

London Borough of Richmond-Upon-Thames 'Community Reporter' Engagement Programme: Final report & summary findings

Introduction

This report follows the completion of the London Borough of Richmond-Upon-Thames inaugural 'Community Reporter' scheme; part of the council's engagement plan for consulting communities on its upcoming new climate strategy for 2025-2030.

In response to the need for community-driven insights into the borough's views on climate action, the council commissioned independent stakeholder and community engagement specialists Copper Consultancy to develop a plan which would harness the voices of people in the borough of Richmond, helping the council gather perspectives on climate change from as many people as possible, including seldom heard groups. This was with the explicit aim of ensuring community priorities are recognised by, and central to, the drafting of the council's upcoming climate strategy.

This report provides an overview of findings from engagement undertaken by the Community Reporters as well as during two public workshop sessions run by the council. These conversations focused on core themes essential to reaching the council's carbon reduction targets:

- domestic retrofit
- sustainable travel
- resource management; and
- resilience against climate change.

Through a comprehensive analysis of interview insights, the key barriers, actions and opportunities within each theme were identified.

As well as this the report explores other critical themes, such as the role Richmond Council can play in this transition, the importance of financing and the development of green skills to secure funding and enhance expertise in sustainable practices.

This report captures the recommendations of the community reporters and residents to feed into future council strategies and actions. A decision has been made to publish in full to reflect the Community Reporter's work including recommendations that are outside of the control of the council (e.g. bus stops), misperceptions around our current information (e.g. recycling information on our website, not known by participants) and recommendations already underway by the council.

The Community Reporter programme at a glance:

The Community Reporter scheme, which ran from June – October 2024, was designed to help Richmond Council to understand the views of people in the borough on issues related to climate change, as well as to understand people's own habits when it comes to transport, heating, energy use, and other areas of modern life.

The programme was designed to complement the broader engagement plan around the new climate strategy, recognising that, for various reasons, participation can be limited, those with important views do not always engage and that climate change is a complex, multi-faceted challenge requiring time to explore in depth.

The reporter scheme was constructed to train and develop a group of volunteers in the borough who could speak to people in or within reach of their networks to gather feelings, views, and a sense of priorities. These could then be fed back to the council. The scheme was designed to maximise the likelihood of reaching a broad range of demographics, and people who wouldn't necessarily engage with the council's consultation.

To ensure the programme reached as wide a cohort of residents as possible, the scheme ensured that the Community Reporters as a whole:

- Broadly reflected the borough's geographic spread and key demographics, to make sure the reporters involved in this process reflect the diversity of the borough.
- Were provided with training and ongoing support through the process to ensure they were effectively informed and prepared to engage in discussions with residents
- Were empowered to use their creativity and understanding of their communities to harness key insights.

Methodology

The methodology was designed to establish a clear, inclusive framework for engaging the community in Richmond's climate plan.

It set out to provide accessible information about climate issues and the plan's objectives, as well as fostering active involvement from residents, businesses and organisations in shaping and implementing the plan.

Guiding Principles:

Richmond Council understands how important it is to make sure everyone's views are given credence, and to make sure the project is run as efficiently as possible for the benefit of the community.

The project was underpinned with five constant 'guiding principles'

1. Openness and Transparency
2. "You Said, We did"
3. Inclusive and accessible
4. Continually striving to do better
5. Creating a positive legacy

Onboarding the Community Reporters:

To deliver the Community Reporter programme in line with the original guiding principles, it was important to ensure that the final group of reporters were representative of the borough, and there were enough reporters to ensure we could achieve a demographic split as close to the borough's make-up as possible.

To do this, the project team set an objective of 18 Community Reporters - equal to the number of wards in the borough.

To produce a list of candidates large enough for a fair and representative selection process, the project team worked on a series of communications which would ensure people across

the borough heard about the programme and could express their interest in taking part. This included, but was not limited to:

- A press notice announcing the programme,
- An excerpt in the council's climate newsletter,
- Speaking at the council's Richmond Sustainability Forum in June, and;
- Digital media promotion through the council's channels.

From this promotion, the council received 78 expressions of interest, providing a large enough group of people from which to select a balanced final group via a fair & representative sortition process. The sortition process aimed to form an 18-person cohort from the applicants and was conducted as follows:

- Selection focused on the priority demographics of age, ethnicity, housing tenure, gender and ward
- The scheme was open to participants 16 years of age and older, with no upper limit.
- Using ONS data, we outlined the demographic composition of the borough.
- The data in turn helped determine the estimated number of people in the cohort who should represent each demographic category.

