

# Evaluation of the Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) Citizens' Advisory Forum

Final report

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Introduction**

During 2010, the Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) partnership launched a Citizens' Advisory Forum to bring public attitudes and values into its strategic decision making processes. The project was co-funded and supported by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' Sciencewise-ERC programme.

The Forum was designed to provide a space in which members of the public could deliberate on some of the issues that the LWEC partnership is seeking to address. The Forum addressed issues of flooding, climate change adaptation and wider governance and decision making processes in relation to climate change.

The main objectives for the Forum were:

- To inform the strategic development of LWEC's research by helping to identify research priorities and commenting on strategic aims for the partnership
- To identify areas of particular public concern about environmental change, so that the commissioning and communication of research by LWEC, and its partners, can take account of the needs and concerns of society

### **Context**

Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) is a ten year partnership which seeks to link policy with research in the area of environmental change. The partnership aims to connect world-leading natural, engineering, economic, social, medical, cultural, arts, and humanities researchers with policy-makers, business, the public, and other key stakeholders. LWEC consists of 22 different funding partners, eight of which are from policy developing bodies. The partners include the Research Councils, national, devolved and local government bodies and government agencies.

Knowledge exchange and public engagement are priorities for LWEC, to ensure that the questions being researched take into account the public's and other users' views, and research outputs are disseminated to these groups. The LWEC Public Engagement Strategic Advisory Group (PE SAG) was established to embed public engagement into the LWEC strategic decision-making process. During 2010, the PE SAG looked at different models for public engagement as a basis for an experiment to pilot a new approach. They agreed that a small scale panel that would allow in depth discussions was a good starting point and it was this approach that was developed into the Citizens Advisory Forum. OPM were appointed in July 2010 as the contractors to deliver the Forum.

### **The Forum activities**

The Forum was intended to provide for the involvement of a broad cross section of individuals within a relatively small group. 18 Forum members were recruited from the Bristol area, according to a recruitment specification designed to ensure that membership of the Forum was inclusive (rather than representative), by a professional recruitment agency. The Forum met three times (October 2010, November 2010 and February 2011), with attendance remaining fairly steady but decreasing slightly (from 18 at the first session, 15 at the second and 13 at the last one). Each session was held in central Bristol and ran from 11am to either 3pm or 4pm, on a Saturday. Incentives of £150 in total were given to participants (one third after each event), plus travel expenses.

The three Forum sessions considered:

- Session 1: Research into flood risk management, with three expert speakers from the Environment Agency
- Session 2: Research into adaptation to climate change, with three expert speakers from the UK Climate Impacts Programme
- Session 3: Governance and decision making in response to climate change challenges, with input from the ESRC and a transport emissions specialist

Reports from each Forum session were produced by the contractors and circulated to all those involved, and a full final report was published by LWEC and Sciencewise-ERC. All the session reports, and all the information materials produced to support discussions by Forum members were also made available on the websites of the two organisations. In addition, Sciencewise-ERC commissioned a five minute video (filmed at the second Forum session), also published on the website.

### **Value and benefits to those involved**

For LWEC, the value of the process was around:

- Getting information on public views and values through in depth discussion.
- Getting direct to the public, rather than going through intermediaries.
- Testing out with the public plans for future work.
- Being able to set the agenda for the Forum session, so the Forum members could address specific questions of relevance to LWEC partners.
- Validating LWEC research activities.

For the public participants in the process, the most valuable benefit was learning, with almost all agreeing they had learnt something new and all agreeing that the Forum had helped them think more clearly about some new issues for the first time. Throughout the sessions, Forum members reported that taking part had affected their views, including about their own behaviour.

11 of the 13 said they were more likely to get involved in public consultations in future as a result of taking part in this Forum (the other two neither agreed nor disagreed). This suggests that their own experience in the Forum had been positive, and also suggests that a good experience of engagement could lead to greater enthusiasm for future engagement.

### **Impacts of the Forum**

This evaluation is reporting very soon after the conclusion of the Forum activities, so it is too early to identify clear influence on policy at this stage. Although some LWEC partners interviewed had not used the results at the time of interview, others had already either used the results or had clear plans for doing so.

There were several specific areas identified where influence on future policy decisions was expected: governance and regulation, the Water Strategy, flooding, and investing more in research into prevention.

For others, the influence of the Forum was less direct, influencing the broader context for policy rather than having direct influence on decisions. However, the Forum is also expected to have an impact on LWEC policy on public engagement.

One point which emerges clearly was the importance of feeding back to public participants and others about the extent to which LWEC have listened to and taken the results of the Forum into account.

