



## **North Devon Council**

Report Date: Monday, 4 March 2024

Topic: Funding proposal for the role of a Climate Engagement Communications Intern at the Devon Climate Emergency Partnership

Report by: Donna Sibley, Sustainability and Climate Officer

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1. In May 2019 the Devon Climate Emergency partnership came together to provide the necessary collective action on climate issues that no single organisation or geography can address in isolation. The Response Group developed the Devon Climate Declaration, which North Devon Council has endorsed, and nominated Devon County Council to lead the partnership and provide the secretariat function.

1.2. The partnership has achieved the second-highest score amongst County areas in the 2023 Climate Emergency UK Local Authority Score Cards.

1.3. The Climate Engagement and Communications Intern position was vacated in November 2023 (highlighted in green above). Pressure on resources at Devon County Council mean that the position will not be replaced using the authority's funds. It is unlikely that Comms officers within the partnership will be able to fulfil this role between them. Coordinating meetings and managing the newsletter and social media platforms takes up a lot of time and requires specialised attention. While NDC Comms are willing to help, they consider a leading Comms officer is necessary for the success of such a significant project.

1.4. This paper sets out a proposal for partners to provide annual contributions towards the Devon-wide collaboration that is creating a resilient, net-zero Devon where people and nature thrive. It is anticipated that not all partners will be able to contribute, but the role will benefit the whole partnership.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1. That, subject to other partners agreeing to contribute, Strategy and Resources Committee allocates £2,000 from the Environmental Initiatives earmarked reserve for four years to fund a Climate Engagement and Communications Intern position as set out in the report.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1. To enable us to continue to communicate and engage with residents, businesses and visitors in Devon on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

#### 4. REPORT

4.1. In September 2022 the Devon Climate Emergency partnership published the Devon Carbon Plan, and in November 2023 the Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Adaptation Strategy.

4.2. These two Plans are designed to nest at the top of a hierarchy of carbon and resilience plans by highlighting the strategic issues that should be the focus of action by local authorities, local councils, organisations, communities and individuals within their sphere of influence.

4.3. Beyond developing and resourcing area-specific and in-house climate change activity, all of the partners engage by providing staff time to assist with various aspects of partnership activity. This includes contributing to steering activity via the Tactical Group, offering expertise on the Climate Impacts Group, evidence gathering, providing meeting venues, reviewing draft documents and communicating the activity of the partnership locally.

4.4. In addition to its share of the above, Devon County Council provides the partnership with the great majority of its operating expenses through its role as the secretariat, detailed below:

##### **One-off costs**

• Design of the Devon Climate Assembly	£10k
• Operation of the Devon Climate Assembly	£147k
• Review of the Devon Climate Assembly	£15k
• Operation of the Net-Zero Task Force Hearings	£2.5k
• Website initial build	£18.3k
• Carbon Plan consultation	£16.7k
• Climate Assembly response consultation	£2.6k
• Adaptation Strategy consultation	£8.1k
	<b>Total £220k</b>

##### **Annual costs**

• Website maintenance	£10k
• County Show presence	£2k
• Project Manager x 1 FTE	£49.5k
• Climate Engagement and Communications Intern x 1 FTE	£25k
• Environment and Sustainability Policy Officer x 0.5 FTE	£30.5k
• Parity Data – Housing quality, energy and carbon database	£23k
	<b>Total £140k</b>

4.5. The Climate Engagement and Communications Intern position was vacated in November 2023. This role was previously filled via the University of

Exeter's Graduate Business Partnerships scheme. Pressure on resources at Devon County Council mean that the position will not be replaced using the authority's funds.

- 4.6. NDC consider a leading Comms officer is necessary for the success of such a significant project, given the substantial amount of time devoted to Comms within the DCE partnership and capacity issues within our own Comms team.
- 4.7. This means that the resource available to deliver the activity described at Section 3 will be halved. This comes alongside a recommendation from the Climate Task Force at its December meeting that resourcing on behaviour change and engagement should be increased, and a frank discussion at the Tactical Group in November that monitoring the implementation of the plans needs dedicated resource to do it effectively.
- 4.8. This is recorded as an issue in the partnership's Issues Register.
- 4.9. Having spent the first three years focussed on involving the community in the preparation of well-supported and evidence-led plans, the partnership is now focussed on monitoring their implementation, delivering 'big ticket' initiatives and essential community engagement.

### ***Monitoring Implementation***

- 4.10. The secretariat is continuously compiling records of projects being delivered in Devon that are helping to deliver the plans. These are posted on the website and on social media to demonstrate to the public the partners' progress. These records are used to prepare bi-annual progress reports on each theme of the plans for scrutiny by the new, independent Climate Task Force and the Response Group. This enables the Response Group to consider implementation issues and to escalate these as necessary.