The sortition process was then carried out to effectively choose 18 people which represented the borough accurately. A total of 15 people successfully carried out their role with 3 dropping out due to personal commitments.

Onboarding process

An onboarding process was designed to reflect an audience with varying stakeholder engagement experience. This included:

- Two sessions (one online and one in person), allowing reporters to choose their preferred format.
- A comprehensive "reporters' playbook", offering strategies and ideas for engaging their local communities, and hints and tips for how to effectively conduct conversations and collate data.
- Regular check-ins scheduled throughout the engagement period to ensure each reporter stayed on track and had opportunities to discuss any issues they might be facing.

Supporting Events

1. Richmond Sustainability Forum (in-person)

On 13th June 2024 at Orleans House Gallery in Twickenham, the second sustainability forum was held where residents, businesses, education institutions, faith and community groups were invited to provide their views on collective ways to reduce emissions and prepare the borough for impacts of climate change.

During the forum, Copper Consultancy introduced the Community Reporter programme and its importance in the development of the new climate strategy, encouraging Richmond residents to register their interest.

The team then discussed the scheme in more detail with attendees. Themes included:

- *Strategies to enhance engagement and how to implement these techniques*

- *How the council ensures inclusive representation throughout the process.*
- *Addressing the need for this initiative as part of the borough's commitment to tackling climate change.*

2. Meeting the Community Reporters (CR): CR scheme onboarding sessions

Community Reporters were invited to join one of two introductory and on-boarding sessions. An online session was held on 20th August with an in-person session on 22nd August. This provided an overview of the role the Community Reporters would take as part of this process. The objectives of the programme were underlined, as well as the guiding principles that underpinned the process.

The session also served as an opportunity for Community Reporters to raise any questions about the process and to meet and communicate with each other about what they wanted to gain from the experience and share insights and goals for their experience.

3. Richmond 2025-30 Climate Strategy Workshops (online and in-person)

These workshops, on the 17th and 26th September, provided the opportunity for members of the public, including those who were not selected for the Community Reporter program, to share their views on the new climate strategy.

The sessions also included a series of breakout sessions, which were designed to mirror the key themes of domestic retrofit, sustainable travel, resource management and resilience against climate change. In these breakout groups, and with defined areas of focus, attendees were encouraged to talk in more detail about the barriers and opportunities in that space – what they believe needs to change or be preserved, and how the council can ensure that happens.

At the end of the session, attendees were encouraged to share any queries or comments regarding the scheme as a whole, enabling those that would not be involved in the Community Reporter scheme to voice their opinions and have them recorded.

Public engagement platform

Alongside the Community Reporter programme, Richmond Council invited the people of Richmond who live or work in the borough to help shape the new climate strategy through the online public engagement platform. As part of the consultation process, views could be shared across various interactive channels until 31st December 2024. This platform was shared with the Community Reporters, widely through council communications and at the public workshops. It included:

- **Survey:** A series of questions have been asked to help the council understand what is important to residents. In building a resilient borough the council is looking at people and places and considering the impacts that climate change may have on how they live in, move about in, and spend time in the borough.
- **Richmond Climate Strategy map:** a chance to feed in what areas the people of Richmond think are working well and need to be protected, as well as any areas that are of concern or could be improved to protect our borough from the effects of climate change.

Community Reporter engagement mechanisms

Community Reporters were encouraged to choose their own methodologies for reaching audiences, exploring discussions around climate and sustainability issues and capturing their insights, illustrated below.

Engagement type	Example
WhatsApp	Broadcasting messages to friends or resident group chats, directing them to the Community Reporters' initiatives as well as the engagement platform.
Email	
Advertising	Hanging posters up around areas of the borough, coffee shops or libraries, detailing ways to 'get involved' with their reporting.
Vox-pops & interviews	Engaging with the people of Richmond (resident or business owners) in libraries and coffee shops, reaching a diverse demographic
Focus Group: Dene Estate	Reached diverse group residents (young, working and retired) through leaflets and WhatsApp broadcast. The Focus group reflected the themes from the survey and was held 8th October
Focus Group: Patch	Interview based focus group reflecting the survey. This was held 15th October
Focus Group: Weekly community group	Focus on recycling and upcycling at a fair, using existing community networks to engage with participants.
Focus Group: Teddington Neurodivergent Group	A reporter worked with a neurodivergent group in Teddington. They were contacted via survey questions, and a focus group was subsequently organised to gather all their views.
Survey	One Community Reporter created a bespoke online survey to capture and provoke responses

An overview of the main findings

There was clear evidence of widespread appetite to 'do the right thing' yet the various challenges were well identified and articulated by participants.

