

Stevenage Borough Council Climate Change Citizens Panel

Background

The Stevenage Borough Council Climate Change Citizens Panel took place from Monday 26th to Thursday 29th October 2020 and was facilitated by Mutual Gain. The Panel consisted of 24 participants broadly representative of the town and was held using the Zoom video platform and Miro, an online visual collaboration tool. The participants heard from five local experts on the science, policy, and activism surrounding the climate emergency and then deliberated on what action they would like to see to help Stevenage reach its target of net zero by 2030.

The first two sessions were information based and focussed around speakers giving presentations, as well as participants having the opportunity to become familiar with the format, platform and facilitators. The third and fourth sessions were deliberative in order to reach recommendations.

Panel Sourcing & Recruitment

Mutual Gain connected Council officers with the leading recruitment organisation Sortition Foundation (SF), who provided advice on how to run a randomised selection. However, the recommended recruitment methodology was not deemed possible. Mutual Gain was requested to co-ordinate recruitment as close as possible to this methodology.

Since on-street recruitment was also not possible due to COVID-19, Mutual Gain conducted a letter drop, and promoted the event through schools network, the NHS Trust Forum and the Stevenage Youth Council, to achieve a broader mix as possible— the youngest participant was 13 years of age.

Most participants had no prior specific knowledge of climate change and had not been involved with any engagement activity before. Those sourced via mail out were primarily Stevenage-based people. A few people were already involved with local advocacy activities (including Stevenage Bus Users Group and local political parties). These participants did not dominate the discussions. Breakout rooms were facilitated to ensure equal voice and everyone was respectful in discussions.

A reasonably representative set of participants was recruited. There was some gender bias among participants, with women accounting for 62.5% and some bias towards “higher educated” and “currently not working” residents.

Headline Recommendations

The headline recommendations made by the Panel were:

- 1. Zero Food Waste Town**
- 2. Establish a collaborative framework to achieve sustainable infrastructure to reduce pollution**
- 3. Improve communications and recycling awareness incentives to public and commerce**
- 4. Implement climate emergency education and create awareness for Stevenage residents, businesses, and visitors**

Next Steps

The full report details the successes and limitations of engagement, as the first for the town and can act as a pilot for any deliberative engagement going forward.

It is important that the Council now identifies what the next steps are for implementing the recommendations and that a formal response to the Panel is given. The Panel highlighted how the Council can act as a community leader, helping residents, businesses and other local organisations make the necessary changes to achieve significantly lower emissions.