the focused group work and appropriate colleagues were approached to facilitate discussion and to take note of member's comments.
- 8 The workshop took place on 27 March 2023 and covered six areas of the CERP:
 - Education and Engagement
 - Heat Decarbonisation
 - Transport and Connectivity
 - Natural Environment (including agriculture)
 - Waste and Scope 3 Emissions
 - Adaptations
- 9 Following the workshop taking place comments made relating to each of the group discussions were collated and formed into an Overview and Scrutiny response which was signed off by the Chair and Vice Chair of ESCOSC before it was sent to the service to aid them in the further development of the CERP2.
- 10 The response is appended to this report at Appendix 2 for your information.

Conclusion

- 11 Members comments and suggestions from each group area have been forwarded to the service and will assist with the future development of CERP2 and beyond.

Background papers

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Comments and suggestions can be found in appendix 2

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable

Member Comments and Suggestions from CERP Workshop –

27 March 2023

Group 1: Education & Engagement

(1) Members felt that the climate change messages needed to be embedded into all Council communications and ensure that these messages covered the whole of the county.

(2) Consideration should be given to engagement with hard to reach groups, disinterested people and with those people who do not use social media. Specific mention was given to engaging with older residents on climate change.

(3) Suggested that digital screens and platforms are used in the county to show 'climate friendly' messages.

(4) Local engagement is needed to emphasise what is happening in the local area highlighting the benefits to the people and area and utilising parish councils, AAPs and local groups. It is important that young people and youth groups are involved in any engagement processes.

(5) Councillors need information sheets to help them to engage on climate change issues and to forward to interested groups/individuals. A member information hub/one stop shop that could be utilised by members that would include independent information on Electric Vehicles; insulation; trusted trader schemes and climate change.

(6) The Council should lead by example and emphasise/promote all projects/successes whether large or small to encourage people to make small changes.

(7) Suggestion that there is a Climate Change Champion.

(8) Engage with children and young people via schools or groups getting them involved in practical activities to benefit climate change.

(9) Practical school engagement in energy saving such as reduction in energy consumption in school, promotion of the walking and using the bus to get to school and encourage schools to sign up for this, deter parents from allowing engines to idle outside schools. Members felt that deterring engine idling should be a priority.

(10) Need to promote the benefits of wild flowering and tree planting to residents.

(11) Establish a mobile energy advisory service.

Group 2: Heat and Decarbonisation

(1) Members raised concerns at the eligibility and criteria of residents accessing green energy grants and for commercial and public sector properties too and noted that academisation of schools was an issue that impacted on the retrofit of school buildings. More work needs to be undertaken around decarbonisation priorities taking into account schools and academisation possibility.

(2) There is a need to focus on heat loss and heat generation equally.

(3) In relation to new government funding for energy funding DCC had submitted bids but often there were issues relating to staffing and capacity as to what DCC could achieve. Where funding was related to staff posts it was highlighted that recruitment could be an issue in getting/retaining the right people. To deliver on our plans we need increased staffing and skills.

(4) Members discussed enforcement of standards, relating to what was currently in place and how from 2025 standards would be increased.

(5) There is a need to lobby for longer term, more strategic funding.

(6) The importance of communicating the benefits of green energy was important to young people in schools but also the wider community. Members suggested that Councillors could help and events at local community centres/groups could be beneficial, Officers noted previous schemes such as "Durham Energy Friends".

(7) Members discussed the merits of retrofit verses replace and of cases where this had led to the venues no longer being eligible for further funding due to the efficiency of the equipment giving venues a better ECP rating. However, examples were also given where payback time had reduced making the works even more economical. They noted that an important element to consider was embodied carbon already in existing structures and that retrofitting is therefore often a good solution for non-residential buildings too. Members highlighted that many new build developments the focus was the architecture rather than energy efficiency and, in some properties, this had a greenhouse effect, whereby a cost was incurred in terms of cooling the property.

(8) Members noted that more people were trained to required standards in energy efficiency and retrofit works and that several Registered Provider

partners now were certified contractors, and it would be good to have such certified contractors internal to DCC.

(9) Funding needs to be available for installer/retrofit co-ordinator training to ensure that training is available locally.

(10) Members considered energy efficiency and green energy and suggested that this was of high importance and should be supported in terms of appropriate training, adequate resources and have the right teams in place to give the capacity to deliver. Members noted the importance, especially in a cost of living crisis, of educating people on why such energy efficiency/green energy measures were needed, but also how new technology can be used.