The barriers to climate action included concerns such as high cost, challenges around planning, limited awareness of options to undertake and the impact of 'misinformation' particularly via social media. Opportunities identified lie in financial incentives, transparent communication and solutions which are more 'streamlined' and 'standardised' to address key challenges.

More broadly, throughout the reporters' engagement, a series of key barriers – but also opportunities – emerged which cut across these themes, regardless of whether an interviewee was discussing transport, heating, resilience or biodiversity.

Barriers

- **Cost of living:** The upfront costs of retrofitting, infrastructure for sustainable travel and the creation of alternative measures to reduce carbon emissions all featured highly as a concern.
- **Permission:** Seeking planning permission for infrastructure (e.g. heat pumps or EV charging stations) which is sustainable might pose difficulties.
- **Awareness:** There is a general lack of understanding of local sustainable resources, recycling processes and ULEZ – often exacerbated by misinformation on social media.
- **Constraints of infrastructure:** Issues such as bike theft, limited public transport and flooding concerns impact choices people make to access climate initiatives.
- **Generational differences:** Older participants expressed concerns about misinformation stemming from the rise of social media, which led them to question the reliability of information sources.

Actions and opportunities

- **Financial incentives:** Tax breaks, grants or coordinated retrofitting projects undertaken by the community could all be useful measures to make initiatives more affordable.
- **Transparency:** A strong theme emerging across conversations was the need for the council to communicate further information regarding climate initiatives and sustainable travel options through a variety of channels.

Key themes

Our buildings – reducing carbon emissions from our buildings

This section examines barriers and opportunities in retrofitting public buildings and homes, as well as potential actions that could be taken to overcome these barriers and harness the opportunities.

Barriers:

Upfront costs: The expense of retrofitting measures, such as heat pumps and solar panels, prohibits a large number of people from investing in these energy-efficient upgrades. The same was said of double glazing.

Below are some of the comments from respondents:

One attendee during a focus group expressed that they previously got their landlord to replace the flooring and had been fearful that she would be charged for retrofit measures.

Another worried that the financial barriers would “*slow the adoption of sustainable technologies*” and slow down broader decarbonisation efforts.

One respondent suggested that the need to retrofit a number of older heritage buildings made green improvements much more expensive.

Another participant highlighted how the cost of housing is impacting the affordability of retrofitting buildings: “*Inflated housing and rent prices are a big ongoing interlinked issue which impacts affordability of improvement/retrofit measures significantly & will require innovative measures to unstuck. The increased proportion of income that housing now takes up on average, coupled with increasing basic costs of living which will continue to rise over the*

coming years as the impacts of climate change increase, all leads to a major restrictive crunch point for domestic decarbonisation”

Permission to retrofit: One Community Reporter shared their own view that in their shared or leased building, retrofitting requires freeholder agreements which complicates the process of upgrading their housing to more sustainable measures. This is primarily because such modifications typically require consent of the freeholder – the entity or individual that owns the building.

A possible solution to issues surrounding retrofit was raised by a Community Reporter who said there should be *“an availability of long term fixed low-rate loans to fund works with an open ledger of costs shared by tenant and landlord with repayment levels that cover the entire lifetime of each individual improvement and a guarantee that no increase in rent will be levied on the basis of the improvement works”*

Trusted information and trades: There is a clear desire within the community for more climate-conscious planning processes that will make retrofit easier, such as installation of solar panels and heat pumps. With this example raised more than once, however, it is clear there is a need for greater education around these technologies, which typically do not actually require planning permission. For example, it was raised during a focus group that *“we need more trusted traders or experienced house-owners to talk to, as this would help overcome this barrier.”*

Lack of awareness: Speaking during a Community Reporter organised coffee morning, one respondent explained that they had pressed many people in their road to retrofit their houses, but these residents were unaware of the ways to improve the energy efficiency in their homes and simply don’t do anything close to retrofitting their homes in a significant way.

Another respondent shared that they had recently renovated their home and were unaware of heat pumps as an alternative to installing a new gas boiler, which ruled out Air Source Heat Pumps as a result. They expressed a preference for installing solar panels but noted that they’d need more information if they were to move ahead with this. A question was then posed as a result about whether Richmond Council would consider investing in solar initiatives for residents.

Action and Opportunities:

Financial incentives: Throughout the various forums and interviews, respondents raised that they’d like to see grants, tax breaks and savings on energy bills, which would in turn make retrofitting more appealing.

