

Our Rep reports:

Background:

The Croydon Climate Crisis Commission (CCCC) formed from a partnership between Croydon Council and the New Economics Foundation (NEF), and began work in March 2020. The CCCC extended an invitation for a VCS Representative to join the commission. Ian Morris, Sustainable Thornton Heath, kindly agreed to take on this role and has regularly provided feedback from meetings for our membership which has been shared in CVA Newsletters and on the CVA website.

Report: The Croydon Climate Crisis Commission has now published its report delivering its recommendations on how the Council should continue to build on the momentum of the Citizens' Assembly and commission's activities, and commit to deep ongoing engagement with residents, community groups, workers, trade unions and businesses to ensure initiatives aimed at reducing emissions and improving quality of life in the borough are genuinely co-created are detailed in the report. This includes formalising an independent climate panel to review progress on the recommendations and developing an alliance of partners to drive a green recovery across the borough. Members of working groups, members of the Croydon Citizens' Assembly and Croydon residents and businesses all provided insights and comments to shape the recommendations.

Ian Morris, our VCS Representative spoke at the Croydon Council Cabinet meeting representing the Croydon Climate Crisis Commission (CCCC) alongside Miatta Fahnbulleh, CEO of the New Economics Foundation (NEF) and Chair of the CCCC who also spoke on behalf of NEF Consulting.

Ian Morris, VCS Representative's presentation at the Croydon Council Cabinet Meeting

I want to start by giving credit to the Council for declaring the climate & ecological emergency 2 years ago and for then setting up the Citizens' Assemblies and then an independent commission [the Croydon Climate Crisis Commission] which was handed over to a reputable and really competent firm [NEF].

Miatta and Muhammad [Ali, Cabinet Member for Sustainability] have already talked about the impact of COVID on the report, both in terms of its timing but also its engagement, and I think this latter point is a really important point for people to be aware of and not to forget because the engagement that we managed to do was quite limited and that's really important when we talk about the effort we really need to solve this problem.

As already mentioned, the one key point is that the Council cannot do this alone. It's going to require a collective act across sectors and across stakeholders. It's also going to require lobbying, as Miatta said, at regional, national and central government levels because we need vast resources to solve this problem. But at the same time, the Council MUST recognize the very special and unique powers and the role it's got to control its own emissions but also influence emissions reductions across stakeholders in the borough, and it's really important to do that. It absolutely must take a central leadership role and linked to this I would urge the Council to look at organisations like Ashden which have a Sustainable Towns & Cities programme that is designed to support Local Authorities and link them together.

I would really urge you to look seriously at that and to engage with that organization. Also Friends of the Earth a list of actions – I think there's 33 – that Local Authorities could and should be taking right now, and I think this is 2 or 3 years old. And then there are also entities like The Grantham Institute that have done a lot of work on this also, so there's a lot of support out there and I think there are plenty of ways that the Council can partner with people to support and help guide it.

I think a key thing to start with is an accurate and comprehensive measurement of emissions, both in terms of a baseline but also to measure going forward. When I say comprehensive I'm talking about beyond production-based emissions (which are the figures we see so often) consumption-based emissions are often around 2-3 times higher than production-based emissions. If we really want to achieve net-zero rather than production-based [emissions] net-zero, then we have to look at consumption-based emissions too (often known as scope 1-3 emissions) that's really critical.

The Council has to build trust. It needs to reach out and engage, when I say engage I don't mean consult; there are a lot of consultation mechanisms that are just very prohibitive, if we want to engage people we've got to engage in a way that makes people want to give their time and input. We need to co-create solutions rather than it being from the top-down, and it has to be done in partnership with all stakeholders. We have to look at the assets and map the assets we've got in Croydon, and use those and learn from the potential for collective action that's come out of COVID.

We have to raise awareness. Everyone knows that there is a climate and ecological crisis, but what this means for themselves and their children and maybe their families (including people that have got relatives in other countries), I still don't think that's completely clear. I think we need to level with people. It's very important for people to understand the scale of this problem when it comes to making some tough decisions. We need to raise awareness, both with the Council itself and also across stakeholders. There is also a lot of co-benefits that come from many of the measures we need to take, this should be part of the awareness-raising too. It shouldn't just be all the doom and gloom.

Transparency and accountability have to be at the heart of the process going forward as mentioned in the report, we need to have, as with the commission – an independent body, which is appropriately populated, that can hold the Council to account regularly, and if the Council really wants to solve this crisis, it should also want this itself.

I end on a few points of concern, but also a bit of hope. The climate & ecological crisis is happening at an accelerating rate, as Miatta said. It's been described as the greatest challenge that humanity has ever faced, and also it's the greatest threat to our continued existence, it doesn't get much bigger than this.

It's been 2 years since the Council's declared a climate and ecological emergency, and despite the Citizens' Assemblies, the declaration, and the commission the Council is not taking anywhere near enough action that is needed to deal with this crisis. If we contrast this with the response to COVID, you can see how different the response has been.

I'm glad to see this has moved to the top of the agenda, as I was a little bit concerned it was item 9 at one stage, which seemed quite telling that it wasn't really being taken that seriously. There should be a real war effort, co-operation across the parties. We did have a Councillor from the opposition [Simon

Hoar], who I saw at one meeting, I heard him say his name once, and that was it. I am concerned that there's not sufficient engagement from both sides.

On the hope side, COVID has given us a real opportunity, as Miatta has said and has been covered in the report, and have to learn from this. There are so many opportunities and co-benefits that come out of making the right choices; it's not all about sacrifice. And so many people – as has been evidenced by many studies – really want to see action and change. But we do need leadership, and not just from central government, but from local too. We have no choice but to adapt, so let's stop pretending otherwise, and let's just get on with it.

Ian Morris

June 2021