WMCA Greener Together

Climate Assembly Notes

Block 1, Part 1 - 3rd June 2023

PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF DECISION-MAKING
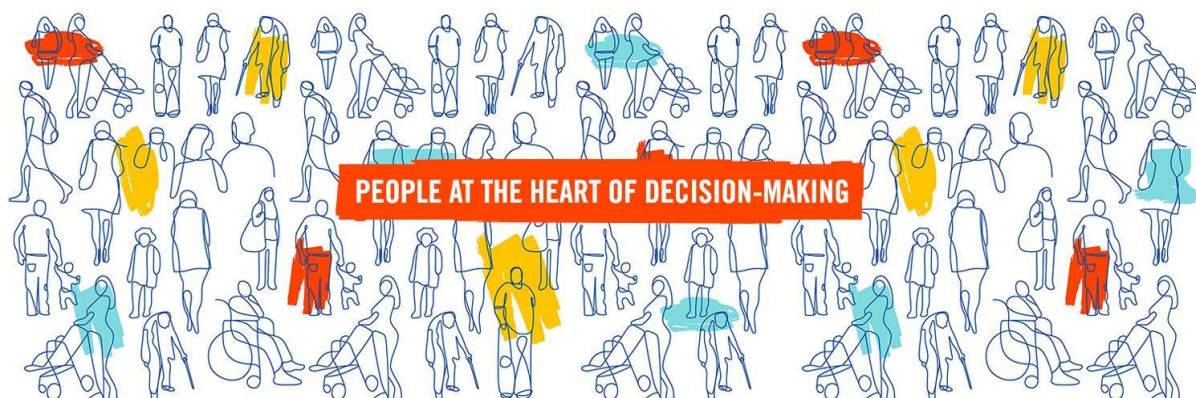
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01. Breakout 1 - after presentations

What are you thinking and feeling, having heard the presentations?

Participants raised challenges over whose responsibility the climate issue is, and the need to have perspective on the problem and be realistic about the challenges posed. However, participants also expressed concern over air pollution, and its effect on health and inequality. Participants were generally in favour of implementing change, however raised the importance of considering infrastructure needs such as better urban planning. Some participants also felt the need for incentives and legal restrictions to enforce better measures to improve air quality. Trade offs over physical health and quality of life / wellbeing started to come through in this discussion.

Legal restrictions / enforcement

- Concerning that we are aware of how bad it is and still no laws or support in place to limit these factors.
- HGV vehicles should be mandated by the government to travel at certain times, but there should be financial incentives for this as well *- also support for incentives*.

- Disappointment, but not surprised that the legal limits are higher than the WHO recommendation

In practice

- The idea of extending the distance between emissions and people sounds interesting but quite problematic in practice? Members would like to explore more ideas of how to implement that.

Trade off - wellbeing vs physical health

- The benefits of being outside outweigh the damage done by air pollution - there is balance to be struck here

Being realistic

- Interested to hear that pollution is higher during rush hour but concerns that this might be difficult to change.
- "It feels like the UK limit for pollutants is a lot higher than the WHO guidelines"
  - Some thought this might be so that the targets are more realistic but with the hope that they will go further once these are achieved.

Health

- Concerns about high levels of traffic and the link to asthma.
- "It's interesting and frightening how my environment affects me. I have a lung condition that I'm being assessed for at the moment, and now I'm realising [the effects] of the kind of area I live in"

Perspective

- Air pollution doesn't feel as critical as some of the other issues we're facing right now.

Inequality

- "I noticed that people who contribute least to pollution are the most affected by pollution"

Raised awareness

- "I Hadn't previously thought about all the various factors that contribute to pollution"

Urban planning considerations for bikes

- Some concerns that lots of green spaces are now used by cyclists which can make it a bit dangerous to walk as there is a chance you can get knocked over.
- "Some bike lanes are either in-complete or not always in the correct place"
- Why are bike lanes put next to busy polluting roads?

