

Hung Drawn and Quarterly #5

No progress, just more PR

An analysis of Manchester City Council's (lack of) progress against its "climate emergency" declaration



Climate Emergency Manchester

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www.climateemergencymanchester.net

Executive Summary

Manchester City Council seems to think it can spin its way out of the Climate Emergency.

As revealed in a Freedom-of-Information Act request based investigation, it has [spent 30 thousand pounds producing deeply misleading adverts about “leaving carbon behind,”](#) based on precisely zero scientific evidence or advice.

That encapsulates everything you need to know about the capacity and willingness of the Council to tell the truth, and to lead.

This report, produced to mark a year and a quarter since the City Council’s 96 councillors unanimously declared a climate emergency. This report, produced because Manchester City Council is not doing its own reporting, reveals that:

- 1) The much vaunted “carbon reduction measure” in the “Capital Gateway” is meaningless as-
“Data is not collected on whether projects have been forced to change because of the introduction of this approach into the checkpoint process.”
- 2) The Council has not co-ordinated a set of ward-level set of meeting to engage residents in the climate emergency declaration
- 3) Carbon literacy training has been abandoned
- 4) The Council spent over 30 thousand pounds on an unscientific propaganda campaign.

If this doesn’t outrage you, we probably can’t help you.

If it does outrage you, get involved in Climate Emergency Manchester’s work. Not because we have a grand plan (we do, kinda) or great expectations of being able to change things (we have close to zero expectations) but for two other reasons. One is, to be pompous, it is your obligation, if you have freedom of speech, assembly and information AND time and energy to devote as a gift to the future. Second, because while you may not come to feel better, if you do nothing (and of course, there are other ways of doing things besides CEM), then you will probably feel worse. And doing things requires, we think, collaborative and collective action.

Introduction

In July 2019, in front of a packed public gallery, all 96 councillors voted for a declaration of a Climate Emergency. This declaration committed the Council to undertake 21 specific actions, including undertaking an open and transparent process to see if the target date for reaching zero carbon could be brought forward from 2038.

We at Climate Emergency Manchester knew, some of us from over a decade of personal experience of how the City Council behaves on climate change, that the likelihood was that these actions would not, in fact, be carried out.

Manchester City Council is stuck in an endless cycle of making shiny promises, not keeping them, waiting for people to give up in disgust and then, when the climate issue comes up again, making new shiny promises.

Climate Emergency Manchester have released 3 other reports (known as Hung Drawn and Quarterlies, at roughly 3-month intervals after the declaration). On the one-year anniversary of the declaration we released a report collating the views of a range of local activist groups on what the Council had (not) achieved over the past year. All were deeply disappointed. local We also submitted Freedom of Information Act requests on the 10th July anniversary, with the intention of releasing a report in August about the previous year.

Well, August is not the best month to release a report. So, we instead looked at the replies (as opposed to *answers*) we were sent and formulated further questions.

We, as citizens should not have to do this. There is a scrutiny committee - Neighborhoods and Environment - that is supposed to examine whether the Executive and the Senior officers are actually doing the things they said they would.

It is not fit for purpose.

Months and months go by with zero scrutiny of climate change. Even when the climate issue is on the agenda, the meetings go round and round in circles, with no clear answers extracted from the Executive (this is not, of course, entirely the fault of scrutiny committee members. They can only operate in the atmosphere of respect or disrespect for democracy). Despite the city having burnt a quarter of its carbon budget for the rest of the 21st century in the last two years, NO report has come to the Neighborhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee since July.

Until - and even after- we get a specific scrutiny committee, that just does climate change, month in and month out - we citizens will be forced to keep tabs on the Council, reporting its abject failure (again) to keep its promises.

We are not going to pretend it is uplifting, exciting or energising work. It is in fact thoroughly enraging and depressing if you let it be. But as citizens, with freedom of information, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, we have no choice.

The following report explains some of what we discovered (we have chosen, again, not to go laboriously through all 23 elements of the Climate Declaration). It suggests what could and SHOULD have happened, as well as what must happen next.