(11) Members discussed new technologies and noted the example of increased and upgraded electrical substations linked with offshore wind at Jade Business Park. Members noted that new technologies such as mine water heating being used in Seaham Garden Village.

(12) Members highlighted that there may be spend to save advantages in relation to Leisure Centres which were DCC's biggest emitters and costly to run.

Group 3: Transport and Connectivity

(1) Members sort clarification on the Council's plans on the introduction of larger Electric Vehicles (EVs), specifically bin wagons. Members suggested that there was an opportunity and need to trial larger EVs within the Council's fleet and Members noted the challenges that exist in relation to the size of the County and the lack of charging facilities and battery charging sites.

(2) Members discussed how to encourage businesses, partners and wider community to increase investment in EVs.

(3) Members commended the authority on having in excess of 100 charging points across the county but stressed there was a need for the authority to look at the location of the charging points and where there were gaps in provision.

(4) Members discussed the timeliness of the ban on sales of new cars using fossil fuels, the accessibility of hybrid vehicles and the shift to EV buses. Also discussed was the affordability of EVs, and the negative impact this could have in a shift to cleaner vehicles.

(5) Concerns were raised by Members in regard to the suitability of some of the housing stock in the county in developing suitable EV charging points particularly amongst terraced properties.

(6) As the local planning authority better promotion is required of alternative energy/fuel solutions and strategic oversight is key and should be balanced against the cost of not addressing climate change/carbon reduction.

(7) The rurality of County Durham was highlighted by Members, and they suggested that this could be a potential deterrent to persuading private car users to public transport or active travel.

(8) Members highlighted the air quality management plan aimed at reducing air pollution and suggested a shift to cleaner transport and active travel.

(9) Carbon emissions were considered to be the key issue which needed to be reduced and Members questioned how this could be achieved and suggested that a key area in achieving this was to move private car owners out of their vehicles and onto public transport and/or active travel whilst also recognising the difficulty in achieving this.

(10) Members discussed the importance of car share schemes and an accompanying infrastructure to promote it especially in terms of improving access to employment.

(11) Members suggested that low-cost car parking and free parking across the county was actively encouraging car use.

(12) Members acknowledged the importance of an effective public transport network to ensure connectivity and accessibility for employment, social and leisure purposes. They also recognised the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on public transport by way of loss of income and expressed concerns at driver shortages and the impact this had on sustainability of routes and reliability of services.

(13) Members referred to the devolution deal and the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and the potential to lead to improvements such as cleaner greener vehicles and ticket subsidies.

(14) Members echoed concerns raised by the public regarding the availability and reliability of a local bus service. Members questioned how to get public transport to poorer and deprived areas that had less economically viable routes.

(15) Members reiterated concerns around the reliability of services and certain areas of the county being served by older less reliable fleet. there was a suggestion that the use of BSIP funding to subsidise bus ticket prices was not necessarily the best use of this resource but that resources should be targeted to deliver better vehicles.

(16) Members suggested that a transport survey was needed to identify key issues regarding public transport and connectivity whilst acknowledging that

this may prove complex because of the ongoing conversations around devolution.

(17) The greatest challenge was identified as getting car drivers to make the shift to public transport or active travel.

(18) Members sort clarity as to whether bus operators had been involved in the sign up to the County Durham COP initiative and associated pledge and if they had not why was this the case.

(19) Reference was made to footpath connectivity and the need for investment in this area to make or develop safe walking routes particularly at night. Members also discussed the development of local cycling walking improvement plans across the 12 main town centres in County Durham was a positive step forward and maybe improved further should access to devolution resources be identified.

(20) The development of cycling routes and the importance of making these as safe as possible for users was expressed alongside the need for associated education of road users around cycle safety.

(21) Concerns were raised concerning connectivity challenges and underperformance across County Durham especially in rural areas – this is a key requirement for the changes in working habits/flexible home working and the absence of investment in those areas deemed not to be commercially viable. Members asked what do we do to change this or encourage commercial providers to invest in wider infrastructure?

(22) Further concern was raised that public sector funding investments for digital network infrastructure (as part of Project Gigabit) is determined by central government.

(23) Members discussed the viability of using IT servers to increase energy/heat facilities such as leisure centres/factory/business units and asked how can this be explored/developed?