## Overall findings

- **The Forum was a cost effective approach to public dialogue.** The experience of the Forum shows that it is possible to undertake valuable public dialogue on complex technical issues on a small scale and with a small budget. The project had a total budget of £30,450 including evaluation. Some problems were caused by the tight budget, and a little additional funding could have achieved significantly more (see below). There were also questions raised about the small size of the Forum (also covered below). However, overall, the Forum has demonstrated that a small scale initiative of this sort has the potential to deliver significant value in terms of policy influence as well as impacts on those involved.
- **The Forum was completed quickly and effectively, and addressed all its objectives.** The development and delivery of the Forum was completed within 12 months from the initial business plan. It achieved a great deal for that small budget and over a very tight timescale, even within a complex organisational context such as LWEC and on complex issues of environmental research. The public participants were satisfied, it addressed all its objectives and delivered valuable results to LWEC.

New information materials have been created as briefing for the Forum meetings, and have been published on the LWEC and Sciencewise-ERC websites as a resource for others considering public engagement on similar topics. The Forum members have learnt a great deal, and had the opportunity to influence important national decisions on future environmental research. LWEC has been able to benefit from the time, effort and commitment Forum members have contributed. Detailed reports have been produced summarising the values, attitudes and conclusions of the public on research priorities of relevance to LWEC's work and strategic objectives.

The precise extent to which LWEC's future strategic policy decisions about environmental research within LWEC priorities is affected by the Forum results remains to be seen, but there are good indications from some LWEC partners that the results will be taken seriously and will have some influence in the longer term.

- **The Forum model has particular strengths.** This experience suggests that the benefit of a group of the public working together over a period of time is that it allows them to grapple quickly and effectively with new issues as they get used to the process and learn about each other. The group gels, trust is established in the process and they are able to very quickly grasp topics and engage with the questions. This Forum only met three times, so it is likely that further work is needed to fully test the model and build on experience, but there are signs that this approach can be effective.
- **Sometimes a lot more can be achieved for a little extra resource.** A little additional funding could have covered more support for initial planning, more facilitators at meetings, post-project contractor support, an independent evaluation contractor, fees to experts, and the costs of one further Forum meeting to enable the Forum to more fully explore priorities and agendas for environmental research beyond the specific topics. In addition, more time for planning and in the overall timescale could have allowed slightly longer sessions (one hour could have made a real difference), and the potential for homework for Forum members (asking friends and family for their views on topics and questions).
- **It is important to demonstrate longer term impacts.** At this point, it is too early to find definitive evidence that the aims, objectives and success criteria of the Forum have been fully met. Longer term monitoring of the dissemination, use and impacts of the results of the Forum will be needed in order to test the effectiveness of this Forum to a range of key audiences: LWEC itself and other funders, the public participants who were the members of the Forum, and other interested parties. There is significant interest in the Forum model as a mechanism for high quality and cost effective public dialogue, and there will be interest in the extent to which it has been successful in this instance.

## Practical lessons for future similar initiatives

The evaluation has identified some overall key lessons for future public engagement practice from the experience of the LWEC Citizens Advisory Forum, as follows:

- **Clarity about purpose and potential.** There needs to be clarity about the purpose and boundaries of the work to help ensure that those involved in using the engagement results in their decision-making know what they are expected to do to achieve the objectives (including the level of commitment likely to be required), and to get early buy in to the process itself and to the results of the process.
- **Clarity about how the project fits into the wider context and longer term.** Public dialogue does not take place in a vacuum, so it is essential to understand what has gone before, what the immediate context is and how it will fit into future planning.
- **Close links are established between process design and policy targets.** The people who will use the results of public dialogue must be involved in the identification and framing of topics for the Forum to discuss, and in the design and drafting of questions for the public, from the start and extensively throughout.
- **Planning needs to bring process and content knowledge together.** Detailed planning of public dialogue needs to involve both those who have knowledge of the subject areas to be covered ('content') and knowledge and experience of public engagement ('process') so that an effective process can be designed to answer the questions that need to be addressed.
- **The quality of information provision affects the quality of deliberation.** Effective information provision requires close working between content and process people to produce appropriate information that can be absorbed by public participants, and expert facilitation is needed to enable participants to use new information (possibly requiring new facilitation skills around learning as well as discussion management). There also need to be clear distinctions between facilitators neutrally managing the process, and those responsible for content provision and questions. Engaging external experts is also always challenging, especially if they are not employed by the organisation managing the dialogue. Information provision affects the quality of public deliberation, the quality of the conclusions that result and therefore the extent to which they are seen as credible and are used by decision makers and thus influence policy decisions.
- **Governance arrangements need to be clear from the start.** In an experimental pilot and especially within a complex organisational structure such as LWEC, it is particularly important that roles and responsibilities for decision making are clear. Ideally a small project team is established at the start and continues throughout the project to be responsible for detailed design and delivery of the project, plus an oversight or steering group that focuses on content priorities and policy implications and targets.
- **The number and type of public participants affects the credibility of the results.** Some LWEC partners felt that the small scale reduced the likelihood, and desirability, of the Forum having a major influence on future strategic policy decisions. However, if the result sought is to provide information and inspiration to decision makers, rather than detailed research evidence, small numbers appear to be less of a barrier.
- **Being there is invaluable.** Although written reports of this type of public engagement will always be necessary, and additional communications such as video and audio can be particularly useful, all LWEC interviewees who had attended were clear that being involved in public deliberations personally, through being at events and hearing public discussions first hand, is completely different (and preferable) to only reading reports.