One attendee mentioned that there should be a *“small financial incentive”* which could help stimulate the market for heat pumps and similar technologies. For example, *“the council could offer a grant of around £2k to homeowners who install heat pumps within a certain timeframe.”*

Another attendee said that there should be compromises on conservation standards and time-limited incentives. They added, *“The council should fund EPC tests on houses. People in the rented sector have no control over their homes and therefore we could benefit if landlords were mandated or incentivised to make upgrades via subsidies.”*

Recognition of other solutions: Respondents showed strong interest in adopting other sustainable features to retrofit buildings and houses such as heat pumps, solar panels, window insulation etc. This was found to be the case for several Community Reporters when they spoke with their networks.

Skills: It was raised by several participants that there is a pressing need for a well-trained workforce that can address all aspects of heating and insulation. Respondents want to see installers with recognised credentials and expertise to provide reliable advice, particularly for properties that have proven difficult to insulate. One attendee suggested, *“Could there be local champions who have had heat pumps installed and are willing to talk to others about it upon request?”*

Long term, low interest loans: One participant suggested funding energy-efficient upgrades with transparent cost-sharing between tenants and landlords. They explained *“tenants could make direct payments to the loan during their tenancy, which would ensure repayments are separate from rent.”*

Our travel and air - increasing sustainable travel and reducing air pollution

The following section explores the key barriers to sustainable travel in the borough as well as opportunities and actions that could help create a positive vision for greener spaces and travel practices within Richmond.

Often, areas outside the council’s direct control (e.g. ULEZ, Heathrow) dominated the concerns and discussions.

Barriers:

Air quality and impacts on health: There were considerable discussions about air quality in the borough relating to car usage, congestion hot spots (including Richmond Town Centre) as well as air quality in the parks and open spaces. One participant raised the concern that heavy traffic and lack of pedestrian-friendly spaces was exposing people to poor air quality. They also raised the question *“what was being done regarding the heavy pollutions from airplanes.”*

Air quality was raised again by a participant who, while happy with Richmond’s ambitious air quality targets, was concerned about *“unrestricted air travel”*. They went on to mention that they’d like to see *“a massive reduction in air travel, and much more pressure put on Heathrow from pollution and noise pollution, quality of life, and carbon emissions perspective.”*

Lack of awareness and understanding of ULEZ: Some people were unclear about the ULEZ. It was mentioned by one respondent that they didn’t understand why there had to be *“an expansion of ULEZ”*

However, as another Community Reporter evidenced from a 1 to1 session, *“ULEZ policy was deemed a useful introduction in Richmond”*

Challenges for neurodivergent travellers: The unpredictable delays and changes in bus services create barriers and stress for neurodiverse travellers, leading to hesitancy in using sustainable methods of transport. Suggestions that were mentioned within the neurodivergent focus group was that there should be *“neurodivergent rail cards”* or more accessible train carriages that support neurodivergent passengers more.

Cost: One person noted that e-bikes are *“very expensive.”* It was noted that the cost of the e-bike was significantly higher in price than an ordinary bike, including the ongoing maintenance of the repairs and cost of charging the bike.

E- bike and e-scooter waste: Safety concerns were raised around poorly parked e-bikes and the environmental risks that these bikes hold with their lithium batteries.

The littering of Lime and Forest bikes on pavements was widely disliked due to safety concerns for pedestrians and environmental impacts.

Concerns around e-bikes ranged from the aforementioned lithium batteries and other non-renewable materials, to perceptions of shorter lifespan than privately owned bikes and greater maintenance costs. One person also raised concerns about bikes being discarded in the Thames, where chemicals from the bike could *“pollute the water, harming birds, fish and seals.”*

Supporting active paths for younger people: When asked in a focus group, held by one of the Community Reporters how young people can be supported to undertake sustainable active travel, a respondent suggested that the council could launch a campaign to encourage children to walk or cycle to school, building confidence in active travel while reducing road congestion.

Bridge closure: It was raised, when asked during a focus group how ULEZ and other transport factors impact accessibility, flexibility, availability and affordability of transport in the community, that the closure of a road bridge in Barnes has *“significantly affected the availability of buses in the area”*. Previously, there were six buses running frequently, but since the bridge closure, it’s been down to one main bus which takes *“longer and [is] busier”*.

Action and Opportunities:

Transport Interventions: To encourage active travel such as walking and cycling. Pedestrianising Richmond’s town centre as per Church Street in Twickenham was raised as *‘crucial’* for demonstrating climate leadership, improving air quality, and making shopping areas more liveable. This was evidenced through an interview held between a resident and Community Reporter.

Another suggested action was for there to be more disability aids, such as speech-activated buttons and QR codes to inform about current Transport for London (TFL) delays. This was reiterated by a respondent who has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and finds travelling challenging, and delays or unexpected terminations of bus services can be particularly overwhelming.

