



Civil Society Events briefing note

1. Introduction

Southampton City Council is working with the University of Southampton, University of Oxford, Involve and the Sortition Foundation to run the Southampton Citizens' Climate Assembly (SCCA) in Autumn/Winter 2023. The SCCA will bring together a diverse group of people to learn about and discuss issues around climate change and transport in Southampton, and reach conclusions about what they would like to see happen in the city. Citizens' assemblies, like the SCCA, have been used by governments and parliaments around the world to help shape their work. The SCCA is one of over twenty local citizens' climate assemblies and juries to take place in the UK to-date.

1.1 Local events - A new approach to deciding what an assembly focuses on

Citizens' assemblies focus on answering an overarching question. What this question is has a significant impact on the topics which an assembly discusses and the types of conclusions it provides. Often the commissioner of the assembly, such as a local authority, will decide the overarching question for the assembly themselves, without seeking wider input or advice.

The Southampton Citizens' Climate Assembly is one of a small number of citizens' assemblies in the UK to try a different approach. In July 2023, the SCCA team ran five events across the city to ask members of the public and local organisations their views on what the overarching question for the SCCA should be and what topics the assembly should cover.

The events were held in Woolston, St Denys and Coxford, and a further two were held online to enable people from across the city to attend. The events lasted around two hours and were open to anyone. A sixth event is due to take place in the autumn.

1.2 How did the events work

All five events looked at the same questions. Participants were introduced to what the SCCA is, why it is happening, why it is focussing on transport and how it will work. They then discussed in small groups their views on what the overarching question for the assembly should be and explored what topics it should cover. They particularly focused on whether significant sources of carbon emissions in Southampton over which the council has limited direct policy influence should be addressed by the assembly, or whether the SCCA should focus purely on people's use of transport in their personal lives (e.g. to commute, visit family and friends, shop, attend appointments and so on). Significant sources of carbon emissions in Southampton over which the council has limited direct policy influence include the airport (and vehicles which service it), seaport (and vehicles which service it) and other commercial vehicles servicing businesses and retail in the city.

1.3 About this briefing note

This briefing note collates the key themes, ideas and concerns which were expressed by participants at the five events. It will be used by the SCCA team to help inform decisions about the overarching question the assembly will address, and the topics it will cover. The SCCA team will also consider the length of time available to the assembly when making these decisions, and this was explained to participants at the five events.

1.4 Who attended the civil society events

Invites were sent out to nearly 100 different organisations, including faith groups, campaign groups and community groups. The events were also promoted on social media and through council newsletters. In total 62 people attended the events. Attendees included people who identified themselves as:

- Members of climate or environmental campaign groups
- Southampton residents attending in a personal capacity
- Regular commuters into Southampton attending in a personal capacity
- Members of faith groups
- Members of disability organisations
- Members of community associations

Participants were not asked to share information about any of their own protected characteristics, such as their age, gender or ethnicity. However it is possible to make some broad observations about who did and did not attend, and to say something about their views:

- Mostly participants appeared to be white and middle-aged, though these characteristics do not describe all participants
- There appeared to be a reasonable diversity of genders
- Attendees tended to be more likely than the general population to identify as very concerned and/or knowledgeable about climate change. However, a small number of participants did self-identify as being more climate-sceptical

These anecdotal observations are shared as context for the outputs created by participants at the events. This briefing note should be read with the knowledge of whose views have been heard during the events.

2. What question should the assembly consider?

All the events started with SCCA team members presenting information about what a citizens' assembly is, why this one is happening in Southampton, why it is focusing on climate change and transport, how it is being funded and which organisations are responsible for running it. The SCCA team members delivering these events were independent facilitators from Involve, with researchers from the two universities also supporting the delivery of the events. After that they invited participants to share their views on what an appropriate overarching question would be for the assembly.



This discussion started with SCCA team members sharing a draft question, which had been developed by the team:

“How do we decarbonise the transport system in Southampton, so that it is safe, easy and connected for people to get around?”

The team also gave participants a list of adjectives - which participants could add to - which they might want to swap in or out of the draft. These were:

Zero-emission	Safe	Connected
Easy	Accessible	Attractive
Affordable	Green	Helps personal mobility

During small group discussions participants identified which three adjectives they thought were most important to include in the question, if the format of the question remained the same - i.e. *“How do we decarbonise the transport system in Southampton, so that it is 1, 2, 3”*. Across the five civil society events, the three most popular adjectives to be included in the question were:

- Accessible
- Affordable
- Connected

Accessible: many participants highlighted accessibility as an essential part of a properly functioning decarbonised transport system. Participants emphasised the right which all city-users should have to decarbonised transport which they can access, particularly highlighting people with physical disabilities, wheelchair users and parents of young children. Participants emphasised that currently people with physical disabilities struggled to access public transport in the city. Secondly participants reasoned that a decarbonised transport system would not help address climate change if it was not accessible to all; if people cannot easily access it then they may be forced to use other modes of transport which produce more carbon emissions.

Connected: many participants regarded the existing transport system in the city as disjointed and disconnected, making it difficult to use. Similar to the rationale for making the transport system accessible, participants said that unless different stages of journeys were well connected (e.g. two bus routes connecting, or different modes of transport being aligned with each other), then efforts to decarbonise the system could be wasted as people may resort to using their cars or other high emission modes of transport. Participants frequently identified regularity and reliability as key aspects of connectedness.

