

Agenda item 5

For decision - Frome Town Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan

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Summary

In December 2018 Frome Town Council declared a 'climate emergency' and committed to going carbon neutral by 2030. Whilst progress has already been made we now need a plan which outlines the practical steps needed to meet these ambitious targets. For the plan to be effective we also need wider community engagement and support. It is therefore proposed that Frome Town Council seeks external funding for a Citizens' Assembly to engage with the wider community and get input and traction into the climate emergency plan. This will inform a series of panel meetings linking with the community and professional expertise to explore and develop specific community-supported actions and policies. The draft plan will be circulated at Council on 22nd January 2020.

Context

Frome Town Council has already done a lot of work around the health, environmental and economic benefits of switching away from fossil fuels and how this could be achieved. We now need a plan that sets out the practical steps, policies and timelines to enable the town to meet its climate emergency targets and to maximise the health, wellbeing and economic impacts of these activities.

As well as outlining actions needed at council and community level the report will also highlight key actions needed by stakeholders including district, county and national government. Mendip and Somerset have already expressed an interest in being involved in this process. The benefits to the local community, for example, through reduced air pollution, reduced fuel poverty and more affordable energy bills will be highlighted throughout.

Community support for this plan is vital and it is also important to link with and involve local expertise. It is therefore proposed that Frome Town Council holds a Citizens' Assembly followed by a series of climate emergency panel meetings which will inform both the report and the priorities for this area of work.

The value of doing a Citizens' Assembly is in gathering the insights and ideas of the wider community to build a collective base for action, working from the ground up and maximising engagement in solutions. However, the Citizens' Assembly is contingent on external funding being secured. If this doesn't happen, the panels and report will be developed sooner and we will explore other opportunities for holding a Citizens' Assembly in the longer term.

For more information on the case for a Citizens' Assembly for Climate Change, see [Appendix 6.1](#).

Citizens' Assembly

A Citizens' Assembly involves engaging with a demographically representative group of citizens to assess evidence, debate and agree action on a specific question which then informs council policy.

For the past 8 years Frome Town Council has been at the cutting edge of both democracy and sustainability. So far only five councils in the UK have announced plans to hold Citizens' Assemblies and none of these are at Town Council level. By being amongst the first communities in the country to embrace this approach to public engagement in relation to climate change will put us in a good position to secure funding as an exemplar.

It is proposed that Frome's Citizens' Assembly is held over three days in October 2019 to address a key question such as 'what should Frome's priorities be for climate action'. Citizens' Assembly experts will help to refine the question to ensure it has maximum engagement and impact.

Participants will be picked by a recognised process called sortition to ensure there is a representative sample of the town and will be offered a financial incentive to minimise barriers to participation. We will work with experts who have held successful Citizens' Assemblies to ensure the process is as engaging and useful as possible.

The Citizens' Assembly will not only give us a better understanding of the town's viewpoints and priorities, it will significantly raise the profile of the issue and the health and economic benefits of moving away from fossil fuels. Participants will influence their community and peers and will also be able to represent the town in the media and at district and county level as a genuinely representative sample of the town's population.

The timescale for the assembly is contingent on securing external funding to cover costs.

Climate Emergency Panel

After the Citizens' Assembly it is proposed that Frome Town Council convenes a climate emergency panel in November. The panel's meetings will further increase engagement and participation. We will actively seek to engage young people in this process. Based on the priorities identified by the Citizens' Assembly, the panel's meetings will explore in more detail what practical action is needed, what the benefits to local communities are and how actions can be implemented by different stakeholders to reach the town's targets. The meetings will involve local experts who will set the context, as well as the wider community. Indicative panel themes could be:

Panel meeting 1: our homes and buildings and how we can reduce energy demands in the town.

Panel meeting 2: energy and how we can enable clean energy generation in Frome.

Panel meeting 3: how we can reduce the impacts of transport.

Panel meeting 4: honing down ideas, developing practical steps, actions and timelines.

Priorities, ideas and action points from the assembly and panel meetings will inform the climate emergency plan. This will be drafted by Anna Francis and reviewed by Climate Works

to ensure that it is realistic and achievable. The final report will be brought to Council for approval on 22nd January.

If funding is not secured for the assembly the panel meetings could happen in September / October, with a draft action plan submitted in November. Panels could subsequently be held in Mendip and Somerset to inform climate emergency plans in these areas too.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Frome holds a Citizen's Assembly to inform our climate emergency work and increase engagement and profile – this is contingent on securing external funding. Assuming this happens, the Assembly will feed into four climate emergency panel meetings focussing on specific, practical actions needed to achieve the town's zero carbon targets. The resultant draft report will be presented at Council on 22nd January for comments, revision and approval.