Sharing a positive vision: During a breakout session during a community workshop, the group discussed how having more clarity of what greener areas could look like once initiatives are implemented, could make it easier for people to support these changes as they can see a ‘clear vision.’

Incentives: The move to electrify trading pitches received widespread approval as a positive step to reduce environmental impacts and promote sustainability. One participant noted: *“The electrification of trading pitches to reduce air pollution was much appreciated and they hope that there will be other areas where this initiative will be implemented.”*

Improved public transport: Many people spoke of how they are increasing their use of public transport – but there was a recognition among these people that connectivity remains a challenge, with trains in particular often needing to go into the centre to connect to rail lines going out of London. One respondent suggested creating a SuperLoop for trains.

EV charging opportunities: A Community Reporter found that throughout a workshop session, residents raised that there should be ‘landscaping’ outside their houses to ensure that there was an opportunity for EV chargers to be inputted.

During a focus group, the importance of ‘finding space’ for EVs was raised. Some respondents within a breakout group said that “*we should get rid of SUVs to open up space for EV charging units*”

Our nature – protecting and enhancing biodiversity and green spaces

This section looks at the key barriers to local biodiversity and a recognition of the community’s desire to increase investment in green spaces in the borough.

Barriers

Landscape changes: Landscape changes caused by interventions in Richmond drew a lot of criticism particularly around paving over gardens, reducing biodiversity and increasing flood risks by the creation of impermeable surface areas. It was raised within one of the Community Reporters’ focus groups, that this has ruined the ‘natural landscape’ of the borough and fed into a deeper concern that this could affect Richmond’s ability to adapt to challenges posed by climate change.

Action and Opportunities:

Desire for more investment in green spaces and local infrastructure: Throughout feedback, there was a call for more investment in Richmond’s green spaces and local infrastructure. For example, improvements like enhanced drainage systems, additional parks and the development of rain gardens.

Very specifically, several residents from Wensleydale Road would like to enhance the grassy triangle between Wensleydale and Gloucester Road, with wildflowers and other plants for pollinators.

Replanting and mapping green areas: One attendee at a focus group suggested identifying paved and tarmacked surfaces that could be repurposed as ‘planting pockets’ for example, pavements that are wider than they need to be could be repurposed as green space – either by removing hard surface and regenerating soil, or via planters.

Local control of street space: One participant in a focus group, held by a Community Reporter suggested that communities should be enabled to take control of their local street space, and have authority (once granted by the council) to carry out their own ‘green’ projects with the space they’re provided access to

Neighbourhood Environment Watch Scheme (N.E.W): Another suggestion from a focus group was to set up a biodiversity equivalent of Neighbourhood Watch, where local residents would be responsible for looking out for biodiversity opportunities. These groups would then be able to disseminate information to local residents about improving biodiversity in their own gardens as well as streets and public spaces. They could also organise litter picks, leaf sweeping and composting sessions, they suggested.

Another similar idea which was raised focussed on the idea of a ‘street nature watch’, where the council could invite people to be biodiversity champions for their street, helping ensure residents were invested in protecting biodiversity in their local area.

Tree planting: One focus group, when speaking with one of the reporters, noted how they believed there should be an increase in the number of trees planted in the borough. Further to this, there was a suggestion to set up a ‘Watering Wednesdays’ campaign, where local people were encouraged to focus, one day a week, on considering nature and how they can

support it (for instance, by designating someone their street's 'tree guardian'. One participant even suggested the law should be changed 'so residents have the right to plant trees', providing they do not interfere with the highway code.

Improving learning about biodiversity in schools: There was a suggestion during a focus group breakout session from one reporter that more school lessons on the climate crisis were needed. The person within the focus group who made this suggestion noted how six schools are involved in the "Lets go Outside and Learn" programme in the borough, and made the point that the initiative could be spread to incorporate more education institutions.

Our resources – moving to a zero-waste economy

This section explores the barriers and opportunities in Richmond's transition to zero-waste economy by focusing on engagement on existing initiatives for shared resourcing and overcoming barriers around the limited awareness of such initiatives.

Barriers:

Limited awareness around resources in Richmond: Many respondents were unaware of community resources, such as the 'Library of Things' or the 'Richmond Furniture Scheme'. As such, people consistently made the point in their interviews that the council should better promote these initiatives, to increase participation in these types of carbon-reducing activities.

For example, when explaining how great the 'Library of Things' in Twickenham is, a participant said "*there should be more advertising, so more people are aware of this and can use it.*"

Contaminated recycling: Speaking from experience, one participant outlined how she had noticed communal recycling bins are close to a popular part of town where she fears non-recycled materials are being thrown in.