(24) In discussing the improvements needed to broadband, Members referenced the often negative reaction made by the public to the installation of mobile phone masts, telegraph poles or associated network infrastructure. Members suggested that more work could be done to promote the need for this emerging technology, particularly in supporting people who work from home or in developing ICT hubs in community venues/facilities.

(25) The need for Community IT hubs which provided access to technology to all the Members of the population was highlighted and the potential ability to utilise existing community facilities to promote these services. This would improve social networking and demystify information technology amongst certain groups whilst also providing an opportunity to reduce social isolation.

(26) Members referenced the need to coordinate works between the council and infrastructure providers particularly in terms of Streetworks and any required reinstatement works.

(27) There was a suggestion made that more well-established communication companies were better at public engagement, consultation, and communication due to the importance they place on organisational and product reputation.

(28) Communications and engagement with the public is critical. There is a need to improve education among the older generation in communities (65yrs+) as the younger generation are by and large sighted on the CERP issues. Suggestions were made to develop more locally based CERP to provide a more targeted and bespoke approach.

(29) It was expressed that a real worry was it would be the same 15% of areas of County Durham that are without effective broadband; public transport; employment opportunities; cleaner and more carbon efficient developments.

Group 4: Natural Environment (including agriculture)

(1) Members acknowledged that it was difficult for farmers to make a profit and suggested that farming subsidies or grants should be accessible.

(2) Members also suggested that solar panels could be placed on areas of poor agricultural land to reduce energy costs. Members suggested that it was essential for farmers to diversify their land.

(3) Members noted the Potential Greenspace Project, which supports regenerative agriculture and helps farmers to find alternative ways to generate income. Members were advised that the project was awaiting a funding bid decision.

(4) In relation to tenant farmers, how do we influence these groups to adapt regenerative practises going forward.

(5) Recognised that engagement with landowners is vital and this needs to feed into the LNRS.

(6) Members suggested the benefit of crop rotation for land and that the leasing of Council land needs to be more diverse. In relation to tenant farmers, Members suggested that it was important to influence groups to adopt regenerative practices.

(7) Members highlighted the importance of hedgerows and suggested that grants for the replanting of hedgerows would be useful, and that regular maintenance of hedgerows was key to their longevity. Members suggested that hedgerow and wild meadow creation were important to the restoration of

natural wildlife. Members emphasised Durham Hedgerow Partnership was a success and grants were available and straight forward.

(8) Members highlighted the importance of connecting with communities at a local level. There is a need to link local people to local schemes and encourage community managed projects.

(9) Members emphasised the importance of education in relation to the natural environment and suggested that this should start as early as possible to ensure the next generate were aware. Members expressed that the importance of ensuring public understanding of the connection between the natural environment, the air we breathe and the survival of the planet. If Members helped residents to understand this, it may help promote engagement and encourage residents to take local issues more seriously.

(10) Members highlighted challenges with community engagement and support from parish councils regarding tree planting, particularly regarding health and safety issues.

(11) Members suggested Climate County Durham website was regularly updated in line with the CERP and champion's local action. An example was given regarding Great Aycliffe Town Council who had not mown land and instead allowed wildflowers to grow.

(12) Members highlighted that land not maintained is met with resistance from local people. Members added that whilst the public were aware of the benefits of tree planting and understand the role of trees in carbon sequestration, they were often had issues with tree planting locations. Members suggested that there was a need to change the public perceptions to support tree planting and diverse grasslands and not mowing land.

(13) Members were advised of a successful tree planting programme which plants 10,000 trees per AAP. Schools are involved in planting the trees and benefit from a combined education package. An example was given - millions of trees planted in an area but 80% had died within one year due to poor management, questioned how woodland areas cared for. It was noted that the Community Forest Partnership have grants available to help with maintenance. The latest year has been bad in terms of drought and watering trees is not built into maintenance. It was further noted that woodlands have been included in the woodland improvement grant which includes five years funding to manage woodlands and makes them more carbon efficient. Part of the management includes thinning the woodlands, but complaints are often received from residents when this occurs.

(14) Members advised that parish councils whilst wanting to look after their woodland areas were sometimes reluctant to take this area of work on due to concerns with insurance. It was noted that Durham Woodland Revival Project

helps communities manage their own woodlands independently and a new model has recently been agreed with a third sector and will help address concerns with liability and insurance.

(15) Great Aycliffe Town Council plant trees on a regular basis and have adopted the same policy as Durham where if a tree is removed, 3 trees are subsequently planted.