Where does the responsibility lie?

- "It feels a bit like homeowners are being shamed when it is more traffic and car owners that are the problem"
- "Really it looks like they are saying turn off your car (i.e. don't have it idling) and use your car less"

Support for green transport

- "Seeing more electric buses on the road now which is good"

Air pollution

- "Seems like petrol cars are much less polluting, so if diesel was cut out entirely it would be better"
    - Some wondered why big vans are still diesel?
    - Some members explained that they have diesel cars and the reason for buying them was that they were cheaper but now they are starting to think about other options.

Support for incentives

- Incentives for individuals and businesses to reduce their emissions. Such as cost.
- Cost really is the biggest incentive for people to change their behaviour when the health impacts are quite hidden unless you see the data.

- Toll roads should be encouraged. For £4 or £5 you can reduce the time of travel and mostly those toll roads are empty because people are trying to save money, which shows how much cost is a big implication.

Participants felt their awareness was raised. They expressed surprise at some air pollution statistics and put forward a need for public education on the matter. Participants expressed concern over political will to make change, as well as concern over air pollution and inequality in terms of those affected by air pollution and who may be asked to implement changes. Additional trade offs began to emerge. As well as referring to the trade off between physical health and quality of life / wellbeing, participants discussed trade offs in relation to long term improvements vs shorter term difficulties and trade offs between implementable solutions.

Surprise over statistics

- Members were surprised that London is not on top, commenting that it's much bigger and has a lot of traffic, so they must be doing something well.
- Surprising how bad the air quality is around us.
- Knowing that the peak travel times are in the morning when everyone's going to school and work, and then later on when they finish is shocking but if we know this why are we not making changes?

Inequality

- The inequality between the people producing the air pollution and the people affected by it.
- We need to make sure that changes and impacts are equally distributed amongst residents. Not just that if you can afford to live in a nice area you can drive through poor areas, pollute and then go and park up and breathe fresh air in your own area.
- **Geographical inequality** - Because we are situated in the middle of the UK geographically are at a disadvantage, because this accumulation of polluted atmosphere.

Trade-offs

- ***Long term improvements vs shorter term difficulties*** - For immediate improvement you'd have to close all arterial routes into electrify all buses. In the meantime the areas would be less connected and travel and business affected.
- ***Between implemented solutions*** - Electric vehicles are good for air pollution, but electricity production contributes to PM production! Difficult balancing act.
- **Physical health v quality of life / wellbeing**
- Where is the line between the benefits and dis-benefits?

Concerns over air pollution

- The presentation is a serious concern about the pollution level that affects communities.I thought it was interesting that the others were single cities, whereas West Midlands is a group of cities and we are still third.
- The impact of diesel cars on the environment
- Near schools the pollution level is notoriously high with cars.
- I wonder what the airport impact is?

Awareness raised / raising

- Lack of previous awareness about the level of air pollution in environment
- Lack of previous awareness about the level of lung conditions amongst the population
- People need the data and information like this so that they can understand what's going on there, casualties and the behaviour change that they can make. This includes being able to exercise your power and influence to make the government accountable, and to holding businesses and others accountable.

- There has to be training for everyday people to know what's going on and know how to exercise their rights.

Political will

- The apparent lack of political will to make radical change.

General points from discussion:

- **Traffic management -** Buildup of traffic on the motorway causes small road issues in my area of Erdington.

- **Business** - Greed is an issue

- **Dialogue needed** - dialogue is needed that leads to results. We need to all work together, residents, businesses and government.

02. Questions for the speakers

Air pollution

- Has the clean air zone helped in Birmingham?
- What plants can absorb or counteract the pollution problems? I thought there was going to be a 1 mile zone for no drop offs around schools?
- The advice to stay in on high pollution days; was this specifically for people with lung conditions or more generally?
- How can we as individuals reduce emissions that contribute to air pollution?
- Would like to hear more about the stats in terms of pollutants for electric cars.
- Should we be wearing masks because of the level of pollution?

