

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL ON CLIMATE CHANGE

We'll be done talking about Manchester City Council soon- we promise- but unfortunately, we need to talk about their record on climate change.

Manchester City Council started making noises about “the environment” in the early 1990s, after winning the right to hold an international conference that was to be a follow-up to the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. They cobbled together a list of things they were already doing/planning to do anyway and rebranded these as “green” and “eco.” That habit has continued.

The City Council then basically decided that it didn't like the outcome of citizen involvement in environmental policymaking because people kept saying things like “airports should be taxed/not expanded.” The physical campaign against a second runway helped sour relations further (Manchester City Council then owned 55.5% of the Airport – that's now down to 35.5%).

From the early 2000s there were various plans and boasts, but climate change policy only really kicked in 2008. In response to a dreadful “Call to Action”, activists wrote a “Call to Real Action.” These combined and extended lead to the creation of the first “Manchester Climate Change Action Plan” in late 2009, which had two headline goals - an emissions reduction target and the creation of a “low carbon culture.”

However, in the 2010s the wheels totally fell off, in part because of austerity and the loss of momentum after the Copenhagen conference of 2009. The emissions reductions that have happened have been due to the UK burning less coal. The City Council's own emissions have gone down because their staffing went from 10k in 2010 to 6k now, and they sold off loads of buildings and stopped providing services.

This is why a seventh scrutiny committee is urgently needed – to force councillors and council officers to hold the executive accountable for their lack of meaningful action over climate change, and to help create more democratic climate justice in Manchester.



In 2015 the Council set up a community interest company and called it the Manchester Climate Change Agency. Unlike a real agency, it has no significant budget beyond a couple of seconded staff, and can't be forced to give information via the Freedom of Information Act. It basically just produces glossy reports, advertises repeatedly and fruitlessly for a new chair, and takes credit for things that were already happening (sound familiar?). It buries inconvenient facts – e.g. Manchester as a city burned through a quarter of its entire carbon budget for the 21st century in the last two years – in the middle of glossy feel-good reports. Oh, and staged a 90 minute top-down zoom call which it called a “conference.” It was, according to one of the editors of this handbook, an exercise in gaslighting and greenwashing.

There have been more shiny promises – in 2018 they said the city would be “net zero” by 2038, and in 2019, under pressure from activists, they declared a “climate emergency”. However, there has been very little progress on achieving these.