



Interview – Cathy Burns,  
Climate Programme  
Manager, Derry City and  
Strabane District Council  
(DCSDC)



## Step One

### Getting Started



# Tips and Advice for Adaptation Planning

## 1. What are the main climate challenges facing Derry City and Strabane District Council?

The Council area includes a number of rivers and areas which are at risk of flooding. Added to this the general risks from increasing temperatures and sea level rise. Derry City and Strabane District Council faces the same challenges as the other local authorities in Northern Ireland in terms of impacts to services, assets and estates, heritage, personnel and the wider community. Adaptation planning and resilience requires a commitment to act across all council departments, this relies on a significant amount of engagement to increase understanding and secure support.

## 2. How useful has the adaptation planning process been for the council?

This process has been extremely useful in terms of raising awareness of climate change and adaptation. In addition to increased impetus for climate action, the adaptation planning process has enabled greater understanding of the specific risks to Council, as well as acting as a catalyst for further climate action – culminating in approval to take forward the North West Climate Action Plan.

The process has delivered a dedicated working group focused on climate action resulting in services across Council beginning to consider climate impacts as part of their every day work.

## 3. What knowledge did you have of climate change before you began this project? What was some of the most important information you have picked up along the way?

I had limited knowledge of climate change prior to the project (my background was primarily built and natural heritage project management).



The Climate Project Team outside the Guildhall



The most important information I have picked up has been around the issue of climate risk; increasing my understanding of the relevant climate risks to council and local communities.

In addition it has been important to identify possible adaptation options and solutions for Council.

The ability to communicate these risks and solutions has been the most important tool when undertaking adaptation planning, particularly when discussing the process and securing input or support from colleagues.

#### 4. How would you describe the process from your role as the lead contact?

The process is very straight forward and easy to follow. Collecting the relevant data and information including risks, impact profile, existing actions and identifying opportunities requires close liaison with colleagues across council, however none of the processes are particularly technical or onerous.

In my opinion, the most important skills are communication and project management – stakeholder engagement and coordination have been critical to the delivery of the process.

**Communication:** It is not necessary to be a climate expert as such – the lead contact should of course be able to explain the basics of climate change and local data, but what is more important is the ability to communicate the relevance to council and local area.

**Project Management:** As lead contact I am responsible for coordination of meetings, as well as continued engagement and communication with service areas and elected members. This can be a significant time commitment.

#### 5. Are there any services you think should be approached as a priority? Why, and do you have any tips on how to approach them?

Council's risk and assurance team, including emergency planning, are critical. It is important to include climate change within the corporate risk register as this will ensure it is taken seriously and will lead to further inclusion within all service area plans.

Early engagement with senior leadership teams is important in order to ensure support across the rest of council. A presentation at a monthly senior leadership team would be recommended, as well as relevant council committees.

It is also important to meet with the relevant head of finance/teams early on in order to raise awareness of any possible financial risk to council as well as secure support for potential budgetary requirements to support adaptation measures.

In general, all service areas will be affected however risk and assurance will be key to ensuring prioritisation across all plans.

The project has acted as a catalyst for further personal research into climate change and solutions, which I can apply to my work in council as well as my personal life.

## 6. How do your views on addressing climate change differ compared to when you began the project?

Due to increased understanding of the risks from climate change I have a greater appreciation for the need to act. The project has acted as a catalyst for further personal research into climate change and solutions, which I can apply to my work in council as well as my personal life.

## 7. Can you give some examples of any other projects which have developed out of this adaptation planning process?

Council have commissioned a Climate Change Risk & Opportunities Assessment for two major infrastructure projects in Derry and Strabane. This will provide a template for climate proofing all future capital projects in Council.

In partnership with Donegal County Council, DCSDC have secured funding to develop a cross-border/cross-sectoral North West Climate Action Plan (NWCAP). This regional plan will provide a strategic framework for both adaptation and mitigation. A natural capital study has begun with appointment of a GIS Officer – this will inform the nature-based solutions to be included in the emerging NWCAP.

## 8. Any final advice for other councils beginning the planning process in 2020?

- Although every Council area is different and will require specific analysis of risk - do not reinvent the wheel. The adaptation planning toolkit is in place with other excellent examples of adaptation planning available in the UK and Ireland.
- Ensure senior leadership and elected member support.
- Allow sufficient time and resources for stakeholder engagement – lots of meetings with colleagues to secure support and involvement.

## 9. What tips can you share on how to sell the process to;

**a. Colleagues** – Be realistic about the level of involvement required. Some will need to be involved more than others. You may find that some don't attend working group meetings and require 1-1 meetings instead. Try and remain positive about the work and encourage people to focus on the solutions and what can be done to adapt to climate change.

**b. Senior staff** – Emphasise the overall climate risk to council and local communities – why it matters both financially and ethically. Important that council is seen as a civic leader in the local community – acting local – thinking global. Sell the benefits of adaptation planning both financial and reputational.

**c. Elected members** – Similar to the senior staff – but with greater emphasis on the political and global context for action as well as ethical duty to act in order to safeguard the local environment and communities.

**Make it relevant!**

**Find the relevant risk and solution for each service area, council area, local communities and use that to engage each stakeholder with the need to act and be involved in the process.**