Enforcement / Legal restrictions

- If diesel is the main source of air pollution why on earth are there not more moves to ban even existing vehicles from the road?
- Enforcement of vehicle emissions - how are they going to enforce them?

Inequality

- Where is the information about how everyday people can access the city plans for where air pollution is bad and how it is being tackled? It should be made easily available and everybody should know where to find it.

Transport

- Are there other solutions apart from not using transport?
- What is meant by road traffic background as opposed to local traffic?
- What are the benefits of electric cars, there were no stats in the presentations about them?

- ***Public transport - accessibility***
  - If the cost of public transport was reduced for adults and children, then people would use public transport more. E.g. a ticket to Manchester being £125 whereas if it was £15 per person.

  - "I'm a car driver and even with improved public transport I still may not use it because I have mental health issues that affect my comfort when I am in public. Therefore, the experience of public transport needs to be taken into account, especially when it comes to people with disabilities.

Health

- What are the links to pollution with dementia, type 2 diabetes, and obesity?

- If we are trying to get people to use other forms of transport, why are we putting cycle lanes where the main pollution is? In Poland cycle lanes are on the pavement or in parks.

- If it's not possible to get public transport, could they have car share schemes for big offices?

- If this is causing an impact on my health, where can we go to avoid this?

03. Breakout 2 - Looking at Actions 1-12

Action 1 - Each home to have a rating that indicates air quality level

Many participants felt that this action could be costly, intrusive and had the potential to lead to inequality, and secondary financial effects.There was some support for this action as a way to influence change, by raising awareness which could support and inform choices, for example for those with health issues.

Support

Informed Choice

- Choice for family/people with health issues/informed choice
- Like it for health

Influence

- Like it as a tool to influence change.

Concerns

Purpose

- Another way of showing where the poor quality housing is. We've already established this, so I don't see the point of it.
- Is it not common sense? We know where the poor air quality areas are. Is it a bit pointless and obvious?
- Sounds quite intrusive.

Secondary financial effects

- I suspect it would put life insurance up or affect the ability to get a mortgage. Feels like it would be used in a more punitive way.
- Affects house prices
- Tool for house buyers

Inequality

- Negative impact on those people who are poorest, because the poor areas have worse air quality, and so will have a more impact on house prices.
- If the people who are causing the problem live in areas that are OK, they are not going to do anything. Richer people will feel like their area is OK, and potentially look down on areas with lower air quality.
- No incentive for people in good quality areas to do anything. So people in poorer areas with lower air quality will see no positive changes.

Costs

- Cost for monitoring network to establish real time air pollution monitoring to give accurate rating

Implementation

- Many stakeholders involved included estate agents, builders, local authorities.

Action 2 - Signs to indicate poor air quality levels

Participants felt action 2 could support health and education, and could have useful effects with specific applications. However, participants were also concerned that this may have limited impact and expressed concerns over purpose and efficiency.

Support

Health

- Could be really beneficial for people with respiratory air conditions.

Education

- Could be educational for younger people/kids so it raises awareness.
- Might need educational programs. All of this is put on Joe Public though and the government need to support people to make these changes. **Trade off - Education is positive, but it will cost - shouldn't be on the public, need for government to step in**

Application

- Signs over a motorway might have an effect. Especially those that flash.

Concerns

Purpose / Efficiency

- Do not agree with the clean air zone. Money that's been made, where is this going? Not seen this invested by government, doing things with this money. Seems like another tax.

Impact

- Good for a minority of people. There are so many signs, drivers are not aware of many of the signs already. In the long term it might be another sign that people will ignore.
- Problem for people whose language is not english, if signs are all in english, people won't recognise what the signs mean.