In conclusion, this evaluation shows that the aims of the project have been met in that the Forum has demonstrated that the public voice is important and would be heard alongside the voice of other stakeholders, and that a space has been provided in which members of the public can deliberate on some of the issues that the LWEC partnership is seeking to address. In addition, public attitudes and values have been articulated and captured through the work of the Forum and there are strong indications that these will be fed into LWEC strategic decision making.

In summary, therefore, although it is too early to find definitive evidence that all the objectives have been fully met, most have been fully addressed and there are good indications that all the aims, objectives and success criteria will be met in the longer term.

It would be very valuable to continue to monitor the dissemination, use and impacts of the results of the Forum over the coming months, and to update this analysis in due course.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) is a ten year partnership which seeks to link policy with research in the area of environmental change. The partnership aims to connect world-leading natural, engineering, economic, social, medical, cultural, arts, and humanities researchers with policy-makers, business, the public, and other key stakeholders.

LWEC consists of 22 different funding partners, eight of which are from policy developing bodies. The partners include Research Councils; national, devolved and local government bodies; and government agencies. LWEC's key principle focuses on the co-design, co-production and co-delivery of research in order to increase uptake and impacts of research conducted.

During 2010, the LWEC partnership launched a Citizens' Advisory Forum to bring public attitudes and values into its strategic decision making processes. The project was co-funded and supported by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' Sciencewise-ERC programme<sup>1</sup>,

The Forum was designed to provide a space in which members of the public could deliberate on some of the issues that the LWEC partnership is seeking to address. The Forum addressed issues of flooding, climate change adaptation and wider governance and decision making processes in relation to climate change.

This report describes the main findings from the evaluation of the Forum. The evaluation was carried out throughout the establishment and activity of the Forum, from July 2010, and was completed in April 2011. The research included observation and informal interviews with public participants at a Forum meeting, questionnaires at all events, interviews with LWEC staff and others involved in delivering the process, and quantitative and qualitative analysis of all data collected.

The report summarises the methodology used for the evaluation, the aims and objectives of the Forum, and describes and assesses all the main activities, drawing significantly on feedback from all those involved in relation to meeting standards of good practice, the value and benefits to all participants, and the impacts of the Forum. It considers the extent to which the aims, objectives and success criteria have been achieved, and identifies some lessons for future practice in the light of these findings.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre (Sciencewise-ERC) funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), helps policy makers to understand and use public dialogue to inspire, inform and improve policy decisions around science and technology. It consists of a comprehensive online resource of information, advice and guidance together with a wide range of support services aimed at policy makers and all the different stakeholders involved in science and technology policy making, including the public. The Sciencewise-ERC also provides co-funding to Government departments and agencies to develop and commission public dialogue activities. [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk)

## 2. EVALUATION STUDY

The purpose of the evaluation, as set out in the Invitation to Tender, was as follows:

- To provide an independent, unbiased evaluation of the public dialogue processes and impacts of the project, based on the success criteria outlined in the ITT, the stated objectives of the project, and the Sciencewise-ERC Guiding Principles of good practice;
- To provide information on developing best practice so that this can be taken account of by LWEC when considering future dialogues;
- To contribute to wider learning about public dialogue.

The Invitation to Tender for the evaluation was issued in May 2010 but, in spite of strenuous efforts to engage an independent evaluation contractor, it proved impossible to do so. Feedback indicated that the budget and timescale were the key barriers. It was therefore agreed that the Sciencewise-ERC evaluation manager, Diane Warburton (a highly experienced evaluator), would undertake the evaluation.