### **Delivering 'Big Ticket' Initiatives**

- 4.10 The ability to cite the Carbon Plan, and its collectively-agreed future pathways and need for interventions that it represents, has been central in securing funding and/or collaborative approaches for significant projects, including devolution negotiations.
- 4.11 Big ticket items having an impact in every corner of Devon include:
- Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure projects
  - Capital and revenue schemes arising from Bus Service Improvement Plans
  - Energy Saving Devon advice service and Home Upgrade Grant 2
  - Local Area Energy Plan
  - Land Use Framework pilot

- Future Farming Resilience
- Devon Resilience Innovation Project
- Innovate UK Fast Followers – Green finance
- Community Engagement

- 4.12. Engagement activity has placed Devon joint-second of all local authority areas in the 2023 Climate Emergency UK Score Cards' 'Collaboration and Engagement' category. Activity covers these objectives:
- Increase awareness and knowledge of how climate change is already affecting, and will continue to affect, Devon and its communities.
  - Provide evidence that action is being taken in line with declaring an emergency and meeting actions in the Plans.
  - Empower individuals and communities to act to achieve various co-benefits, and not just those interested in environmental issues, so they feel they can be part of the Devon Climate Emergency.
  - Ensure people are aware that this is a joint ecological and climate emergency.
  - Emphasize that this is a collective Devon effort, not a local authority initiative – stories from the community and benefits of taking action.
- 4.13. Activity includes ad-hoc promotion of partners' activity and of local businesses who have signed the Devon Climate Declaration, alongside structured campaigns that respond to specific actions and behavioural change requirements described in the plans.
- 4.14. Digital channels comprise the website, social media accounts on Instagram (1841 followers), Facebook (2342 followers), LinkedIn (738 followers) and X (1763 followers), plus a monthly newsletter distributed to 4249 subscribers with an open rate of 45% (20% is considered good for this type of communication).
- 4.15. Structured campaigns supporting partnership and specific partners' objectives have included:
- University of Plymouth Net Zero Visions project**
- Helped develop web pages
  - Attended workshops and took photos/documented for social media
  - Shared the project on social media and at the Devon County Show
- Public Health Devon**
- Collaborated on a mental health awareness week campaign, highlighting that taking action on climate change can contribute to the five ways to wellbeing
- Recycle Devon**
- Ran a campaign for Food Waste Action Week



Collaborated on a sustainable fashion campaign  
Collaborated on the Big Green Day Out campaign

**University of Exeter**

- Set a challenge to the University of Exeter Liberal Arts Challenge Setters module, helping the students to contribute to addressing real world problems.

**South West Water**

- Shared assets from the Save Every Drop Campaign

**Energy Saving Devon**

- Helped deliver a social media campaign promoting Energy Saving Devon
- Worked on the Energy Saving Devon website

4.16. Physical engagement includes the County Show and irregular attendance at partners' events and larger-scale community events. The ambition is to attend more physical events, particularly at locations where new audiences will be reached.

4.17. We are proposing that the partnership collectively funds the role of the Climate Engagement Communications Intern on an annual basis, and commits to do so for four years. This would continue to be hosted by Devon County Council. In return, Devon County Council will resource the remaining annual requirements for the partnership's secretariat operation. This will enable the exemplary work of the partnership, as recognised by the 2023 Climate Emergency UK Scorecards, to be communicated effectively to the people of Devon.

4.18. The partners of the Devon Local Nature Partnership fund its secretariat function on a similar basis.

4.19. Anticipating that some partners will not be in a position to contribute, securing the necessary £25k will require each willing partner to offer c.£2k on an annual basis, accepting that the partnership as a whole will benefit from this post.

4.20. Every partner should give this proposal its urgent consideration so that the full range of DCE partnership activity might be re-instated from April 2024 onwards.

## 5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.12. No additional staff resource will be required.

5.13. The Council set aside revenue contributions into an earmarked reserve for Environmental Initiatives, the current balance in this reserve is £82,814 and there are current commitments from the reserve of (£33,220)



leaving an un-committed balance of £49,594. The above proposal would commit a further £8,000 over the next four years.

## 6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

6.12. There are not considered to be any negative impacts arising from publication of this Adaptation Strategy for any of the protected characteristics. Promoting how organisations, communities and individuals can mitigate and adapt to climate change will aid protected characteristics.

## 7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

7.12. Funding of a Climate Engagement Communications Intern will support the Council's commitment to tackling the climate and ecological emergency.

## 8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

8.12. What impact, positive or negative, does the subject of this report have on:

- The commercialisation agenda: none anticipated
- Improving customer focus: additional comms support for key messaging and campaigns
- Regeneration or economic development: none anticipated

## 9. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

9.12. The decision in respect of the recommendations in this report can be made by this Committee pursuant to delegated powers provided in Part 3 Annexe 1.

## 10. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

## 11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: none.

## 12. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers: Donna Sibley, Sustainability & Climate Officer