Action 3 - Widening the Clean Air Zone / Implementing a congestion zone

Some participants supported the clean air zone and reduction of speed. However, participants also expressed a need to consider public transport and infrastructure were this to be implemented. Participants were also concerned that this action could lead to increased

individual costs, with potential for this to lead to inequality for those with less means. Questions were also posed as to who the responsibility should lie with. Participants suggested an alternative could be to consider technological solutions.

Support

- Prefer the clean air zone. Nobody in my family would drive to Birmingham, but we have train stations that go directly to Birmingham, it's also quicker. In Coventry I think it works. People would also get public transport to London.
- Reducing speed is good, and not allowing heavily polluting cars to drive.

Concerns

Transport and infrastructure

- I would need to drive somewhere to get a train. Better availability of public transport, an integrated transport system.
- For work, taking public transport is too expensive and takes longer in terms of time. Waiting for a bus that never turns up.
- Going into Birmingham by public transport is really hard. The trains with the train strikes, limited availability of trains. There is not really an incentive to go into the city by car.
- Places for free parking outside the city centre and transportation for free to the city centre.
- Really highlighted the need for an integrated transport system
- I have a diesel car and so I just don't go into the city centre. Wouldn't use the transport until it is better than it is now.

Inequality

- Disproportionate effect on those who are poorer.

Where does the responsibility lie?

- When you look at business, it is mostly businesses that run diesel cars who need it because it's cheaper. Businesses can afford this.
- People need to hold the government accountable and they need to know how
- A good example is the sewage companies and the pollution and the impact they have on the water and the fact that the government isn't really doing much to hold them accountable and we have to put all of our trust in them.
- Things (the burden/impact) need to be distributed, especially vehicles that deliver delivery vehicles.
- People go into the clean air zone and they pay the charge but still pollute. People should not take polluting vehicles into clean air zones.

Effects on the individual

- Against payment, I don't think it impacts the environment.
- May require people to sell/scrap their car and purchase a compliant vehicle
- Cost for example of a family of 4. How realistic is it to ask the, mto take public transport vs a car. A lot of people can't afford that.
- Like widening the clean air zone, the congestion zone sounds like a tax. Encourages people to change their vehicles. Obviously this has an impact on people who can't afford to change.

Alternative Solutions

Technology

- Engineers to look at how to collect or remove heavy pollutants from car whilst in use

Action 4 - Speed limit reduction and enforcement

Participants expressed concern over timescale, as well as overall and individual costs. They suggested alternative solutions could be to consider surplus capacity on motorways, speed limits and enforcement.

Concerns

Timescale

- Timescale is too long - why not 1 year?

Effects on the individual

- Personal effect of speed limit is higher (35) because 50% increase in time travel

Costs

- Cost is too high

Public transport and infrastructure considerations

- Public transport needs to be improved

Alternative solutions

Surplus capacity on motorways

- Utilise surplus capacity on motorways by mandating businesses to use roads 7pm - 7am

Speed limit

- Make speed limit 50 everywhere if it's that effective re emissions

Funding

- Money raised should be ring fenced for this kind of initiative

Action 6 - Constructing new cycle lanes

Participants felt that urban planning should be considered if introducing this action. They expressed concern over reaction from drivers, as well as the costs, timescale, and education / training needed for this initiative.

Concerns

Urban planning considerations

- Need to design 'with' cyclists
- Cycles routes are over engineered
- A painted cycle route is all that's needed
- We need to modify the streets for everybody's situations
- New design can be confusing, Not sure when it's safe to walk sometimes
- Improve road signs for the cyclists and pedestrians
- Multi occupancy can go in bus lanes as hard to add 2+ lane like outside of the fort to star city

Driver reactions

- Drivers can be aggressive

Costs

- Cost is too high

Timescale

- Timescale is too long - can be done much quicker

Education / training

- Greater training is needed for people to utilise cycle lanes - bring back school training

Action 7 - Priority parking and/or reduced charges for low emission vehicles

Participants expressed support for this as a starting point, as it could incentivise public consideration and has less of an effect on the individual. However, participants also raised concerns over impact in terms of size and reach, and that it could lead to congestion.

