Briefing for scrutiny committees

Climate change can affect anyone, but some people have the potential to be more affected than others. How badly a person or group will be affected will depend not just on their exposure to the event, but on their social vulnerability – that is, how well they are able to cope with and respond to events like floods and heatwaves. People and communities experiencing multiple causes of vulnerability are the most extremely socially vulnerable.

Tackling climate change is a shared responsibility. It is deeply connected to other policy issues and local action is necessary for sustainable solutions. We need to be clear how any proposal/project impacts on our carbon emissions and how it affects our resilience. It is also important that the decisions we make do not prevent other people from reducing their own emissions or improving their own resilience.

Scrutiny has a critical role to play in these cross-cutting issues. Climate change as a stand-alone issue sits in the purview of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, but everything we do either has an impact on, or is impacted by, climate change so it is important for all scrutiny committees to also ensure that everything that comes in front of them has considered it.

The Council Plan now includes climate change as a key principle underpinning everything we do. The guidance notes for cabinet and decision papers have also been updated so the "carbon impact" box should never say no impact. Clearly, proposals or projects will differ, depending on what is being discussed, and not all of the questions below will apply to everything that comes to a scrutiny committee, but they should help to tease out how the officers have come to that decision.

Questions for scrutiny committee members to ask

1. Will the proposal/project result in an increase in carbon emissions?
    - How have you ensured that energy is not wasted or lost through poor insulation, heating the wrong areas or inefficient lighting?
    - Will there be an increase in business travel or commuting?
    - How easy will it be for people to travel by public transport, bicycle or walking?
    - Is there a need for travel at all?
    - Will there be an increase in waste disposal?
2. How will you reduce emissions?
    - How can you reduce energy use?
    - How can you reduce use of natural resources?
    - How can you ensure suppliers are working in a sustainable way?
    - How can you reduce waste?
    - How can you improve energy efficiency?

3. Will the proposal have any impacts on biodiversity (positive or negative)?
    - Will there be a net reduction in trees?
    - Are there opportunities for planting?
    - Are there other habitats or wildlife considerations?

4. Does the proposal incorporate/promote the development of renewable energy?
    - How can you increase the use of renewable energy in your project?

5. How can you minimise emissions from transport?
    - How can your project enable and encourage active travel?
    - How can you reduce the need for travel at all?

6. How will you make the proposal/project resilient to the impacts of climate change, such as more frequent severe weather, floods and heatwaves?
    - How can your project be designed to be resilient to these occurrences?
    - How can you ensure the building does not overheat in summer?
    - How will your service travel during these events?
    - How can communities using your service be protected?

Supplementary questions

- Does any procurement consider the impact on the environment?
- How does the project/proposal support the climate change strategy, tree and woodland strategy and sustainable communities strategy?
- How does the project/proposal support local businesses and employers to be sustainable?
- How can the project/proposal help develop local skills?