A recurring message from a range of interviewees was uncertainty about what things could be recycled other than the basics (e.g. paper, tins, bottles) as well as where and how to recycle more complex materials.

On recycling, some respondents voiced scepticism about whether recycling schemes were carried out properly, or '*whether it was just being binned or burnt or pushed out to sea*'. It was suggested the council could help simplify waste recycling and make the process more transparent – for instance, by publishing where and how each type of waste is processed.

Safety of repurposing items: One participant raised concerns around the plan initiated by the council called 'Freegle'; in their view, it amounts to 'a stranger coming to a door to collect used items'. Concerns were also raised around trying to hand over 'heavy' items which might be inconvenient to collect.

Accessibility around recycling hubs: One attendee was critical about the locations of recycling hubs available in the borough – in their experience, their hub of choice was the Townmead Recycling Centre in Kew, but in their view "*there's no suitable transport*" to travel there.

Action and Opportunities:

Praise for current initiatives: The 'Real Junk Food Project' was well known among interviewees, and was seen to be well advertised and well supported. Some respondents

suggested not all members of the community are in need of food from the initiative and, therefore, more textile repair stations should be available in the borough.

Encouraging community participation: The initiative known as ‘Making Business Greener’, which enhances business participation, was praised with members of the community – and respondents said they were seeking more initiatives like this. The initiative was launched in partnership with Green Mark.

Tree planting initiatives: The planting of over 2,000 trees by Richmond Council was well-received, and further expansion of this program is believed by participants to strengthen Richmond’s green infrastructure. Responders were keen to plant for nature and wildlife in their gardens, and even, in the words of one respondent taking part in a specific focus group, “set up competitions” to get more people within the borough involved.

Leverage green spaces for climate mitigation: Some respondents stated that the council could promote urban biodiversity further by planting more indigenous, wildlife supporting trees and shrubs (including hawthorn and crab-apple, as one respondent raised) and replacing non-porous surface with permeable planting to reduce flooding.

Creative recycling: During a 1:1 interview held by one of the Community Reporters, an interviewee raised how the council could transform local shopping areas into recycling hubs with mini bins grouped by household items that are usually deemed as difficult to recycle. These bins can be placed in convenient spots and help people waste less.

Further feedback gathered by Community Reporters evidenced the importance of improving communications around available community resources and initiatives, particularly around those aimed at enhancing local green spaces and advancing waste reduction efforts. For instance, one respondent said:

“The Kingston resident mentioned her local Sainsbury’s has bins for vapes, water filters and so on, which others really liked the idea of. The consensus seemed to be that more would be recycled if there was clear guidance, a wider range of mini bins focussed on small household items that are impossible to recycle kerbside (pens, lighters, toothpaste tubes, baby food cartons, makeup) which would be situated together, local hubs for recycling (instead of trailing around lots of shops that take specific items) would also promote the range of items that can be recycled. Making it easier for us to take responsibility for what we discard by making it more accessible to more people and more integrated into where we shop.”

Optimise use of allotments: To encourage people to ‘grow their own supplies’, interviewees made the point of how the management of allotments needed to be improved, to ensure full usage of the space. For example, one respondent stated that if people are not utilising their allotment spaces within the year then they ‘need to reallocate into more manageable places’.

Incentive to recycle: Respondents suggested that, in order to increase recycling habits, there should be tax on shops for people who use plastic packaging, and there should be reductions in business rates for shops who recycle or who use no plastic.

Our resilience – preparing for a changing climate

This area looks at the barriers and opportunities related to Richmond’s resilience in the face of a changing climate:

Barriers:

Increased flooding and drainage issues: Some respondents noted their property faces flooding along riverbanks. These respondents noted how, when flooding occurs, mobility and access are disrupted, highlighting the challenge facing the borough in adapting to extreme rainfall and managing urban flooding.

Heatwave challenges: When asked the question about how residents had been impacted by heat waves during a focus group session, one participant mentioned that the changes in weather had led to damage to plants and difficulties to garden under high temperatures. This led them to highlight the challenges they face with inadequate infrastructure and resources to handle the changes in extreme heat in the summer months.

Water challenges: There were concerns around the Teddington Direct River Abstraction Scheme raised by some interviewees. Some respondents stated how Richmond Council had been called upon to oppose this scheme on grounds of water quality, water temperature, chemicals and also damage to Ham Lands. Some respondents said more needed to be done to raise awareness on this issue.

