

Case Studies

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Cornwall's NVDA Assembly to Local Government Representation

Cornwall local XR group were the first to really get success in using NVDA as a tactic, running alongside community assemblies to achieve support from the local authority, initially, then later representation on the District Council.

What follows is the background for everyone to delve into and follow the example of to empower your local community to be heard by local government decision makers and be invited to participate in the statutory decision making process.

How Escalation From Assembly to NVDA and Council Decision Making Inclusion Began

In this video, Myghal Rual, an assembly organiser, talks about [Cornwall's Community Assembly here](#)

Prior to the Festival of Resistance in 2022, in his own words, Myghal wrote the following summary of how their escalation process from assembly to NVDA began:

"Just a quick background story to how we held a People's Assembly about the climate and nature crisis. Bringing together Climate Activists and Cornwall Councillors .

We occupied Cornwall County Hall. The seat of power in Cornwall. We were asked to leave by the police and council officials, we held our ground and had our first Peoples Assembly inside county hall. We went on to have many PAs inside county hall.

We have built up constructive dialogue with Cornwall Council. We now have a 4 person team who meet leaders of the council. Ensuring transparency and accountability on a regular basis.

We also occupied Truro Cathedral and asked for a PA in the Cathedral. That PA happened inside the Cathedral on April 6th 2024 with nearly 100 people present."

He goes into more detail on the Assembly escalation process as follows:

"In September 2021 we held a large protest of community coalition groups including Greenpeace, Green Party and XR, outside of our Cornwall County Council building. We decided to go inside the building to hold a People's Assembly on a climate related theme.

We then established contact with the Leader of the Council and other leading Council officials, with the aim of creating constructive dialogue with them.

We now have regular meetings with these council officials and present the feedback from our regular People's Assemblies at County Hall to council officials.

Some councillors have also joined us at our Peoples Assemblies inside the building, in recognition of the spirit of deliberative democracy.

We have also have a working group who engage with the council's carbon neutral team.

In June 2022 we set up a Marquee on Council grounds for a two week occupation. During these two weeks we camped in the County Council grounds and offered an extensive programme of educational events made available to the public and councillors. Initially we were asked to leave. We held firm and eventually Cornwall Council accepted our decision to stay.

These two weeks were an outstanding success, the Leader of the Council even gave a speech as did the Director of Public Health Cornwall, in the marquee. Extensive publicity was generated, largely positive.

Cornwall Council have an aim of Cornwall as a whole reaching net zero by 2030. We aim to ensure that by action, accountability and transparency this target is met."

People's Assembly Held on 29th November 2022 - Summary

PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY AT COUNTY HALL, TRURO ON TUESDAY NOVEMBER 29th 2022 Attending: 48

- **QUESTION 1: Where do we go from here?**
- **QUESTION 2: How can we work effectively with other groups?**

Six breakout groups selected their top priorities.

QUESTION 1

- Make People's Assemblies more accessible and get the Coalition out into communities
- Work better with the media, get regular coverage
- Complete the survey on the Council's 2023-24 draft budget here: [Cornwall Council Draft Budget 2023/24](#) |
- Let's Talk Cornwall Closing date Sunday January 8th
- Also complete the survey on shopping, energy use and attitude towards climate change here: [Council launches survey to understand residents' travel, energy use and shopping](#)

choices - Cornwall Council

- Investigate alternative funding methods for community energy schemes
- Support regenerative farming and more self-sufficient food production
- Establish an open access register of habitat/greenspace loss
- Transfer financial support from Newquay Airport to local bus/train transport system
- Individual actions count and the Council need to be shown what action is needed; we lead, they follow
- Divestment of any Council assets which are not environmentally friendly
- Local campaigns for local solar/wind energy projects
- Develop more active relationship with the Carbon Neutral Team
- Scrutinise and challenge “green washing” by the Council
- Form groups to monitor key indicators and publicise the results
- Have an “Insulatometer” with a St Piran’s flag, showing progress on home insulations
- Do more visual imaging to get the message out to the public

QUESTION 2

- Climate centres to be facilitated by the Council; could Warm Hubs be used for this?
- Work with Acorn Community Group on unfair evictions and other housing issues
- Build links with other groups such as Wildlife Trusts and Trades Unions

Following this initial assembly, more organisations came on board via an online assembly, as can be seen the following month...