(16) In terms of GEO offsetting, it was noted that the next local plan would be shaped by an updated GI strategy and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy LNRS.

(17) Members suggested that Northumbrian Water should consider placing solar panels on reservoirs. Although it was noted by Members that there were issues with this suggestion and solar panels on land with animal grazing was more beneficial.

(18) In relation to carbon sequestration, Members emphasised that this had to be to scale and suggested that elimination of peat and peatlands restoration was for overall carbon reduction and should be a priority for the Council.

(19) Members noted that local people understand that trees are beneficial for nature and carbon sequestration but often have a problem with the locations in which they are planted. It was suggested that public access to woodland should be considered, and an example was given in relation to dog walkers.

(20) Members expressed that a full understanding of land law was needed and although funding was available a full understanding of the land hold was currently not known. Member's local knowledge was important and should be encouraged. They understand the best use of their land and should be encouraged to feed this information back.

(21) Members identified that a mechanism was needed to evaluate the best use for land. It was noted that that this was a CERP action which involved a land mapping exercise to determine how land should be used. However, it was noted that in terms of mapping, ultimately it was whether the landowner wanted to do this on their land. The CERP cannot be delivered independently and relies on engagement from landowners.

(22) Members noted that DCC own a great deal of land and suggested DCC had an opportunity to carry out strategic interventions to improve biodiversity and wildlife, to lead by example.

(23) Members referred to the A68 Corridor Project and noted that whilst this area had the greatest capacity for large scale woodland it was not successful

in obtaining funding, however there were more funding pots currently available, and the project could be reconsidered.

(24) In relation to the ecological emergency, Members suggested that this should be viewed as an opportunity.

(25) Members highlighted bee keeping in urban areas and suggested strategic locations for intervention for pollinators and engaging with Clean and Green regarding connectivity.

(26) It was suggested that the County Durham Community Foundation was a possible source of funding to help tidy up parts of County Durham.

(27) Members highlighted cemeteries and cremation and questioned how environmentally friendly cemeteries were and if cremation should be encouraged and they noted that scattering of ashes impacted on soil health. Member suggested that consideration should be given to the grounds maintenance of cemeteries as there was a potential for ecological gains.

(28) Members noted there was currently consideration of a cremation package where carbon credits could be purchased.

(29) Members suggested that DCC could generate income through the planning process by encouraging developers to pay the Council to carry out the relevant works on their land to achieve biodiversity net gains.

(30) Members highlighted that areas within the County could be developed to encourage better use by people/local communities and to prevent anti-social behaviour. It was advised that a targeted approach for development could be used if areas of the County were identified as a concern.

(31) Members considered waste management and suggested that compost which is made from green collections should be utilised to grow flowers for County Durham rather than buying them in and any flowers that are removed should be recycled. It was noted that the compost from green collections was currently used as a soil improver but that there were issues with this.

Group 5: Waste and Scope Three Emissions

(1) Members acknowledged that Scope 3 was mentioned in CERP2 but suggested there was a need to expand this in CERP3 by looking at how carbon emissions could be measured in relation to investments and the grey fleet.

(2) Members suggested that consideration was needed as to how to encourage staff to reduce car usage (grey fleet). Members put forward

suggestions of better facilities for staff such as changing, showering and bike storage to encourage active travel.

(3) Members advised there was a need to focus on public transport provision specifically buses to ensure there was reliable provision across the whole of the county to meet the needs of local communities.

(4) Referring to waste Members suggested that consideration should be given to conducting analysis of carbon emissions resulting from waste incineration, which produces mostly carbon dioxide. Members also suggested that information should be provided on the reduction of carbon emissions achieved through recycling rates of 40% as this would give a full picture.

(5) Members felt there was a need for a tool kit to be developed for Members, AAPs and staff who work in the community to get key messages out to residents in relation to the waste services provided, how to bin waste correctly and where to get advice.

(6) Members requested training or support to assist them in their role as community leaders to enable them to communicate key messages regarding waste management and the CERP in their local communities.

(7) Members advised that it was difficult for local communities to connect local issues to the bigger picture and stressed that there was a continued need to promote key messages through local community groups such as residents' groups, PAC meetings and AAP meetings.

(8) Members felt there was a need to promote what DCC was doing and offering in relation to services and gave an example of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Scheme (WEEE). Consideration was needed as to how this scheme and other schemes/service provision could be promoted in local communities.