Action and Opportunities:

Adapting to heatwaves: Purchasing air conditioners and staying hydrated were ways in which participants explained how they prepare for temperature changes. An action to gather reliable seasonable weather information was raised by a respondent, to improve informed decision making during these seasons. This was mentioned as a 'call to action' during a 1:1 interview.

Increasing awareness and accessibility of initiatives: During one particular focus group, participants raised ways in which the council could increase awareness around initiatives linked to preparing for climate change. Respondents focused on the need for expanding communication through community hubs, local libraries, and pop-up sessions on sustainability topics (like bike maintenance and repair workshops) could increase community participation and knowledge.

Enhance communication channels: Distributing clear, accessible information through physical leaflets and community announcements was seen by interviewees as a way to help bridge the information gap for residents who don't regularly use the council website, with the Resident Climate Action Pack being a resource to raise awareness of.

There was also enthusiasm from one Community Reporter for more deliberative democracy and direct citizen engagement through methods such as citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting and the open government models to encourage broader public buy in and generate more agency in the borough. For instance, one interviewee posited the question: *"Can we run more community assemblies to inform local decision making in relation to biodiversity and the broader climate crisis?"*

Inclusivity: Across our reporters, it was noted how it seems mostly older people get involved in meetings to discuss the climate – most likely stemming from the family responsibilities facing younger adults. One interviewee, in response to this, made the specific suggestion that, in order to be more inclusive, there could be creche opportunities at climate-related meetings.

Moreover, it was mentioned that ways in which the council engages should be more inclusive as well. e.g. to think about how to engage people in tenanted blocks and ideas of how to increase awareness to nature for those with specific needs like dementia walks in Barnes Common.

Looking at inclusivity within the planning regime, interviewees suggested ecology needed to be taken into account sufficiently in planning issues. One respondent specifically said there were *“too many environmental hurdles to jump over in an application to increase biodiversity”*, for instance.

Call to action for Richmond Council: No Mow May (involves leaving grass that might otherwise be cut alone for the month of May and beyond if possible) ... It was raised, that it wasn't entirely clear what the council was doing to make sure it is effective at increasing biodiversity, rather than just leading to messy verges and messy cemeteries. *“Is there a way that new species that are attracted to this area as a result, can be tested? Is it possible to also educate the majority of beneficial changes?”*

Supporting themes

The key themes covered up to this point represent the overarching ideas and concerns within this process which will enable change and implementable action from the new climate strategy. These supporting themes, on the other hand, serve to add more depth to these key areas and more actionable insights of targeted improvements that support our goal to publish this plan for change in the borough.

Our Targets – becoming a carbon neutral and climate ready organisation by 2030 and a Net Zero Borough by 2043

Concerns around Richmond's climate initiatives highlighted challenges such as lack of clarity and inconsistent approaches across the borough. This was primarily evidenced when it came to retrofit buildings and the process of recycling. Concerns surrounding the council's role to implement these initiatives successfully were raised and issues about whether centralised policies may not have much of an impact on local change.

Barriers:

Lack of clarity and transparency: Multiple reporters noted residents were unaware of the council's 2030 and 2043 goals as well as many of the successful council-led initiatives already underway, such as Library of Things. Similar observations were made in the Community Workshops, noting that strong information exists, such as the Richmond Climate Resident Action Pack, just residents were unaware of these resources.

A question was raised around the council's apparent “lack of transparency” on many aspects of reaching the borough's climate goals, primarily in the areas of recycling and retrofitting our buildings. For instance, one respondent based in Hampton said they would welcome *“more transparency on what happens to our compost collections”*, and that there should be *“some engagement with the results, like being able to collect and use the resulting compost at stations throughout the borough.”*

Lack of understanding: The query over how much ‘power’ the council has to make substantial changes was raised several times by various interviewees. For instance, one interviewee from Richmond Hill noted how, when asked the one thing they would like Richmond Council to prioritise, that the council should *“focus action on evidence base where you can have most impact and in terms of where the Council has most power.”*

Action and Opportunities:

Leadership and responsibility: Throughout the reporter's interviews, a theme which came up regularly was how the council must lead by example in setting ambitious carbon goals and

climate readiness initiatives indicating a low awareness amongst residents of 2030 and 2043 targets set by Richmond Council

One reporter, in summary of their interviews, noted various initiatives were raised through their engagement around improving local nature and biodiversity through council schemes, including the council could do more to identify areas that could be greened, such as bus stops, and encouraging supermarkets to do the same in their car parks.