Affordable: many participants chose ‘affordable’ because, similar to the adjective “connected”, this was seen to be a description of what the current transport system is not. Many participants reasoned that a decarbonised but unaffordable transport system would be unlikely to achieve the desired impact of reducing travel emissions as people would resort to using other, more polluting modes of transport.



Some of the other popular adjectives were:

- Safe – though some participants felt that safety was covered by adjectives such as accessible
- Zero-emission or Green – though some participants suggested that zero-emission added little to the meaning of the question if it was already mentioning decarbonising

When discussing whether this sort of question was the right overarching one to be asking the assembly, some participants suggested changes to the language and structure of the question.

On language, some participants fed back that it will be important to very clearly define what is and is not included when using terms like “transport system”. Some participants also pushed back on the use of the term “decarbonise” for a few different reasons. Firstly some participants suggested that it is too technical a term and might not resonate with people. Secondly, some participants said this term didn’t include air pollution and they were unhappy with this being omitted from the scope of the assembly because they felt it was a major issue in Southampton.

On structure, some participants felt it was important to ensure the question was asking how to achieve an outcome, not whether an outcome is desirable or not. Linked to this some participants were keen to ensure the question included an appropriate level of urgency to set the tone of the discussions at the assembly.

3. What topics should the assembly cover?

SCCA team members explained to participants that personal transport (i.e. how people travel around the city) and use of delivery services such as Amazon and Deliveroo would be explored at the assembly. Participants were then asked to share their views on whether or not the assembly should consider further topics.

To support this discussion SCCA team members presented information outlining:

- The fact that the airport (and vehicles which service it), seaport (and vehicles which service it) and other commercial vehicles servicing businesses and retail in the city have a significant impact on carbon emissions¹
- The council’s relatively limited powers to directly influence emissions coming from these areas, compared to their more direct influence over personal transport use and deliveries
- Potential time constraints at the assembly itself and the choice between covering fewer topics in greater depth, or more topics in less depth

¹ For brevity, these topics are henceforth referred to as “airport, seaport and commercial vehicles”

SCCA team members then asked participants to discuss whether or not they would like to see the scope of the assembly expanded to include emissions from the airport, seaport and commercial vehicles.

Participants across the events were split in their views on whether the assembly should discuss emissions from the airport, seaport and other commercial vehicles servicing retail in the city. Overall more people thought that these topics should be included in the assembly than thought these topics should not be included in the assembly. However some people also expressed that they were unsure or wanted further information to be able to make this decision.

3.1 Reasons for including emissions from the airport, seaport and other commercial vehicles

There were three key reasons why some participants wanted to see the assembly cover emissions from the airport, seaport and commercial vehicles:

- **The scale of emissions involved:** some participants reasoned that addressing emissions from the airport, seaport and commercial vehicles would be key to action on climate change in the city.
- **Perceived legitimacy of the assembly amongst Southampton residents:** some participants suggested that emissions from the airport and seaport in particular are prominent and emotive issues in Southampton, so attempts to discuss transport and climate change without tackling these topics would risk de-legitimising the process of the assembly; people might feel it was failing to address ‘the elephant in the room’.
- **Pollution and damage to the ocean:** some participants felt that pollution and damage to the ocean were just as important as transport emissions, so to discuss one topic and not the other would fail to address the bigger picture.

3.2 Reasons for not including emissions from the airport, seaport and other commercial vehicles

There were two key reasons why some participants felt that it was better not to include emissions from the airport, seaport and commercial vehicles.

Firstly some participants felt that the assembly discussing these topics and making recommendations about what should be done would be a waste of time, given the council wouldn’t have the power to enact the recommendations. Participants reasoned that, given the urgency required for action on climate change, the assembly should focus on topics over which the council has more direct policy influence, thus making it more likely that the assembly’s recommendations would have an impact.

Secondly, some participants felt there was a risk that time at the assembly would be spread too thinly across the multiple topics, meaning that learning, discussions and the recommendations would be rushed or not contain sufficient detail to be useful to the council. These people preferred for the assembly members to be able to give their full attention to a smaller number of topics.



It is important to note that, whilst some participants felt the assembly should not expand its scope, this did not mean participants did not want to see meaningful action taken to reduce emissions from the big businesses operating out of the airport and seaport in particular.

3.3 Reasons for uncertainty

Some participants felt they needed more information to be able to give their opinion. Specifically some participants wanted more information about:

- The exact levels of emissions coming from the airport, seaport and commercial vehicles, as opposed to general statements about them being significant
- The ways in which the council might have direct or indirect impact on emissions from the airport, seaport and commercial vehicles.
- Particularly regarding the seaport; whether there are some areas of operations which the council may have more ability to influence. If so, whether it would be possible to include only these elements of the seaport in the assembly.

In general this suggests that the greater the level of emissions coming from the airport, seaport and commercial vehicles - and the more influence the council could have over them - the more likely participants would be to want them included in the assembly. The levels of emissions seemed the most important factor to participants.

4. What happens next?

The outputs from the civil society events will be used by the Southampton Citizens' Climate Assembly team to inform decisions on the overarching question for the assembly and the topics it covers. There will also be an Advisory Group convened to review the information presented at the assembly and comment on plans for the assembly.

This briefing note and the slides presented at the events have been shared with everyone who attended and are also available on the council's website.