(9) Members highlighted the composting scheme and suggested this was another good scheme that should be fully promoted, and that consideration should be given to selling compost to the public. Members reiterated that consideration should be given to selling compost and investigate developing local markets for the waste products we produce.

(10) Members suggested that DCC develop services as a commercial product for the use of other local councils, and gave an example as DCC's flower growing operations, to deliver a local alternative for Town and Parish councils. Need to examine the whole lifecycle analysis of local markets.

(11) In relation to refuse collection vehicles Members noted that currently there was only one electric vehicle with the remainder of refuse collection vehicles using diesel. It was suggested that this should be kept under review

in relation to what alternatives were available to reduce carbon emissions from this type of vehicles.

(12) In discussing carbon offsetting, Members suggested that it should be ensured that the benefits from such schemes go to County Durham projects and added that these schemes should be implemented through the procurement process.

(13) Members highlighted the resource efficiency and waste reduction of Government's Environment Act 2021, including the possible introduction of weekly food waste collections, which will increase the amount of waste miles and carbon footprint. Members suggested that work would need to be undertaken to qualify this further in relation to the carbon impact.

(14) It was highlighted that DCC was a big spender and as such had leverage to influence suppliers through social value and climate change and Members suggested the need to continue to expand the use of themes, outcomes measures (TOMs) in the procurement process.

(15) Members advised that there was a need to recognise the good practice and success which was taking place within procurement with the use of Contract Procedural Rules, Priority Environmental Procurements (PEPs), Themes, Outcomes and Measures (TOMs) and a Procurement Policy Note requiring suppliers bidding for a contract over £5m to have a Carbon Reduction Plan to achieve Net Zero by 2050. It was felt that this good practice should be shared with other DCC services such as planning to determine what requirements can be embedded into their infrastructure to ensure the continued reduction of scope 3 emissions.

(16) Members suggested that procurement needs to continue to work with Business Durham to ensure that local businesses are on board with DCC procurement requirements to ensure they are not behind.

Group 6: Adaptations

(1) Members discussed the importance of flood elevation schemes such as the work which had taken place a Cong Burn at Chester Le Street.

(2) Members highlighted the availability of information regarding local flood risk. National flood risk maps were available online which could show risk, by post code, including risk of flooding from rivers, coastal water and rainfall. River flooding in the county is from catchment wide flood events, causing rivers to burst their banks.

(3) Members raised concerns regarding the stripping of vegetation or over grazing, which can lead to an increased risk of flooding and the importance of work on natural flood management measures with landowners.

(4) Members noted that work had taken place with farmers and landowners on natural flood management systems, which often included simple but effective measures such as erecting fences and highlighted that importance of the continuation of this work. Members recognised that clarifying land ownership was often an issue.

(5) Members were made aware of Northumbria Integrated Drainage Partnership which Durham is part of, the partnership works with the Environment Agency and Northumbrian Water on catchment studies to reduce risk of flooding. Conducts full integrated modelling and partners collaborate to identify risk and find solutions.

(6) Members highlighted that small issues in residential areas could cause flooding such as badly fitted drain covers, frequency of gully cleaning, repairs and damage caused by public utilities and tree roots.

(7) Members referred to the scope of the hydro power scheme at Freeman's Reach in Durham City and enquired if there were other viable locations within the county for similar schemes.

(8) Members discussed the County Durham Plan, planning policy and the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) to manage excess rainfall. Specific mention was made to the South Stanley SUDS project to investigate retrofitting SUDS and the importance of the ability to evidence that schemes work, in order to secure funding. It was highlighted that this was partnership working with both Teesside and Northumbria Universities.

(9) Members learned of engagement work that had taken place with partner organisations such as the Resilience Forum and the Environment Agency to encourage communities to create local plans. Templates for emergency plans were available and an online resource was being developed. Members noted that following storm Arwen the workload had increased.

(10) Members referenced storm Arwen and advised that in emergencies it was not clear to the public who was responsible or who they should contact. Members suggested that improvements could be made in relation to partnership working and specifically response times such as during power outages. Further work needs to be undertaken with partners.

(11) Following storm Arwen, Members sought confirmation that community emergency plans were being developed and highlighted the need to ensure that community emergency plans are communicated.

(12) Members highlighted the use of mine water to heat properties at Seaham Garden Village.

(13) Members suggested that consideration be given to the types of trees that were planted as we adapt to climate change and suggested that the Ecology Team may be able to provide information on this.