The same reporter, also in summarising views stated throughout their interviews, outlined how points were raised where the council could take a lead on educating the borough's public through initiatives such as:

- Providing easy tips for being more sustainable to individuals
- Engaging schools with competitions around sustainability
- Speaking to local WhatsApp groups or hosting talks through Community Hubs

Providing incentives: Incentives were raised multiple times as a way to help encourage positive change. There were a range of areas where incentives were suggested as a mechanism to help affect change – for instance, one interviewee suggested that Richmond Council could provide incentives to encourage 50% green and 50% paved gardens instead of fully paving them – the specific incentive suggested in this case was a with council tax break for those that comply. Similarly, another reporter outlined how, in their interviews, the idea of individuals receiving positive incentives for greening their own gardens was raised.

Our communities – supporting climate action across the borough

Although this report already covers some aspects of community needs, priorities and perceptions, this section directly addresses how we can foster climate action within the borough.

Barriers

Limited awareness around both local and global impact: When asked about climate change, people said they had limited awareness of its seriousness and the urgency with which communities, regions and nations must deliver a net zero transition. Many noted that whilst they were concerned, they couldn't see how individual or community efforts could contribute meaningfully to the larger goal mitigating climate change. For instance, one reporter, when speaking to people about the loss of biodiversity, noted how "*concerns were raised around... specific species like coral reefs and polar bears*", but not local impacts.

Similarly, one reporter in their interviews ran a survey. Within that, respondents highlighted pollution as an issue, but with a firm focus on the global pollution picture (with a heavy focus on China and South East Asia as 'major polluters') rather than local sources of pollution.

Misinformation: This process also highlighted the influence of misinformation. One reporter, during a group session, heard from respondents how misinformation online, from sources such as social media, prompted confusion among them around climate-related issues. In the reporter's words, "misinformation has led to an 'uncertainty' around the real impacts of climate change" and that such a view throughout the session was primarily made by older participants.

Competing concerns: Whilst participants acknowledged that climate change was an issue, they also outlined other critical issues were just as, if not more, important to them. For instance, when one reporter spoke to an interviewee in their early 20s about the priority they place on

climate change, the respondent noted they were *'more worried about issues like housing and the NHS'*. These competing priorities evidenced that whilst climate change is important, it exists within a broader context of concerns held by the public.

Action and Opportunities

Community willingness: Despite the significant barriers outlined in the previous section, interviewees still demonstrated a willingness to engage in climate action. For example, one reporter conducted a small, five-person, survey on a range of topics. When asked about their interest in being involved in efforts which affect change in the borough, half of respondents who answered the question said they would be willing to learn more. Similarly, another reporter noted how – across their general conversations with interviewees – there was a sense that many were willing to learn more, although the same reporter noted *"there is a real perception that the subject is confusing and messy"*.

More action from council: It was raised that members and officers from Richmond Council should do more to support small businesses by lending their expertise and 'lessons learned' from their experience of helping other businesses when it comes to improving sustainability.

One reporter, when conducting interviews in a Twickenham-based coffee shop, heard from one respondent how more information about small business grants would be useful – for instance, the respondent wasn't aware of the Making Richmond Businesses Greener Scheme. Respondents stated that this would be a more personal approach rather than businesses having to reach out.

Vision for the streets: Attendees to various focus groups brought up the need to transform the urban spaces to prioritise sustainability and enhance green infrastructure. One resident shared: *"The big issue is traffic on George Street. I'd love to see much-reduced car-use, especially in town centers. More landscaped areas with trees would help make Richmond the greenest borough in London"*

Statements from Community Reporters

Below are a selection of comments from Community Reporters about their experience of working on the programme:

- *"I enjoyed the experience of speaking to people in my community about the issues around climate change and sustainability and the more local impact of these issues. I met some new people too who I now say hello to."*
- *"This has been instrumental in me gaining momentum for further climate related public engagement work."*
- *"Many of the community reporters voiced how great it was to meet and speak with others there who shared their awareness and passion for action on these key sustainability issues. I sensed an unfulfilled need there... to be able to continue the conversations that we started through further gatherings of some form. There was also a desire to maintain the sense of progress, purpose and empowerment that came from having been a part of the scheme and engaging people around these issues. I think there were many with skills and valuable perspectives that had a lot more to offer. A number voiced their desire to be able to do more and take the process further."*

Acknowledgement

The findings from this report will be used by the London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames in the formulation of the new Richmond Climate Strategy for 2025-2030.

Thank you to the 15 Community Reporters and the many people who live, work and study in Richmond borough for their generosity of time, reflective insight and energy which contributed to the findings in this report in the hope to make a difference to their wider community. We look forward to working with them to continue the progress underway around climate action and creating a climate resilient borough.

This report was produced by Copper Consultancy and commissioned by the London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames.

www.copperconsultancy.com

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