It was anticipated that this would be a light touch evaluation, reflecting the very limited budget, focusing on:

- Work with the Forum contractors and the LWEC Directorate, including reviewing progress and providing feedback;
- Capturing feedback from the Forum members, including about their expectations of the Forum and the value of participation to them;
- Providing a short report covering the purpose of the Forum, how well the objectives and success criteria were met, good practice, key impacts and achievements, and lessons for the future.

In practice, the first point above was primarily met through the Sciencewise-ERC Dialogue and Engagement Specialist (DES) working with the contractors and LWEC, reviewing progress and providing feedback, rather than this forming part of the evaluation. However, this evaluation has drawn on feedback from the DES both in person and through monthly reports on the progress of the Forum.

In terms of feedback from the Forum members, the evaluator collaborated with the contractors to provide questionnaires for each of the first two Forum meetings, so that feedback could be collected on those events. The contractors distributed and analysed these questionnaires after each event. The evaluator then developed a wider questionnaire which was distributed at the final of the three events to collect feedback from the participants on the Forum process overall. The evaluator also attended that final Forum meeting to enable observation of the process, and to gain informal feedback from Forum participants on their experiences of the process.

This report is designed to meet the third of the activities outlined above. Sections 3 and 5 cover the background context for the Forum, and provide a description of how the Forum worked in practice. The aims, objectives and success criteria of the Forum are outlined in section 4, and analysis of the extent to which these were met is summarised in section 9. Good practice is assessed in terms of Sciencewise-ERC's guiding principles for public dialogue on science and technology<sup>2</sup>, and analysis against these principles is presented in section 6. The value and benefits to the various participants are identified in section 7, and the impacts of the Forum are outlined in section 8. Overall conclusions and lessons for the future are outlined in section 10.

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<sup>2</sup> The Government's Approach to Public Dialogue" available at: [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/TrackedDocuments/Guiding-Principles/Sciencewise-ERC-Guiding-Principles.pdf](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/TrackedDocuments/Guiding-Principles/Sciencewise-ERC-Guiding-Principles.pdf)

In summary, the methodology for evaluation research was:

- attendance at the inception meeting in August 2010, to discuss the plans for the project and agree the parameters for the evaluation
- input to drafting of end of Forum meeting questionnaires for the first two meetings, to gain emerging responses from participants
- discussion with the LWEC project manager (Melanie Knetsch), the head of the LWEC Directorate (Ken O'Callaghan) and the Sciencewise-ERC DES (Lynn Wetenhall) about the priorities for the evaluation; all agreed that the priorities were the use of the results from the Forum and potential and actual policy influence
- provision of fuller (4-page) questionnaires to all participants at the final Forum meeting to cover the Forum process as a whole
- attendance at the final Forum meeting to observe the process, and have informal conversations with Forum participants about their experience of the Forum
- interviews with six LWEC partners, plus the two LWEC project managers involved over the course of the project, the Sciencewise-ERC DES and the contractors (interviews written up in note form)
- review of all Sciencewise-ERC DES monthly and final reports
- analysis of all evaluation research
- attendance at the project wash-up meeting
- drafting and finalising the evaluation report.

### 3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR THE FORUM

Knowledge exchange and public engagement are priorities for the Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) partnership, to ensure that the questions being researched take into account the publics' and other users' views, and research outputs are disseminated to these groups. The LWEC Public Engagement Strategic Advisory Group (PE SAG) was established to embed public engagement into the LWEC strategic decision-making process (e.g. agreement on the wider issues which need to be researched in the LWEC six areas of research). At the time of the Invitation to Tender for the Forum, LWEC's six areas of research were:

- A. To predict the impacts of climate change and to promote sustainable solutions through mitigation and adaptation.
- B. To manage ecosystem services for human well-being and to protect the natural environment in a changing world.
- C. To promote human well-being, alleviate poverty and minimise waste by ensuring a sustainable supply of food and water.
- D. To protect human, plant and animal health from diseases, pests and hazards in a changing environment.
- E. To make infrastructure, the built environment and transport systems resilient to environmental change, less carbon intensive and more socially acceptable.
- F. To understand how people respond to a changing environment and develop thriving, cohesive and informed communities.

Initial thinking about the potential public engagement activities that LWEC could undertake revealed different perceptions among LWEC partners about what this might mean in practice. The PE SAG reviewed a range of models of citizens' panels including a large consultative group (of 1,000 plus people). However, on balance the PE SAG felt that a smaller scale panel that would allow in depth discussions was a good starting point and it was this approach that was developed into plans for the Citizens Advisory Forum.

