

Briefing paper on reshaping scrutiny committees #ClimateScrutinyNow



by Climate Emergency Manchester and supporters, for the benefit of Councillors and citizens

Purpose of Document

This briefing note makes a series of proposals to the remit, membership and format of the meetings of Manchester City Council’s reshaped Climate and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

On 9 February 2021 the [Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee](#) recommended that “we would have a sixth committee – so not a seventh one. But a re-organisation of existing structures within existing resources to allow for a committee that is focused primarily on environmental issues, and climate change, and the recommendation is that that goes to the appropriate constitutional route, as quickly as is feasible”.

This recommendation will now be turned into a report on proposed revisions to remit, with input from the Council’s Senior Management Team and the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Group. It will then go to the Constitutional and Nominations Committee and Full Council on 31 March (as well as Labour Group).

Key proposals for the reshaped scrutiny committee

- The **remit** must cover all Council services, as well as the functioning and effectiveness of the City Council’s Climate Change Agency, Climate Change Partnership and Climate Change Board
- The **membership** should include elected and co-opted members
- Members of the committee will be expected to have completed carbon literacy training and publicise their membership of the committee
- The **work plan** for 2020-1 should monitor progress on the creation of a zero carbon culture and how the ambition, action and impact of the Agency can be expanded
- The **format** of meetings must engage the public more in local government

Proposed Remit of Committee

The current (February 2021) [remit](#) of the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee is:

“The Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee deals with many of the Council’s services which are most visible to residents - housing, highways, the street environment, waste and recycling - and also monitor’s the council’s planning and environmental policies, including carbon reduction plans and climate change strategy.

The Committee also looks closely at the work of the Growth and Neighbourhoods Directorate and examines how the services it delivers meet resident’s needs and expectations.”

Proposed wording for new Climate and Environment Scrutiny Committee

“The Climate and Environment Scrutiny Committee leads in scrutiny of the city’s emissions, the functioning and effectiveness of the City Council’s Climate Change Agency, the Climate Change Board and the Climate Change Partnership, as well as other organisations in the city. It has the capacity to deal with all Council services and operations, ensuring changes are completed in a just manner, since climate change is a whole-of-organisation challenge. The committee will also consider other dimensions of the city’s environment and the impact of our city on the environment, locally and beyond.

The remit of the Climate and Environment Scrutiny Committee does not prevent any other committees or council bodies from investigating aspects of the climate emergency.”

Proposed Work Plan 2021-2 (to be reviewed in 2022)

- Monitor progress on the implementation (not just by the Council) towards zero carbon 2038 and the creation of a zero carbon culture in Manchester
- Assess whether the Manchester Climate Change Agency (a Council-owned ALMO) is fit for purpose and how its ambition, action and impact can be radically expanded
- Bring in new thinking from other organisations, looking at best practice from other local authorities in the UK and beyond.
- Scrutinise quarterly reports on the Council’s internal progress towards its 2020-25 plan.
- Instigate a rolling programme of all Executive members, and chairs of all committees giving oral/written reports to the committee on progress made towards the Climate Action Plan and – crucially – what is not going to plan, chief obstacles, help needed.
- Consider the potential impact of any other policy imperatives that could be impeding climate mitigation and adaptation actions and strategies.
- Make a series of recommendations to the Executive.

Membership

- Up to 9 councillors
- Up to 9 co-opted members of relevant civil society/academic organisations (both Health and Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee have co-opted members)
- Co-opted members could come from the following types of sector: cultural sector (e.g. Museums, Theatres and Galleries, media organisations); universities (academics from the social sciences as well as physical and life scientists); civil society and campaigning organisations; housing providers.

Expectations/requirements of members

- To have successfully completed carbon literacy training
- To publicise their membership of the Climate and Environment Scrutiny Committee, its upcoming meetings, and the outcomes of the meetings via social media and at other meetings of the Council and other bodies.
- To undertake at least 6 public speaking engagements per year on the climate emergency, and the work of the committee, around the city, and to report back to the Scrutiny Committee, briefly in writing, about what went well/badly on each of those occasions.
- To actively and continually improve their knowledge and understanding of climate change

Communicating the role and remit of the committee

Consideration should be given at the outset to this important task, part of building the city's zero carbon culture. For example, a basic video explaining the remit, role and function of the committee could be produced. The video will be hosted on the City Council's website and also on Youtube. Environmental organisations will be encouraged to share the video on their websites.

Meetings

Before meetings

- Ideally some meetings will be held outside of standard working hours, and in a mix of locations around the city (when COVID-19 regulations allow).
- Strenuous efforts will be made to publicise meetings, going beyond merely placing the date, time and papers of the meeting on the Council website.
- Reports should avoid jargon and contain sections on: what is behind track; specific lessons learned; help that should be requested from other bodies in the City.
- A traffic light-style dashboard updated at least quarterly, covering emissions data, agreed corporate and para-corporate actions, and progress as a standing agenda item.

During meetings

- The committee may commission reports and invite expert witnesses. Suggested guests: Tyndall Centre, academics including social scientists, NHS representatives, representatives from other Local Authorities (e.g. Bristol)
- The format of the meetings (whether online or in person) may vary. The traditional format may be necessary for some meetings but there could be times when other formats (including pairs or small group work) will be more appropriate. It will be the responsibility of all members, not just chairs, to ensure that the right tools are used at the right times.
- Possible topics could include
 - How can Manchester communities be supported to create and implement their own disaster preparedness plans? Updates on ward-based plans.
 - How can the Council act as a force multiplier with both the public and private sector?
 - What can be done to accelerate learning, sharing of experience, synergies? How can failures be examined, used to improve future actions?
- Members of the public do not have the right to speak; speaking is at the Chair's discretion. However, the presumption is that they will be able to do so, within a time limit.

After meetings

- Minutes will be posted in plain text on the Council website and (moderated) comments will be invited
- A blog/short video will be produced by the chairs of the committee, and any other member who is so minded.
- Social media tools will be used to cover and report on the meetings
- Where appropriate, letters / to the Manchester Evening News/guest columns

Public engagement with local government is low. Voting levels in some wards of the city are extremely low, and getting lower. The Council has an opportunity here to model an openness, and willingness to engage in sometimes difficult dialogue, learning from both the expertise available in our city as well as from the points of resistance to climate action internally and externally. We hope that it will seize the opportunity.