Assembly Held on 15th December 2022

Cornwall Council and Members of Cornwall Climate Action Coalition Summary points

Topic: Climate Commission Model - continuation

Attendees: Cornwall Council (CC) Cllr Martyn Alvey: Portfolio holder for Environment and Climate Change Mark Holmes: Manager, Carbon Neutral Cornwall Cllr Linda Taylor: Leader Cornwall Council Cllr Louis Gardener: Portfolio holder for Economy, good growth fund, SPF, LUF, energy policy parts of NQ airport & spaceport and councillor for NQ & Pentire Cornwall Climate Action Coalition (CCAC) Karen Jeffereys John Carley Helen Angel Tom Pine Andrew Stott

QUESTION 1: The Climate Commission What has the Council found out about the climate commission model from their contact with ‘Place based Climate Action Network (PCAN)?

- CC had met with Andrew Goldstein members of PCAN* (one of the research fellows and professor of economy at Leeds University, and the independent chair of Leeds Climate Commission). PCAN is a 5 year funded programme which has supported the development of 20 commissions across the UK.
- The different models were discussed.
- LA’s generally do not lead on commissions but have a seat on them. A number of commissions are funded by universities.
- Commissions are not for lobbying or campaigning.

- It was evident that each commission varied in size depending on the area that it represented so some had as few as 10 members and the largest one (Yorkshire and Humber) ran with 40 members plus a series of sub boards.
- CC subsequently attended a meeting of the Yorkshire and Humber Commission and also attended the extended network that they call PCAN plus. This is a networking opportunity for the different chairs and leads of the commissions around the UK to come together to share good practice. CC had found this meeting really interesting, it was well resourced and led by a university who had secured additional funding. There were also LA attendees present.
- CC likened the structure to Cornwall's Sectors and Partner Group explaining there were key representatives from sectors to industry as well as community representatives.
- Because their university had secured additional funding the Yorkshire & Humberside Commission was running sub and working groups that focused on industry, transport and land Cornwall Council and Members of Cornwall Climate Action Coalition use resilience.
- Their progress updates are loaded onto a website similar to CC's: "The Hive". They run a series of consultations through their website and have links to their action plan.
- CC noted that the first 3 commission meetings were independently chaired by someone outside of the region. This led to a sharing of Terms of Reference, ownership mapping and to who and how people could be involved.
- CC and Carbon Neutral team are writing up the findings and terms of reference and doing a bit more digging around on the other models.
- Questions that arise for CC are:
- What does it mean to other groups that are in operation?
- What would be the implications in terms of the budget?
- Where do LAs have a role?
- CCAC mentioned that commission members would be volunteers and that as existing commissions all have academic input Cornwall's could be Exeter/Falmouth University. CC confirmed that the Tremough campus would probably have an interest, Exeter Uni is an obvious choice.
- Commissions have representation of maybe 1 or 2 from community organisations, industry, academia, and infrastructure organisations (water board, electric, gas). CC feel that the current Sectors and Partners Group mirrors this. It covers transport, housing, academia, visitor economy, construction, communities and those with lived experiences, international perspective, farming and agriculture.
- CC will be looking into another aspect: "The Climate Readiness Assessment" that PCAN offers. This reviews the sectors' readiness to respond to climate change in areas such as funding, policy, skills and public buy in. CC feels that much of it will align with the LAEP starting next year.
- CC: Cornwall is the only LA to have a rural climate and emergency planning document. The approach the commissions were using were much the same as the way Cornwall developed their DPD.
- CCAC: invited CC to look at what Essex have done in that they have produced a document based on the recommendations of their commission and it appears more robust in how it expects things to go forward. Essex is pursuing about 65 actions by comparison; CCAC have only found about 18 in the Cornwall 2030 plan.

- CC are developing a review of the options and in the process drawing in views from the IoS Leadership and those involved in climate commissions. It will be made public and this is expected by the end of January. Cornwall Council and Members of Cornwall Climate Action Coalition Summary points - online meeting 15th December 2022
- CC noted that costs as indicated by PCAN, were not what had been expected. CC would need to establish what might/might not be available from PCAN and any implication that might flow from that.

QUESTION 2: Timeline and budget

Please outline what is the timeline and process for adding an item to the annual budget?

