

Agenda Item 21c

Climate Change Adaptation Scrutiny Panel Evidence Statement – Thurstan Crockett, Head of Sustainability & Environmental Policy

Background

I have been in my current role at Brighton & Hove City Council since November 2004. In 2005 the council signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change and at the same time held a city-wide Sustainability Conference on climate change. A key element of the Declaration committed the council to “preparing a plan with our local communities to address the causes and effects of climate change and to secure maximum benefit for our communities”. The conference provided a groundswell of ideas for the plan.

The Climate Change Action Plan, produce in 2006, contained a hundred actions and kick-started a wide range of projects and programmes. While very successful in many ways, it also had weaker elements, including its Adaptation section – referred to by Chris West from the UK Climate Impacts Programme in his evidence to this panel. The section covered Water, Maintaining quality of green spaces; Local development and building design; and Public Health (including Emergency Planning). This action plan is currently being reviewed and should be revised by July.

Nonetheless, the original plan began to focus the authority more on adaptation; but the focus was not reflected in the views of the c.100 city stakeholders in 2007, when only two felt adaptation should be a priority in any city climate change strategy. One of those was the late Prof John Chesshire. As the energetic chairman of the Local Government Association’s Climate Change Commission, John said in the foreword to its influential report at that time:

“We believe that tackling climate change through effective application of...mitigation and adaptation will be a key long term priority for local government....

(which) is uniquely placed to tackle climate change, with a democratic mandate for action, close proximity to citizens, and a strategic role leading other public, private and voluntary sector partners.... (But) few have systematically built carbon reduction and resilience to climate change into their organisational DNA”.

With the strongest focus still firmly on mitigation measures then, this was still true by August 2009 when the government looked at the self assessment results for National Indicator 188 Planning to Adapt to Climate Change. Of 149 Local Strategic Partnerships, 76 – or 51% - said they were still at Performance Level 0 in a scale of 0-4. I.e. the Authority

has begun the process of assessing the potential threats and opportunities across its estate and services...and has identified and agreed the next steps to build on that assessment in a systematic and co-ordinated way.

Some of our services are clearly ahead of this position, as you have been hearing from officer evidence. For others, the Level 0 assessment is reflected in the Corporate Risk Register for the council. The section on climate change adaptation / resilience from the current, 2nd Draft Sustainable Community Strategy for Brighton & Hove, summarises the overall current position locally:

Living with Climate Change Locally

Issues of concern

Climate change is with us here and now and will get significantly worse before (if) it gets better due to the greenhouse gas emissions already in the atmosphere and their delayed impact.

The UK Climate Impacts Programme - which leads UK scientific consensus on impacts – says the South East of England will continue to be most affected in the UK.

UKCP 09 projections show changes modelled by 2020 may well include:

- Average temperature increases of 1-1.5 degrees c.
- 5-15% less rainfall, especially in summer months, increasing the likelihood of drought.
- More extreme weather events such as very hot days, drought, storm surges, and heavy rainfall – increasing the likelihood of flooding.

Latest sea level rise predictions for this century from the world's leading climate scientists suggest 1.1 or 1.2 metres is now probable due to polar ice melting rates, rather than the half a metre previously predicted. More frequent storms and sea surges make this an increasing issue for the city and its sea defences.

The summer heat wave of 2003 was responsible for tens of thousands of heat-related deaths across Europe, but by 2020 an average summer locally may well be as hot as this. High temperatures and still weather can also lead to a build up in air pollution, mainly from vehicles and this poses health risks to the very young, old and, asthmatics.

The south east of England is in “water stress”, receiving only 690mm of rainfall per year compared to a national average of 897mm per year. Brighton & Hove has one of the highest domestic water consumption rates in the UK. The pressures on water resources are set to increase through additional demands from population growth and new housing. Greater water efficiency,

especially within existing housing stock, is essential for the sustainable management of water resources and the health of the environment.