What we discovered

Rather than laboriously go through each of the 23 items of the motion, we have chosen a few that act as “brown M&Ms” - ways to test whether anything is actually being done. What’s a brown M&M? Well, this –

Back in the day, the legendary band [Van Halen](#) put on complex live shows involving lots of equipment, lighting and expensive sensitive sound equipment. The setup for the show was documented in great detail in their standard concert contract which dictated what the venue needed to do to set up and run a Van Halen Concert.

One of the more unusual requests, under the “Munchies” section hidden in the middle of the contract, was a line requesting a bowl of M&M’s with the brown ones removed. One would assume that they were just being prima-donna rock stars in requiring each venue to task a person to remove the brown M&Ms from the bowl.

But that was not the intent.

This requirement served a very practical purpose: **to provide a simple way of determining whether the technical specifications of the contract had been thoroughly read and complied with.**

In short, if there was a bowl of M&Ms with the brown ones removed, chances are the venue had read all the details of the contract, followed them all and had set up the concert properly and correctly. If not, Van Halen knew to run a detailed check, line by line, to find out what the venue had failed to set up properly and could put the concert at risk. Empirically, they usually found problems when the M&Ms requirement was not met, and rarely found problems when the bowl was properly prepared.

[source: <https://hiltmon.com/blog/2015/10/14/brown-mms/>]

The cost of the “leaving carbon behind” campaign.

We asked: How much it cost, who signed off on it and whether any actual scientists were consulted in the making of it (see [here](#))

We were told: 30 thousand pounds; the usual suspects; no.

Our questions are in bold, the responses (not really answers) are in italics.

What is the evidence base for the claim “we are leaving carbon behind”, since the city’s emissions reduction was 4% last year and there is to my knowledge no accurate data about what has happened since lockdown began (if there is, please provide it)

The campaign focuses on how Manchester is leaving behind its dependence on carbon, following the reduction in carbon emissions during the COVID-19 lockdown. It is based on the city’s ambition to become zero carbon by 2038 [it continues in this vein for several more paragraphs, without saying “no, there’s no evidence-base.”]

Did [the council’s inhouse media group] liaise with any scientists – e.g. at the Tyndall Centre – about whether the claim was indeed supportable? If so, please provide copies of the correspondence

*“We have been working with the Manchester Climate Change Partnership to develop a zero carbon campaign for the city. Some of the earlier creative executions were shared with the Tyndall Centre for comment and feedback. This particular iteration was shared internally and with the Climate Change Partnership for feedback. As the ‘leaving carbon behind’ message builds on the positive behaviours that resulted in a decrease in carbon emissions during lockdown and the narrative around a community working together, to move forward to a positive future, **not on scientific fact**, comment was not sought from scientists” [emphasis added].*

This, against a backdrop of the city having achieved a 4% reduction in its annual emissions, instead of the 13% it now needs.



What should have happened:

The Council should never have allowed such a flagrantly misleading campaign to have been created. There are other ways to engage and consult the public.

What we are doing next:

Asking for the Advertising Standards Agency to look into it. We don't hold out great hope on that, but you never know.

What you can do:

Take photos of these and any future misleading adverts. Share on social media, along with other statistics such as the fact that Manchester City Council has already burned through a quarter of its carbon budget for the entire 21st century. Tag your ward councillors.

Beyond wasting 30 thousand pounds of public money on lies, there is a broader cost is of

- a) Belief that this is an emergency- people who don't know better will think (as the Council wants them to) "ah, that's nice, everything is in hand
- b) With those who do know the truth, further reduction in trust.
Less hyperbole

Leaders don't lie, either actively or passively. Leaders, in an emergency, don't spread false messages. They tell the truth.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/09/hyperbolic-messaging-eroding-public-trust-uk-covid-response>

TOPIC Flights

We were told in July that *“At present all alternatives to flying must be explored before a flight is requested and no flight can be booked without specific approval from the Chief Executive or her Deputy. The policy is under review but progress has been delayed due to Covid-19.”*

We asked: I am glad to know the policy (well, it’s really just a protocol) is under review. What progress has there been since my last FOIA in July?