- CC indicated it would likely be a diversion of existing funding within the carbon neutral budget. CC added that they would want to consult with the partner groups that might be affected and may fold if the commission route is followed.
- CC thought the CIC route is particularly attractive for partnership working. It was confirmed that there is currently no specific budget line for a commission model.
- CC thought that having a commission with a degree of independence would allow the work they are doing to be more visible. But some of the groups they already meet with and work with are worried that they will lose their chance to speak directly to CC.
- CCAC suggested smaller sub-groups from the main commission with working groups involving other people feeding into those small groups
- CCAC asked for detail on where we are against each of the set objectives and CC answered that the quarterly performance report ** should have that detail. **Update on Shared Prosperity Fund SPF** (There was reference made in these notes to previous notes of meetings for 1st Sept and 20th, which we do not have, but there is a contact referred to at the end of the Assembly notes for this session).
- CC gave an update on the scope of some of the projects to be funded by the SPF.
- Applications from right across the board were coming with green initiatives incorporated. CC have allocated £1m of SPF directly into boosting the insulation programme. Other bids have come in for new builds and community hubs with carbon neutrality and energy issues right at the height of their design.
- At a larger scale there are bids connected to the burgeoning floating offshore energy industry which includes supportive engineering companies all aligned to solving the UK's future energy needs. Those organisations that are demonstrating a clear commitment to carbon neutrality are scoring much higher in the bid assessment process than those that do not. CC are extremely pleased with applications. Cornwall Council and Members of Cornwall Climate Action Coalition Summary points - online meeting 15th December 2022
- A version of the Decision-Making Wheel is being used against the bids. The same questions are being asked through the triage process including whether a bidder is paying the real living wage.
- Cabinet has just agreed the framework for the Rural Prosperity Fund. This is an additional £5.6m on top of SPF (total £137.6m).
- CCAC: hitherto funding streams had been very centralised, but it is hoped they would become more decentralised so as decisions could be more locally focussed. It is thought a commission model could provide a helpful steer to bring this about.

- CC asked CCAC to look and participate in the devolution consultation and a Cllr specifically said they would be happy to answer any questions or queries and to please email them. CCAC post meeting reflection The issue of a Climate Commission Model has recently been raised with CC from a number of routes: Public question to full CC; question to CC from within CC i.e. an elected councillor and via CCAC meetings. As a result of this multi levelled approach CC have listened, taken this topic forward and are now exploring the options.

**** Useful background reading**** - (Link to PCAN): What is a local climate commission? | Place Based Climate Action Network (pcancities.org.uk) ****** For reference CC shared a link to the [new reports page on the Hive](#) (This brings together key Cornish reports, including links to the action plan, inventories and performance reports. This was something promised at a previous meeting and the Climate Change pages on the CC website are also under review). In depth notes of the meeting are available via: Karenjeffereys@tiscali.co.uk

Massembly 2024



Over 450 people took part in our incredible Massembly at Upgrade Democracy, to discuss the question: "How can we take meaningful steps to Upgrade Democracy?"

The 'Massembly' took place in-person at Windsor and also online and a second online 'massembly' took place in Oct 2024.

The input and questions for discussion

Massembly Information Cards

Summary of Results

Sat 31st August 2024 In person and online

Over 450 people took part in our incredible Massembly at Upgrade Democracy, to discuss the question: "How can we take meaningful steps to Upgrade Democracy?"

1. Citizens' Assemblies and Participatory Democracy

- Advocacy for the widespread use of citizens' assemblies at local, regional, and national levels (e.g., replacing the House of Lords, setting up assemblies for long-term issues, starting at the local level to build trust).

- Emphasis on participatory budgeting and decision-making processes that involve ordinary citizens.
- Support for creating spaces and opportunities for grassroots democratic participation, including community assemblies and participatory budgeting.

2. Civic and Political Education

- The need for better and earlier civic education, starting from primary school, to empower young people and encourage political engagement.
- Incorporation of political and ecological education, including rights of nature, to create a culture of informed and active citizenship.
- Promoting a culture of democracy through experiential learning in schools and community involvement.

3. Accountability and Transparency in Politics

- Calls for effective mechanisms to hold elected representatives accountable, ensuring transparency in decision-making and reducing the influence of lobbyists and vested interests.
- Proposals for job descriptions for MPs, declarations of outside employment, and transparency in funding and lobbying.
- Introduction of independent bodies for fact-checking and monitoring disinformation.

4. Political Reform and Representation

- Criticism of the current political system as serving a minority elite, with proposals for reforms to make it more representative and fair (e.g., replacing the House of Lords, limiting political donations).
- Support for fair and transparent government funding of political parties to reduce the influence of private and corporate interests.
- Encouraging inclusivity and diversity in political processes, ensuring that all voices, including marginalized groups, are heard and represented.

