

Cornwall Council Decision Wheel

Cornwall Council

Thursday 19 November 2020

Summary

We're working to become a carbon neutral council. We also have a duty to ensure that social justice is alive and that we're doing no harm to our communities.

The new tool, our decision-making wheel, is based on the [Kate Raworth Doughnut Economics model](#). The wheel shows us how projects and decisions will impact the environment and people. If it shows us that a project will have a negative effect on the climate, citizens or wider environmental concerns like biodiversity and pollution, we can look at mitigations to restore balance.

By using the wheel to inform decisions, we can ensure that people and the climate are at the heart of everything this council does. We're already using it in all Cabinet decisions and are embedding it into all Council decision making processes.

Our problem

While it's essential that we tackle climate change, we also have the challenge of ensuring that our citizens and the wider environment aren't negatively impacted. As a local authority we have a duty to ensure that in looking after the environment, we don't disadvantage anyone. Cornwall is one of the poorest counties in the country. We have more than a dozen areas ranked as some of the most deprived in the UK, which therefore makes it even more important that we ensure all measures to go greener factor in potential impacts to the most deprived in our communities.

Overview

As a Council, we are working hard to achieve Net Zero by 2030 - but given the economic status of the region, we have a duty to ensure social justice and that none of our measures impact residents negatively. We believe that our Decision Wheel will ensure that the decisions to help combat climate change do not disadvantage the people of Cornwall.

How it works

The Wheel has two parts. The inner wheel focusses on social and economic issues like wealth and homes. The outer wheel focusses on environmental issues like greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity.

[You can see an example of a wheel here.](#)

Completed wheels are used in reports to explain the effect of a project. The decision-making wheel is introducing a new way of thinking for the Council. It is helping us to connect how we live, and how we can use our funding more effectively and help the environment. By looking at a set of completed wheels, we can see how we are changing and improving the services we provide. The completed wheels also let us know how the Council is progressing to become a carbon neutral council.

We produced a wheel for The Saints Trail - a new set of walking and cycling routes. The Wheel shows how the new routes will improve people's health and the environment while also potentially disturbing wildlife habitats and increasing the risk of crime. The completed wheel allowed us to review and mitigate the negative impacts.

Timeline / project progress

The Decision Wheel has been in use since September 2019 and is now being used within the Council for all significant decisions and externally for [Community Infrastructure Levy Fund](#) applications.

As it's only been in use for little over a year, its impact has been forecast but not yet verified.

Stakeholders

The Decision Wheel is based on the Kate Raworth Doughnut Economics Model. Carbon Neutral Cornwall introduced other Cornwall Council services and Cabinet members to the Wheel and helped develop it into something fit for purpose for local authority decision making processes.

Whole systems approach

Our approach has been picked up nationally, with huge amounts of interest from other local authorities. Amsterdam has followed our example in adopting a similar Wheel approach for their response to Covid-19. We are also employing the Wheel in our own Covid-19 recovery work.

Impact

Many council officers are now using the Wheel to help shape their decision-making processes during project or policy design. This is helping our services and officers consider a much broader range of potential social and environmental impacts. It is putting a holistic approach to sustainability and social justice at the heart of not only project and policy design but other areas such as commissioning and procurement, budget setting and service design.

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Work is underway to embed the tool within wider budget setting processes, commissioning and lower level decision-making committees. Feedback has refined what report authors are asked to consider and the areas covered.

We have developed a digital version which scores completed segments automatically. The tool is progressing towards a semi-automated system that will produce the relevant Red-Amber-Green ratings (i.e telling you if a proposal is good to go ahead or not). It will also link to the Council's carbon inventory providing an annual account of decisions and progress against carbon reduction targets.

Work is also underway to integrate the wheel with our Comprehensive Impact Assessments (CIA) to enhance that process. This will create a truly comprehensive impact assessment model as the CIA focuses very heavily on human rights, equalities and diversity and safeguarding.

We are currently using the Wheel in our Covid-19 recovery work but given the unpredictable nature of this crisis, it's hard to say how effective it has been just yet. However, we believe that climate change will requires an equally targeted response and the decision wheel provides a means of articulating it.