We were told:

All business travel will be covered as part of the Council's new Business Travel Policy. Given the current climate in terms of travel restrictions and the majority of council staff continuing to work from home, this area of work is not considered an immediate priority therefore very little progress has been made since July 2020.

What should have happened:

“Very little” - that’s surely a euphemism or “zero”. With flights suddenly halted by the pandemic, this could have been a moment to change this policy.

What we are doing next:

More FOIAs.

What you can do:

- Learn how to write FOIAs (here’s [an example of one we wrote about the Alexandra Park trees](#). Here’s our [Active Citizenship Toolkit page about FOIA writing.](#))
- Write FOIAs
- Publicise the results.

In July we asked “Is there a “only fly if there really is no alternative” policy in place? If so, please provide a copy of it. If not, why not, and is one being considered?”

You replied:

At present all alternatives to flying must be explored before a flight is requested and no flight can be booked without specific approval from the Chief Executive or her Deputy. The policy is under review but progress has been delayed due to Covid-19.

I am glad to know the policy (well, it’s really just a protocol) is under review.

1. What progress has there been since my last FOIA in July?

All business travel will be covered as part of the Council's new Business Travel Policy. Given the current climate in terms of travel restrictions and the majority of council staff continuing to work from home, this area of work is not considered an immediate priority therefore very little progress has been made since July 2020.

2. Is there a deadline or aspirational target for this?

The aspiration is to pick this work up again later this year/early next year, when council travel requirements will hopefully be clearer and we are able to embed some of the learnings from working during lockdown as part of this new policy.

3. Please provide all flights paid for by Manchester City Council undertaken from 10th July 2020 to today, their origins and destinations, the numbers of staff / members flying. Where the passenger was an elected member or a member of the SMT, please also provide their names

No flights have been paid for by the Council, which have been undertaken since 10th July 2020.

You continued

"There are several actions within the Manchester Climate Change Action Plan relating to the review and changes to council operational and waste fleet and a new Business Travel Policy. Unfortunately we have been unable to meet the April 2020 deadline for the new Business Travel Policy due to resource being redirected to respond to C19, however this work has been picked up again and is being reviewed as part of Covid-19 recovery.

6. What progress has been made on the new Business Travel Policy in the last two months, and what is the new deadline?

Please see the response provided in questions 1 and 2.

[i.e. zero].

TOPIC Ward Plans

Short version – there were supposed to be actual meetings in all 32 wards to identify people who wanted to be involved, and engage them. In a handful of wards, where there are councillors who give a damn, some meetings have happened (looking at you, Chorlton Park, Moss Side, Deansgate and a couple of others). There has been ZERO co-ordinating or supportive effort from the Neighborhoods Directorate bosses.

1. What provision has been made for people who want to be involved but are not already "in the loop" (e.g. on a ward mailing list, following a local MCC ward twitter account) and so did not know about the meetings, or somehow did know about them but were unavailable on the day because of childcare or work commitments.

The information you previously requested i.e.: "What provision was made, in each case, for those not able to attend?" was set out in the document 'Neighbourhood Team Ward Climate Change Meetings-for release'. Please accept my apologies for not referencing the exact attachment. I have attached it again to this response. The information is set out in the final column of the table. This column is headed: If the community were invited, but could not attend, how did/do we engage with them?

(table will be the subject of a separate blog post. Basically, nothing has been done).

3. Finally, with regard to Longsight ward, you mentioned "The method for updating attendees and the wider community will be agreed at the next ward coordination meeting on 12 August 2020." Please provide the minutes of that meeting and any supporting documents about the method for updating attendees.

The Council does not hold a record of the requested information. A brief discussion took place at the ward meeting on 12 August 2020 but no actions were noted. This item will be included on the agenda for the next ward meeting in November [date to be determined].