5. Environmental Protection and Rights of Nature

- Advocacy for legal rights for nature and the criminalization of ecocide.
- Proposals to integrate environmental considerations into all aspects of policy-making, including the appointment of commissioners or legal guardians to protect future generations and ecosystems.
- Calls for a nature-based curriculum in schools and the protection of the interests of future generations.

6. Building Trust and Confidence in Democracy

- Emphasis on rebuilding public trust in the political system through inclusive, transparent, and participatory processes.
- Encouragement of civic engagement and community involvement as a means to foster trust and counter populist movements.
- The role of local projects and assemblies in building understanding and confidence in democracy.

7. Long-term and Future-focused Governance

- Proposals for creating positions like a Commissioner for Future Generations to ensure policies are assessed for their long-term impacts.
- Calls for policies and governance structures that consider the well-being of future generations and the planet.
- Use of frameworks like doughnut economics to assess policy decisions and their impact on planetary boundaries.

Sun 13th October 2024 Online

447 participants voted, 43,153 votes were cast, 96.54 votes per participant on average, 137 commented, 453 comments submitted.

1. Citizens' Assemblies and Participatory Democracy

- Citizens' Assemblies offer inclusive platforms for deliberation on important issues, involving diverse voices and opinions.
- Citizens' Assemblies should be used at local, regional, and national levels, with legally binding decisions and integration into parliamentary processes.
- These assemblies are tools for rebuilding trust in democracy by involving ordinary citizens in decision-making.

2. Education for Democratic Participation

- Civic and political education should begin early to develop responsible, engaged citizens who understand democracy and governance.
- Schools and educational institutions should implement assemblies and participatory budgeting to foster democratic practices.
- Media literacy and experiential learning are key to preparing future generations to resist misinformation and participate effectively.

3. Reducing Corporate and Private Influence

- Corporate lobbyists, political donors, and mainstream media often wield disproportionate power, distorting democracy.
- Regulations are needed to limit donations, increase transparency in lobbying, and prevent private interests from influencing public policy.

- Fair media regulation, including accountability and fact-checking mechanisms, is crucial to protect the integrity of democracy.

4. Long-term Thinking and Future Generations

- Decision-making should prioritise long-term impacts, taking into account the well-being of future generations and environmental sustainability.
- Legal frameworks should recognize the rights of nature, criminalise ecocide, and integrate environmental protection into democratic processes.
- A Future Generations Commission or Commissioner should assess policies for their impact on the unborn and natural ecosystems.

5. Transparency and Accountability in Governance

- Transparent decision-making processes and public accountability are essential for restoring trust in politics.
- Governments should publicly record expert advice and decisions, ensuring that citizens understand the reasoning behind policies.
- Transparency in political funding and lobbying is necessary to reduce undue influence and promote fair, evidence-based decisions.

6. Inclusivity and Diversity in Decision-Making

- Democracy should be inclusive, promoting representation of marginalised groups and fostering gender equality and diverse community participation.
- Grassroots initiatives, such as participatory budgeting and local assemblies, help empower underrepresented voices in the political process.
- Special provisions should be made to include non-voters (e.g., children and future generations) in decision-making.

7. Reforming Democratic Structures

- The structure of political institutions, such as the House of Lords and electoral processes, needs reform to better represent citizens.
- Deliberative and participatory processes, such as Citizens' Assemblies, should replace outdated and hierarchical systems.
- Introducing non-oppositional, collaborative decision-making spaces could enhance democratic functionality and reduce polarisation.

More Case Studies

Haringey Community Assembly on Climate (2min video)

https://www.youtube.com/embed/LzaTx3AJuvo?si=hiTPjjGJta_omR0n

S. Yorkshire Climate Assemblies was a council enabled Assembly that made recommendations on the route forward for South Yorkshire. NB the Mayor backs the popularisation of assemblies.

Walshaw Wind Farm Community Assembly, near Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire.

Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly, this was the first climate assembly in Wales.

Blackburn People's Jury on Climate Change Crisis - September 2022, a group organised by the council and the **Sortition Foundation**; they came up with 15 recommendations to tackle local issues related to climate change.

Cheshire East People's Panel- video on the cost of living with **Positive Money**.

Los Indignados Assemblies, a Spanish ad hoc citizen coalitions to challenge specific government actions.

COP26 Global Assembly produced a report answering the question 'How can humanity address the climate and ecological crisis in a fair and effective way?' Findings in their report came from both a **Global Citizens' Assembly**, and self-organised Community Assemblies around the world.

Grassroots To Global - Scotland.

Co-operation Hull

Eastbourn Citizens and Local Authorities Partnership