The expectation was that the Forum would pass its observations to the different LWEC governance groups (including the Partners Support Unit, the Communications Group, the PE SAG, the Directorate and the Partners Board). In this way, the expectation was that public views would be considered at the highest levels of the LWEC partnership, and enable a two-way method of information sharing and dissemination.

Discussions with Sciencewise-ERC resulted in an agreement between LWEC and Sciencewise-ERC to develop a partnership to develop and implement a Citizens' Advisory Forum. Funding and governance arrangements, including a Sciencewise-ERC Dialogue and Engagement Specialist advising LWEC on the Forum, were agreed between the two bodies in April 2010, and contractors to undertake the detailed design and delivery of the Forum, and an evaluator, were appointed in July 2010. The detailed objectives for the Forum, and the activities that took place, are outlined in section 4.

In terms of the wider context for the Forum, the actual sessions started when a new government had been in office for about six months. Initial delays were caused to the project by legal restrictions around the election which delayed the issue of tender documents and therefore the appointments of contractors to deliver and evaluate the project.

The wider national political context for the discussions in the Forum was around financial austerity, and cuts to public spending and public services, rather than a positive forward looking focus on innovation and development. More specifically, there were no environmental disasters during the course of the Forum meetings which might have skewed the process; the earthquakes and other natural disasters in 2011 happened later in the year.

#### **4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM**

The aim of the LWEC Citizens' Advisory Forum was "to bring public attitudes and values into its [LWEC's] strategic decision making processes". The Forum was intended to demonstrate that "the public voice is important and should be heard alongside the voice of other stakeholders". The Forum was designed "to provide a space in which members of the public can deliberate on some of the issues that the LWEC partnership is seeking to address" (all quotes from the ITT for the evaluation).

The main objectives for the Forum were:

- To inform the strategic development of LWEC's research by helping to identify research priorities and commenting on strategic aims for the partnership
- To identify areas of particular public concern about environmental change, so that the commissioning and communication of research by LWEC, and its partners, can take account of the needs and concerns of society

A secondary objective of the Forum was to offer views on different forms of communicating results and outputs to different audiences. However, it was agreed during the design phase of the Forum that this objective would be better met through different public engagement activities.

The success criteria outlined in the ITT for the evaluation were

1. The LWEC governance groups take account of the Forum's views and recommendations in their development of LWEC's strategies and activities
2. LWEC partners use the outputs from the Forum to inform the development and dissemination of research
3. The members of the Forum feel valued and empowered to state their opinions.

The analysis of the extent to which the Forum activities met these success criteria is summarised in section 9.

## **5. THE CITIZENS' ADVISORY FORUM IN PRACTICE**

This section describes the way the Forum was established and how it operated in practice. It covers the timing of the Forum, the public participants involved, the structure of the Forum meetings, the issues discussed and why they were chosen, the information provided, recording and reporting, governance, reflection and learning, and budgets.

### **5.1 Timing**

Initially, the plan was for the Citizens' Advisory Forum to run for a year but reduced timescales (including deadlines for Sciencewise-ERC funding) resulted in the Forum meeting three times over the course of four months. Each Forum meeting was held on a Saturday, and lasted for a full day (around 10am to 4pm each time).

The overall timetable of main events in the planning and delivery of the Forum was:

- Business case and funding agreed April 2010
- Contractors for delivery and evaluation appointed July 2010
- Inception meeting with contractors and evaluators 12 August 2010
- First Forum meeting: Saturday 16 October 2010, 11am to 4pm, Bristol
- Second Forum meeting: Saturday 27 November 2010, 11am to 3pm, Bristol
- Third Forum meeting: Saturday 5 February 2011, 11am to 3pm, Bristol
- Draft project report 8 March 2011
- Draft evaluation report 16 March 2011
- Washup meeting 24 March 2011
- Final project report published 6 April 2011.

### **5.2 The public participants**

The Forum was intended to provide for the involvement of a broad cross section of individuals within a relatively small group. 18 Forum members were recruited, according to a recruitment specification designed to ensure that membership of the Forum was inclusive (rather than representative), by a professional recruitment agency. Quota were set for demographic factors (e.g. age, gender, urban/ rural location, ethnic background, family situation, housing tenure, working status) and environmental attitudes. The recruitment specification and quotas are described in detail in the project report by the contractors<sup>3</sup>.