What should have happened: Every ward should have appointed one of the three councillors as a 'ward climate champion'.

By now every ward should have had a new Ward Plan in situ, that foregrounded climate change, with real action happening.

What we are doing next:

CEM will continue to ask the basic questions

What you can do:

Contact your ward councillors

TOPIC Carbon Literacy “All staff and councillors to be trained by end of 2020”

New target is 15% by April of 2021...

In case you're wanting to make excuses for the Council because of the coronavirus, remember that this has been going on for ten years (see blog posts about this [here](#)). The initial goal of carbon literacy was that everyone who lived, worked or studied in Manchester would have received the training by the end of 2013. The Economy Scrutiny Committee recommended all 96 elected members should have completed the training by the end of 2014. Promises were made, and remade, and never kept.

We asked: How many training sessions have been conducted. What is the current number of staff and councillors trained? Is there a public database/are there plans for such?

We were told:

In response to your request, I have summarised the information as follows:

Training online is now happening every week so more staff are being trained and our target is to reach the Silver award from the Carbon Literacy project by April next year **which is an achievement of 15% of the staff trained.**

To date the amount of staff trained and certified is 758 individual staff & councillors (**56 are councillors**), and 150+ staff who have begun their online training. Taking the training into an online format has allowed us to begin the training again and will allow us to broaden our scope of staff. We are able to be more flexible, offering staff different times or days this would not have been available in the face to face format.

The carbon literacy trainer has a master database spreadsheet of how many current staff and Councillors have had training so far. This isn't currently available as a public document, it is a working document, changing daily and not available as a public database.

There are 507 Grade 10+ managers currently employed by Manchester City Council

What should have happened: As we have said, on many occasions, there should be a public dashboard with updates on who has completed training. As they complete the training, councillors should blog / give media interviews about training.

What we are doing next: Keep asking the basic questions. This is very very embarrassing.

What you can do: Ask if your councillors are carbon literate

TOPIC The Report on investigating a stronger target

We asked:

So, to clarify (and a “yes or no” is fine). The Council considers that finally hiring its preferred academic colleagues, who are in a relationship of mutual dependence with the council, to produce a dense report, which goes through only the existing council mechanisms, fulfils its obligation to a “transparent and open review”?

We were told:

As per the response to the previous request for information (reference FOI/00002577) on this matter, the Council feels that an open and transparent review has been carried out

We asked:

Also, can you confirm that in fact, contra what you have written, these are not “public meetings”. My understanding is that Exec, Scrutiny and even sub-group meetings are meetings “in public” where the public have no legal right to speak (though they can request the chair’s permission and on occasion that is granted).

We were told:

This is correct.

What should have happened:

They should have investigated moving the target date forward, through an open and transparent process. You know, like they promised.

And the councillors who voted for it could have shown a little spine, a little self-respect, and insisted that the promise was kept. In our dreams...

What we are doing next:

We will blog about this. For what it is worth.

What you can do:

Continue to keep this broken promise on the agenda: ask questions in public consultations, ask to ask questions in meetings (and enquire as to why the public cannot ask questions in webcasts).

TOPIC (Not) on your bike

We asked:

I asked "Since 1st February 2020, has the Council looked at purchasing or renting e-bikes, e-scooters or "normal" bikes for its staff?"

"The Council submitted a bid to the Energy Savings Trust in March 2020 for e-cargo bikes to be used for Council fleet however the bid was unsuccessful. Further bids will be made if funding sources for eBikes become available."

Sorry to hear about unsuccessful bid! Please provide the complete feedback given by the EST about the unsuccessful bid.

*The response received from Energy Savings Trust was "**We received a very high volume and standard of applications, and it was very positive to see so many local authorities keen to integrate eCargo Bikes into internal and local businesses fleets. Unfortunately, due to the high volume of applications, we are unable to provide individual feedback.**"*

Energy Savings Trust informed us that they are in ongoing discussion with the Department for Transport regarding the potential for more funding in this area and will contact bidders when additional funding becomes available.

