

Preparing for Climate Change in Oxfordshire – 20 January 2010

Notes from Open Discussion *(notes taken by Astrid Blackburn, West Oxfordshire District Council, Partnership Development Officer)*

- Whilst there are groups set up to support mitigation measures by way of reducing local emissions ie Community Action Groups for energy (eg Wantage Area Climate Action) these need to focus equally on adapting to climate change.
- Thames Valley Police commented on the need for improved networking/ information sharing on community they serve in order to best respond to climate change impacts and assist in adapting to these. It was found that during the snow, whilst there was a high turn out of staff ready to help, without contact with Age Concern/ Social Services this was difficult to coordinate and resulted in TVP using an internal database on home thefts of the elderly to be able to identify those households in greatest need for assistance during the snow.
- Cllr John Tanner (Oxford City Council) raised three points about the previous climate risk exercise:
 - This exercise does not address the need to respond proportionately when looking at budget expenditure
 - Need to take into account extreme weather when planning infrastructure
 - Need to plan for a greater time scale – perhaps 40 – 50 years ahead, but this is incompatible with local elections which are every four years.
- Local businesses find it very difficult having staff absent due to child care responsibilities which arise from school closures during extreme weather events. The Association for Small Businesses are campaigning to cut the half term school holiday in order for parents to make up the business hours lost during the recent snow.
- Engineering standards need to change in the longer term.
- We can apply long term risk management to a particular project. Need to develop a template for applying long term risk management.
- Can not continue to respond to extreme weather events/ climate change in the current emergency response mode – this is too short sighted and does not support preparedness for future climate change. If we continue to follow an emergency response methodology this is at the margins of tackling the real issue ... it is a reactive rather than proactive response.
- There are many communities to attribute total responsibility for responding to climate change to Local Government. How much as a Local Authority should we be guiding individuals to prepare for this change themselves? Community structure needs chance to increase resilience to climate change.
- Oxfordshire County Council Officer: because adaptation requires a measure of risk probability over a long time scale this is at odds with how the media portrays the situation. Media want to encourage the public to blame Local Authorities which leads to complaints about lack of preparedness. It is important that a collective discussion is held to establish an acceptable level of preparation for such events, but a challenge lies in managing local expectations which would be attached to such a discussion.
- Comment from NHS: Swine Flu preparation was cited as an approach to encouraging individuals to prepare themselves for an 'extreme' health related event.
- Need to build adaptation into Parish Planning as a means for enabling local communities to prepare for extreme weather events/ climate change.