All members were recruited from Bristol, and the surrounding areas, providing access to a diverse population. In order to encourage participants from diverse backgrounds to take part (and not just those with an interest), incentives of £150 in total were given to participants (one third after each event), plus travel expenses. This use of incentives is common practice in deliberative public engagement exercises of this type.

Attendance varied and did diminish slightly over the course of the three meetings: 18 attended the first session (November 2010), 15 attended the second (December 2010) and 13 attended the third (February 2011).

### **5.3 The Forum meetings**

The Forum meetings were all slightly different in design, with OPM facilitating all group and plenary discussions:

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<sup>3</sup> *Citizens' Advisory Forum*. OPM, London March 2011. Published by LWEC and Sciencewise-ERC, March 2011.

- **Session 1. 16 October 2010. Research into flood risk management**
  - Introduction, ice breaker (OPM 20 mins)
  - Role of the Forum and its members (OPM 25 minutes)
  - Introduction to LWEC (LWEC 15 minutes)
  - Overview of flooding and flooding research, followed by initial responses from participants (OPM 45 minutes)

Lunch

  - Presentations by three Environment Agency expert speakers (45 minutes)
  - Group work in three groups to clarify the issues with one of the three speakers in each; first 10 minutes for speakers to answer questions (30 mins)
  - Group work to set priorities for research (45 mins)
  - Plenary feedback with groups presenting their rank order of priorities (30 mins)
  - Feedback on session and close (15 mins)
  
- **Session 2. 27 November 2010. Research into adaptation to climate change**
  - Introduction to session (OPM 15 mins)
  - Introduction to climate change adaptation (OPM 40 mins)
  - Introduction to research topics and three expert speakers from the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) (OPM and experts 35 mins)

Lunch

  - Group discussions with experts in carousel; each expert 10 mins per group (30 mins)
  - Group work to set priorities for research (50 mins)
  - Plenary feedback with groups presenting their rank order of priorities (30 mins)
  - Feedback on session and close (15 mins)
  
- **Session 3. 5 February 2011. Governance and decision making in response to climate change challenges**
  - Introduction to session (OPM 15 mins)
  - Introduction to decision making around limited resources (OPM - 30 mins)
  - Introduction to group discussions (OPM 15 mins)
  - Group work on decision making (60 mins)

Lunch

  - Plenary feedback of key points from previous group work (30 mins)
  - Whole group discussion of decision making in relation to carbon emissions from transport (led by OPM with carbon emissions expert 75 mins)
  - Feedback on session, evaluation and close (OPM and evaluator 15 mins)

The final report on the Forum project summarises that "*The Forum sessions were designed to be deliberative, enabling members to engage with information provided by experts, by the OPM team and by each other, through discussion and the exchange of views.*" (page 6).

#### **5.4 The issues discussed**

The LWEC Directorate was responsible for identifying issues for the Forum to discuss that could influence future strategic research decisions. The first two sessions were linked directly to research planning on specific issues: flood risk management, linked to a current LWEC consultation; and adaptation to climate change, linked to LWEC's planned 2011 climate change strategy. The third session was a more upstream approach looking at governance and decision making around scarce resources (food and water), and around the need to reduce carbon emissions from transport. This third session was designed to provide public views to feed into LWEC's research agenda around behaviour change.

Although the overall issues for each session were identified by LWEC, the detailed content for the sessions was developed in discussion with the experts involved in presentations to the Forum.

The table below, taken from the final project report, summarises the rationale for each subject focus, and how this was pursued in the sessions.

Session and subject	Rationale for the subject focus	Key lines of enquiry	Strategic role in LWEC
<p>Session 1: 16 October 2010 Research into flood risk management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The risk and impact of flooding in the UK is affected by the impacts of climate change, making this a very important topic for LWEC.</li> <li>• LWEC currently consulting amongst the academic community on a UK Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk strategy, to encourage collaboration and co-ordination of research providers, funders and users on the topic of flood risk management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which types of research into flood risk management do the public believe are most important for LWEC and partners to prioritise?</li> <li>• What criteria inform the public's choices about priorities in terms of research spend on flood risk management?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public response to key questions within consultation, to which LWEC was contributing</li> </ul>
<p>Session 2: 27 November 2011 Research into adaptation to climate change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LWEC Directorate is considering a more co-ordinated approach to research into adaptation to climate change, and would welcome greater understanding of the public's concerns around adaptation to climate change</li> <li>• LWEC is to produce a climate change research strategy in 2011, of which adaptation will be a major part</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the public's understanding of adaptation to climate change?</li> <li>• Which spheres of research into adaptation to climate change do the public believe are most important for LWEC and partners to prioritise?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public input into strategic direction for large topic area for research – public potentially influencing key areas needing to be addressed</li> </ul>
<p>Session 3: 5 February 2011 Decision making and governance in response to climate change challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LWEC Directorate identified a potential need for new programmes of social research into questions of governance around sustainable behaviours. LWEC and partners are considering this as an area of future funding, and would welcome public input at this early stage of thinking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where should we locate responsibility for responding to the challenge of increasingly limited resources due to the impacts of climate change?</li> <li>• Where should we locate responsibility for ensuring we respond to need to reduce carbon emissions?</li> <li>• What criteria should inform society's access to and usage of limited resources?</li> <li>• What approaches to behaviour change are most appropriate in ensuring a response to climate change challenges?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upstream engagement, with public opinion helping to shape the direction of a potential research funding call</li> </ul>