Have any other bids been made since that one (in the last two months since I sent my last FOIA)? If so, to whom and for how much

We were told: *"No other bids for eCargo bikes have been made since your previous FOIA in July 2020."*

What should have happened:

Manchester City Council could have, you know, shown some leadership.

It could have liaised with other local authorities about active travel (walking and cycling)

Consulted with grassroots groups who are using cargo bikes and learned from their positive experience (e.g. Chorlton Bike Deliveries).

What we are doing next: Providing - and asking citizens and supporters - for other practical suggestions like eCargo bikes for 'final mile' deliveries (the kind that we put in our "With Love and Rockets" report a year ago.).

What you can do: Send us concrete, practical suggestions:
contact@climateemergencymanchester.net

TOPIC: Business Travel Plan

We asked:

In July you told us *“There are several actions within the Manchester Climate Change Action Plan relating to the review and changes to council operational and waste fleet and a new Business Travel Policy. Unfortunately we have been unable to meet the April 2020 deadline for the new Business Travel Policy due to resource being redirected to respond to C19, however this work has been picked up again and is being reviewed as part of Covid-19 recovery.”*

What progress has been made on the new Business Travel Policy in the last two months, and what is the new deadline?

We were told: *Please see the response provided in questions 1 and 2. (e.g. nothing)*

What should have happened:

They should have been proactive about releasing this information to the public. Why should citizens have to FOIA?

What we are doing next:

More FOIAs, specifically about the date that it will be reviewed. Identifying examples of other councils who are ‘leading the way’ by reviewing their business travel policies.

What you can do:

Investigate and implement the Cocker Protocol

TOPIC Grey Fleet

We asked:

I asked –“Since 1st February 2020, has the Council undertaken any study, or any actual work on how to reduce emissions from its “grey fleet”?”

You replied

The Council has not undertaken any work or study reducing emissions from its "grey fleet" – which are privately owned cars used by officers on car allowance.

This is perturbing. The grey fleet is considered part of the Council’s carbon budget in the pie-charts I have seen. Grey fleet emissions surely matter. Who took the decision not to undertake any work or even study on this? When? Will that be reviewed, or is it just hoped that grey fleet emissions will magically vanish?

We were told: *“Reducing emissions from 'grey fleet' will be covered as part of the Council's new Business Travel Policy. Alternative options for travel and incentives for greener travel are currently being considered as part of the research for the development of the new policy. “*

What should have happened: Well, this is progress of a sort. We have forced them to include grey fleet emission reductions in their future plans (answers to previous FOIAs were basically “nope, we ain’t gonna do anything about this”).

What we are doing next:

More FOIAs

What you can do:

Cocker Protocol and write to your MPs and ward councillors

TOPIC The Citywide procurement toolkit.

We asked:

Work on the “citywide procurement toolkit has been paused during COVID-19 but it will be taken forward as part of the City Business Climate Alliance project.” Fair enough. But I will ask again “when is this one going to be ready to be unleashed on a waiting world?”

We were told:

“At present there is no date for the completion of this work.”

What should have happened:

Be upfront that everything is stopped, and that we shouldn't expect anything to happen in the near (ever) future...

Learning from other complex institutions (the NHS) who have [introduced some 'quick wins' to their procurement policy in a very short period of time](#) (it's an emergency).

What we are doing next:

What you can do:

Help us get a new scrutiny committee dedicated to climate, in which it would be much harder to bury such pauses

TOPIC The Capital Gateway is a Capital Fakeway

This is the “the governance mechanism for approving new capital projects” -i.e. the tick box exercise that favoured white elephant projects have to go through before being signed off... The Council says there is a “carbon reduction” measure added to the checklist.

We asked:

Secondly I asked about the “carbon reduction measure” that had been applied to the capital gateway. You gave me a great deal of cheering information about 66 projects, but the specific questions I asked were not answered. So I will ask again, this time with underlining. How many projects have now gone through the gateway (e.g. beyond the 66 you mentioned.). And, again, has the carbon reduction measure had any measurable impact in reducing carbon? i.e has any project been forced to change because of the measure. If so, which project(s) and which change(s).