Flooding through torrential rainfall had a serious impact on Sussex in 2000 and continues to be a major area of concern. Fears about flood and drought are not incompatible, as one feature of climate change is disruption to usual weather cycles, with more frequent extreme periods of one or other. So we need a better and sophisticated shared understanding across the city of the risks (and some opportunities) of climate change to our infrastructure and economy, our communities and our wildlife and habitats.

What has happened over the last three years

Responding to climate change is a key consideration in preparing the Core Strategy (A key document within the Local Development Framework).

Serious flooding in England in the summer of 2007 has significantly raised the profile of this issue right across local government and emergency planning.

The Sussex Resilience Forum actively monitors climate change impact risks such as flooding and heat wave and manages the Community Risk Register for the whole of Sussex. In 2007/8 it organised a Sussex-wide conference in Brighton on flooding.

A city Strategic Flood Risk Assessment was produced in March 2008 in line with national policy on development and flood risk. This should be regularly reviewed to ensure it contains the latest data, planning policy and legislation.

A major incident emergency planning exercise was held in winter 2008/9 to test planning – in this case for a tidal wave hitting the coast.

Southern Water has invested £15 million over three years in replacing 35 miles of old Victorian water mains across the city with modern piping and the leakage rate is relatively low.

Following chalk cliff falls above the Marina; the University of Brighton has developed a cliff monitoring project and with the Coastal Engineer is developing trans-national project plans with similar areas on the French coast.

The City Council's Sustainability Conference in 2006 on Water Shortage: the "Here and Now" Climate Change Issue, explored the key water resource issues and the drafting of a Water Action Plan.

A tourism stakeholders' seminar for the sector's Brighton & Hove businesses explored the threats and opportunities posed by climate change and the issue is addressed in the city's revised Tourism Strategy.

Planning has introduced sustainable building standards which require minimum levels of water performance in new development.

Current position

The government has developed new national indicators on preparedness/planning for flooding impacts and for climate change, under the Comprehensive Area Assessment. The performance of Local authorities and their partners will be measured on these. Other areas like Kent and East Sussex are ahead of us on this and we can learn from them.

The indicator on Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management focuses on local authority progress in delivering agreed actions in existing Catchment Flood Management Plans (CFMP) and Second Generation Shoreline Management Plans (SMP2).

The proportion of households with water meters in Brighton & Hove is relatively low and there are plans to change this rapidly. To all intents and purposes, non-household customers are all metered already.

Planning permission has been granted for a wastewater treatment works at Peacehaven.

Introduced sustainable building standards through Planning which require minimum levels of water performance in new development through the Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM.

Compulsory water metering is to be introduced - Southern Water's draft water resource management plan outlines plans to achieve water metering of 90% of all households by 2015.

What we plan to do

Complete a council scrutiny inquiry into the city's preparedness and planning for climate change to identify any areas of weakness and actions required.

Develop a Local climate Impacts Profile to determine the impact on key services of recent major weather incidents. Use these with the UKCP 09 projections to develop a detailed risk assessment and mitigation programme.

Seek through the planning system to deliver development adaptable to climate change; mitigating against urban heat island effect through green & bio diverse developments; delivering the highest standards in water efficiency and exploring feasibility of rainwater harvesting and greywater recycling; providing sustainable drainage systems; and maximising passive heating and cooling.

Include an Adapting to Climate Change section in the city's revised Climate Change Action Plan, drawing on the recommendations of the scrutiny inquiry and following the nationally agreed process.

Continue to work with Southern Water to ensure appropriate wastewater treatment

Develop a joint project on chalk cliff erosion with the University of Le Havre and the local council.

Incorporate policies in the new core Strategy which address climate change adaptation and climate-proof design such as greening of buildings and rainfall attenuation to mitigate against flooding.

Adopt the Core Strategy incorporating requirements for climate-proofing in design and more urban biodiversity & tree-planting by developers to counter the “heat island” effect.