## 5.5 Information provided

Information was provided to the Forum members in a variety of forms:

- Pre-session briefing (2-3 pages), sent to all participants in advance, to introduce the topics and concepts in each session and the key questions they would be considering.
- Briefing sheets during the sessions
- Expert speakers (seven in total across the three sessions), who made presentations and also participated in the small group working (answering questions and providing information, rather than leading or directing discussion).

Information was also provided to the expert speakers who contributed to the Forum, including personal briefing in advance and detailed written information about the Forum and what was being asked of them as experts.

## 5.6 Recording and reporting

Public views were recorded in writing during the sessions in a variety of ways: on laptops, note taking and flip chart recording during group work and plenary sessions. In addition, audio recording was used throughout; this was used to check information when there were questions in the written notes rather than being transcribed and analysed fully.

Reports summarising the results of the Forum discussions were circulated to participants after each session. Towards the end of the project, Forum session reports were circulated to others in LWEC, and publicised on the blog of the LWEC project manager. In addition, questions and requests from the public for more information were followed up (via the topic experts) by the contractors. Communications were continued between sessions between the contractors and Forum members, via email and post.

The final report was drafted by 8 March 2011, and finalised and published on 6 April 2011. The session reports (included in the final report as appendices) focused on the results of the Forum on the specific topics of those sessions, while the final report focused more on underlying drivers and values across the different topics.

The final project report therefore identifies the overarching themes that emerged from the sessions, Forum members' attitudes to environmental research (including what they favoured and the criteria they used to rank different fields of research), Forum members' views on communicating environmental research, where they saw responsibility for responding to the challenges of climate change, and what criteria should be used in decision making around limited resources. The report also provides full details of the process including recruitment and Forum activities.

The main findings from the Forum, as summarised in the project report, were as follows:

- Attitudes to climate change among Forum members shifted, with a majority of them growing more convinced that it was a real problem to which serious attention needed to be paid.
- Their attitudes to research into environmental change were that research should be part of the solution to responses to environmental change, and that the research needed to be action-orientated and value for money, creating new information and cost effective new solutions. The priority for research was felt to be on prevention; particularly on preventing disasters caused by climate and environmental change (also seen to be a cost effective approach). Initial perceptions that research meant technical experiments shifted over the three sessions, with increasing recognition of the value of social research.

- Their attitudes towards the impacts of research into environmental change were that research findings did need to be taken seriously by decision makers; indeed they felt it was only worth doing research if the findings were used. It was seen to be critical for LWEC to have close links to government, so that the research findings could impact on the real world; only then would the research be 'value for money'. These links need to be with local and national government; local government especially around flood risk management, although there was recognition that limited resources affected likelihood of use of research findings. They felt that private sector organisations should also be among the primary audiences for LWEC's research, so they better understood the risks from environmental change and to ensure they have the technical solutions to be able to respond.

Finally, there was also a strong feeling from Forum members that LWEC should play a role in educating and informing the public about climate change and the need for behaviour change, especially using the sort of data and statistics that they had seen as Forum members. Young people were seen as a particularly important audience for this information as they were felt to be likely to be more receptive to these messages.

- Forum members supported interventions by national government, who are considered the obvious leaders on issues as major as climate change, although interventions needed to take account of people's demand for personal choice and freedom, and not wholly reliant on measures such as taxation, not least to maintain trust in government and avoid accusations that government is acting out of self-interest.

International organisations were also seen to have a role to play in co-ordinating on issues that crossed national borders. Local organisations were seen to have limited power on these issues, while markets and corporate organisations were seen to be too powerful and in need of tighter and stronger regulation by national and international bodies. The report states that "*In fact, there is a scepticism of 'big business' to act in the wider interests of society*".