We were told:

In addition to the 66 projects approved between August 2019 and June 2020, there have been a further 34 projects approved in the last 3 months. Projects do not get changed by the checkpoint process, what the process does do is ensure that carbon reduction is foremost in the design of schemes. **Data is not collected on whether projects have been forced to change because of the introduction of this approach into the checkpoint process.**

What should have happened:

You'd hope that backbench councillors would have been all over this. And if they weren't all members of the same party, perhaps some of them might have been.

What we are doing next:

We will keep FOIAing

What you can do: Ask your councillors to ask about this.

TOPIC Lottery winning? It couldn't be you!

We asked:

Thirdly, thank you for informing me that the bid to the National Lottery Fund was for 4.8 million and that when refusing the bid the Lottery said that they liked the overall concept but felt that it needed “stronger community-led aspects”? I did have a chuckle when I read that. What has been done by Manchester City Council done to “strengthen community-led aspects” in a putative future bid? Or are you going to tell me I should talk to the Climate Change Agency, which by some strange quirk of fate can't be compelled to release information through the FOIA?

We were told:

The Council's Neighbourhood Teams are working with 3-5 community groups as part of a revised bid to the Lottery which the Manchester Climate Change Agency are leading.

What should have happened:

After ten years of alleged “partnership working”, you'd think that whenever Manchester City Council submitted bids for cash, outfits like the National Lottery Fund would be singing from the rooftops about how good MCC's community-led aspects were, while throwing bags full of cash-from-regressive-taxation at assorted bureaucrats.

But oddly, no.

What we are doing next:

Oh, FOIAs. Always with the FOIAs. (We've submitted some, btw – the answers will be back soon...)

What the council should be doing (but won't do until forced to do so)

All the way back in November 2019 we produced a report "With Love and Rockets"
We sent it to all the members of the Executive. We got one acknowledgement, from the current Executive Member for the Environment, who said she would look into it and get back to us.

She never did.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of recommendations

- Set up a seventh scrutiny committee, dedicated to climate policy and its implementation, so that the issues can get genuine scrutiny
Commit to honesty in your advertising campaigns
- Commit to releasing information about what is and is not being done by the Zero Carbon Coordinating Group proactively
- Commit to releasing information about what is and is not being achieved around the elements of the July 2019 climate emergency declaration clearly and *proactively*.

What is to be done by you, the citizen

Sign the petition for a seventh scrutiny committee

Share the petition with your friends, family, work colleagues - anyone who can sign. Fun fact- if everyone who has already signed the petition would just convince two other people to do so, we would get there, overnight.

It is unlikely we can, in the middle of this pandemic, get the 4000 signatures we need.

But we should do everything we can to get as many as possible and send the strongest possible signal to the Council.

Maintain your individual morale

<http://activecitizenshiptoolkit.net/elements/morale-maintenance-individual>

Get together with other people in a functional group (and if the group you are in turns out not to be functional, or to have become dysfunctional, that isn't your cue to give up and despair. You have to a) try to fix it and if you can't, then b) walk away TO ANOTHER GROUP.

Maintain your collective morale

<http://activecitizenshiptoolkit.net/elements/morale-maintenance-collective>

Engage with the scrutiny process

<http://activecitizenshiptoolkit.net/elements/engaging-with-scrutiny-processes>

What will CEM be doing in the coming year (not a complete list)

Continuing to build our own strength and networks using the Active Citizenship Toolkit and other techniques (under the general rubric of "Operation Strawberry")/

Creating additional versions of the student climate handbook, working with school students and university students.

Trying to get climate change to the top of the May 2021 local government election agenda (and puncturing the propaganda).

Engaging with the new Executive Member for the Environment so we can have a *genuine* effort to respond to the climate emergency.

If any of this appeals – or if you have other ideas – please get in touch, via contact@climateemergencymanchester.net or on Twitter - @ClimateEmergMcr