Incentives such as introducing subsidies, measures to reduce driving, and solar panels in car parks were suggested as alternative measures.

Support

- A good starting point

Incentivises

- Potentially good incentive to encourage people to think about where they are travelling to and parking
- A tool for longer-term behaviour change-think about what replaces the current vehicle

Effects on the individual

- *Less onerous on the individual.*

Concerns

Inequality

- Cost feels prohibitive and aimed at people with already considerable means

Focus

- Don't like it-very car focused-would rather see more innovative solutions

Congestion

- Might cause more congestion for those trying to find non eve parking

Impact

- How many people have EVs? Will it warrant the space being given on these car parks?
- Not sure how significant the benefits would be.

Alternative solutions

- **Would prefer to see subsidies** to support people to make the change
- **Would rather see measures to reduce driving** into the centre in the 1st place
- **Solar panels in the parking spaces** to contribute to the energy needed to charge EVs

Action 8 - Air quality campaign on health impacts

Participants expressed concern over the impact and clarity of what this measure involves. They suggested alternative solutions, such as increasing public awareness, focussing specifically on areas outside schools, reducing the speed limit and implementing air pollution signage on the M6.

Concerns

- Where would the advertising be?
- **To be an effective campaign it needs to have clear asks.** What do you want people to do/not do?
  - *Too abstract;* don't think this will have significant impact - *also small-scale impacy*
  - More abstract than smoking, could be difficult to frame
- *What are the incentives?*

Alternative solutions

- *Increase public awareness* of impact, e.g. link to impact on children-similar to impact of passive smoking
- Could **focus on short journeys** (under 2 miles)
- **Campaign could focus specifically on outside schools** - subsidised walking bus approach?
- **Reducing speed limit on M6** - air quality messaging along the motor-way

Action 9 - Support to remove household appliances that cause poor indoor and outdoor air quality

Participants put forward that this could help improve indoor air quality, however expressed concern over impact, potential disruption and cost implications. They suggested alternative solutions, such as initially making this action voluntary, starting with old appliances and introducing incentives.

Support

- Will help to improve indoor air quality

Concerns

Changing habits

- Removal of gas stove - with more power outages in the future this might not help the most vulnerable in society to make that change

- People who prefer working with gas much less inclined to adopt

Potential disruption

- *Disruption caused* by works to remove appliance and may need updates to electrics for new items
- Campaigns giving people new boilers for years but now boilers are going to have to go.

Cost implications

- Without financial support it would require people to buy new appliances or associated installation costs

Alternative solutions

- **Initially** offer on **voluntary basis**
- *Would need to be highly incentivised* targeting on low quality air area and for people with lung conditions - *incentives*
- Could **start with really old appliances**

Action 10 - Workplace charging levies

Participants considered whether there should be responsibility for this on an individual level, with thoughts differing. They also discussed the use of incentives and raised trade offs on impact vs costs for this initiative. Some concerns were expressed over choice, transparency and fairness, as well as costs to the individual and potential inequality. Participants also suggested transport sharing as an alternative solution.

General thoughts

Effects on the individual

- Personal financial burden is quite high.
- Some thought the personal financial burden should be higher than is currently rated and so should the general personal burden
- Most don't like the idea of paying for parking generally

Incentives

- *There should be an incentive* for people to get electric cars as part of the scheme, cheaper charging for example or free parking"
    o Some concerns however that people park in electric car areas when they are not charging their cars or do not have electric cars
- Overall feeling that "action 10 might just get lots of complaints, but if people could see the benefit and impact of the funds raised it could be a motivator. However, if people don't see the impact people are going to think it is just a way of charging people."

