

Case Study; Local Climate Engagement Training for Town and Parish Councils; supported by Cornwall Council

Cornwall Council's cabinet member for environment and climate change Cllr Martyn Alvey said:

“We cannot reach carbon neutrality for Cornwall alone and it is vital that we have the support of our residents and partners such as town and parish councils in taking climate action. Providing Climate engagement training is an important way in which we can support our town and parish councils.”

Introduction; Why Training on Local Climate Engagement is Essential to Reaching Net Zero Targets

[Involve](#) runs the [Local Climate Engagement Programme](#) and related training for local government. Local authorities across the country have already shown bold leadership by setting Net Zero targets that are years ahead of national legislation, and as their work on climate change grows, many local authorities have moved beyond traditional consultation methods to engage their local populations.

Engaging the public in their climate decision-making in these ways enables local authorities to build a deeper understanding of local preferences, aspirations and needs. This supports the development of policy that is more likely to achieve public buy-in. It also allows local authorities to reach beyond those they most often hear from. This builds trust and is a key step in achieving a fair transition to Net Zero.

Involve's local climate engagement training and mentoring supports local authorities to ensure that they overcome risks seen within engaging publics on climate and maximise the benefits and potential in doing so. While the Local Climate Engagement Programme worked predominantly with district, county, and unitary authorities, Cornwall Council decided to purchase Local Climate Engagement Training for a number of its town and parish councils. They recognised that action at the lowest tier of government is essential to meeting the net zero targets of the unitary authority, and that local councils also have a unique strength in their reach within the community. However, for local councils to fully realise the potential and maximise the benefits of engaging the public on climate decision making, support to apply public participation theory and good practice, and understanding of methods is required.

What we did; the training

Involve worked together with Cornwall Council to help identify and recruit nine local councils to the training, each sending between two and four representatives. Each council was asked to have identified a piece of climate related work that they want to engage the public on that we would use as a basis for the applied learning throughout the course.

Training took place over 6 half-day sessions as follows:

Session 1

This session built a shared understanding of public engagement and clarified the focus of our training; on public engagement that aims to build collaboration. The session covered the benefits of public engagement in this way, what good practice looks like, and introduced some relevant case studies.

Session 2 and 3

Sessions 2 and 3 were delivered together across one day. Participants used their planned public engagement to develop an engagement brief, working through a range of activities to refine the purpose, scope, and reach, and how to plan the engagement work so that it has maximum impact on decision making.

Session 4

This session was about how issues of power, privilege and inclusion arise in public participation in climate, and how it is essential to overcome these in order to ensure that engagement does not re-entrench harmful inequalities and to ensure a just transition for everyone. This session looked at both some of the theories behind issues of power and

privilege and practical approaches to embed within engagement delivery which could be incorporated into the engagement brief participants had developed.

Session 5

In session 5 participants were introduced to a range of practical engagement methods and the considerations that should be made in selecting a method that will meet their training brief. Participants reflected on the training brief they had developed across the previous sessions to select engagement methods that would fit with the aims of the brief.

Session 6

This session focused on communications, storytelling, and segmentation in order to tailor reach and communication to the audience, and maximise the impact of climate engagement through a positive narrative.

Mentoring and next steps

After the training course was delivered, three councils accessed mentoring from Involve which was used to further work on their planning and delivery. As a result, the three local councils who undertook the mentoring sessions have taken forward:

- Taken forward practical steps towards a citizen's jury on local energy as part of a wider project with significant external funding
- Planning for a local survey or workshop to develop a nature recovery strategy
- Planning public engagement for the sustainable future of a new public space

Further information

Involve have a range of information on public engagement at - <https://involve.org.uk/resources> including:

[How to plan a participatory project](#)

[What a good participatory process looks like](#)

And, information on [a range of methods](#)

Involve can be commissioned to deliver [training on public participation](#) and can work flexibly to develop a training programme that meets the needs of local authorities.