- "It might make people park on nearby streets to avoid parking in a paid area"
  - One person suggested this could be mitigated by putting more double yellow lines around the surrounding area
- "Maybe there could be a higher charge for people that live near by to the parking area to encourage them to use another form of transport"

Concerns

Choice

- One person said they already have to pay for parking and there is no real *choice* in this
- Some felt that it could be forced on workers
- "Seems a way of punishing workers"

Costs vs impact

- Most were not sure what the main benefit of this is seeing as it has a **very low impact** on health and is **relatively costly to implement**

Inequality

- Some thought lower paid workers may be more affected by this

Fairness

- "Some people need to use their car for their job but then they are forced to pay for their parking"
- "More admin for companies"

Suggestions / Alternative Solutions

- Suggestion that **sharing transport could reduce the cost for employees**
- ***Transparency*** - "If employees could see where their money is going it would be more attractive to them"

Action 11 – Route planners including air quality

Overall, participants generally expressed support for the app. However, they expressed concerns over fairness, timescale, accuracy, and potential congestion. Members questioned how it would work, whether by monitoring pollution levels or congestion levels. Members also suggested implementing a system of incentives.

General thoughts

- Confusion amongst the group as to why the health impact was not greater considering it was potentially pulling people away from polluted areas.

Support

May participants said they would use it:
- "Can be used to educate people too"
- "Good idea for family outings"
- "Hikers, runners etc might use it"

Concerns

Congestion

- Some thought it might cause more congestion elsewhere when drivers use it to find quieter routes but there was some recognition that this in itself could reduce pollutants from busy routes.

Timescale
- One of the group-built apps and wondered why the timescale to introduce it was so long

Accuracy

- People were wondering how accurate it would be as pollution fluctuates so much, they want it to be accurate

Fairness

- "Some people might not like increased traffic in their area"
- "Some people can't get out and walk"

Suggestions / Alternative solutions

- **"There would need to be [an automatic] system to work,** assuming that it would work more by congestion than actual pollution ratings?"

Incentives

- Suggestion to introduce a sort of rewards scheme for using it e.g. planting trees. This method was compared to something like 'Swipe Coin'

Action 12 – Publicly accessible tool showing air quality information

Overall, participants expressed support for both action 11 and 12. They suggested the two actions could be merged or work simultaneously, however some were concerned about potential cost implications of this. On Action 12, participants felt this had potential to increase awareness on pollution in an impactful way. They discussed considerations for ease of use, accessibility and differences in use across different demographics.

Support

Overall feeling that both action 11 and action 12 would have a positive impact and be very effective.

Education / awareness raising

- Overall feeling that it increases people's knowledge of pollution overall and that it will have a big impact on this

General thoughts

Ease of use / accessibility

- People were ***inclined to feel the app would be easier to use*** as it can be used on your phone, so accessible to more people
- **Others thought it was more interesting than the app however**, as it was more specific.

Affordability vs health

- **Also, that it might impact on house prices,** mentioned as a bit of a joke but considered by all when someone said it might discourage people from moving to the areas that are most polluted

- Some indication that it **might encourage people to move house to less polluted areas**

Differences in use between demographic

- "People who are not tech savvy may struggle to use it"
- "Younger people might be quite interested in this"

What else would you need to know about it?

- "How spaced out are the sensors, therefore how detailed is it"
  - o Some people would prefer to see more detail and further breakdown by area

Suggestions / Alternative Solutions

- Suggestions were made that local news and weather anchors could comment on pollution that is taken from action 12

- **Can action 11 and 12 be merged / work simultaneously?**

  - o Comparisons were made with action 11 and many thought it was very similar
  - o The group discussed whether action 11 and 12 could actually be merged together or to work simultaneously, for example saying could action 12 provide less polluted routes
  - o Some slight concerns that merging action 11 and 12 would increase the overall cost of production - ***concerns over cost***

Concerns

- No specific concerns about this action mentioned.