Overall, it was felt that the players in the system could not work in isolation; all layers of decision making needed to be involved and share responsibility. A combination of incentives and punitive measures was advocated, alongside structural changes to make it easier for people to change their behaviour e.g. improvements to public transport as well as taxation and price rises.

- The most important criteria for decision making in relation to access to limited resources were equity and fairness. This was felt to be particularly important where the resource is critical to human survival e.g. water. However, there was little optimism about how this might work, and an expectation that inequality and dispute may even increase as supply of resources become more limited in future.

The final project report was sent to all Forum participants (by email or by post if individual did not use email) in April 2011. It was published on the LWEC and Sciencewise-ERC websites<sup>4</sup> and circulated widely within LWEC by the LWEC project lead. The individual Forum session reports, and the briefing materials to support the public discussions, were also all published on LWEC and Sciencewise-ERC websites.

To supplement the written reports from the project (and this evaluation report), Sciencewise-ERC commissioned a five minute video<sup>5</sup> using footage filmed at the second Forum meeting on climate change adaptation. The video includes general footage of the Forum in action as well as short interviews with Forum participants, LWEC staff and partners, and expert speakers from UKCIP, all giving their views of the exercise.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/citizens-advisory-forum-for-living-with-environmental-change-lwec/> and <http://www.lwec.org.uk/audiences/Society>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/citizens-advisory-forum-for-living-with-environmental-change-lwec/>

## **5.7 Governance**

The Citizens Advisory Forum was a complex project to design and deliver in terms of management, decision making and communications. LWEC is a complex partnership body in itself (with 22 different organisations as partners) and staff seconded to LWEC from the Research Councils. Sciencewise-ERC was a partner in the project to the extent that it was providing funding (details arranged by the Sciencewise-ERC Projects Manager) and advice and guidance (provided by Sciencewise-ERC Dialogue and Engagement Specialist - DES - and the Sciencewise-ERC Evaluation Manager).

LWEC staff and partners, with support from Sciencewise-ERC, managed the selection and appointment of the delivery contractor, who was appointed in July 2010. However, in spite of extensive efforts, it proved impossible to procure a contractor to undertake the independent evaluation, so it was agreed that the Sciencewise-ERC Evaluation Manager (an experienced evaluator) would take on this role.

An early project inception meeting took place on 12 August 2010 and involved the newly appointed contractors, LWEC staff and key LWEC partners, Sciencewise-ERC Projects Manager, Sciencewise-ERC DES and Sciencewise-ERC Evaluation Manager / project evaluator. Subsequently, the contractors were responsible for the day to day design and delivery of the Forum. LWEC staff made all key strategic decisions about the Forum, including identifying the topics for discussion by the Forum in association with LWEC partners, and on practical design issues in planning the Forum (with advice from the contractors and the Sciencewise-ERC DES). No topics had been identified prior to the decision to set up the Forum.

There were several changes to LWEC staff during the course of the Forum. The LWEC lead on the project shifted from the project initiator, to a newcomer to LWEC, and back to the initiator towards the end of the project.

## **5.8 Reflection and learning**

In addition to the reflection hopefully prompted by the formal evaluation research described in this report (e.g. questionnaires and interviews), short review sessions were held among the key team members (LWEC staff, contractors and the Sciencewise-ERC DES) after each Forum meeting. At the end of the project (March 2011), a final 'wash-up' meeting was held, attended by LWEC staff, the delivery contractors, the evaluator, the Sciencewise-ERC DES and Sciencewise-ERC Projects Manager.

The purpose of this meeting was to explore and discuss insights and learning from the project, help Sciencewise-ERC in their advice for future projects, help LWEC draw out any further insights for themselves, and contribute to moving forward in an evolving field. The meeting was planned, and discussion facilitated, by the Sciencewise-ERC DES. The draft evaluation report was circulated a week in advance of the meeting. Detailed notes were produced from this meeting, and have fed into the final version of this report.

## **5.9 Budgets and funding**

The overall budget for the project was £30,450, including a Sciencewise-ERC contribution of £17,625 (including non-recoverable VAT as a project cost). The total budget included £2,500 for the evaluation. The budget did not include internal costs for LWEC for project management or procurement, or internal costs at BIS or Sciencewise-ERC. See section 6.2.5 for more details on budgets and costs.

## 6. MEETING STANDARDS OF GOOD PRACTICE

### 6.1 Introduction

In a light touch evaluation it is not possible to examine and assess every detail of practice in depth. However, it is important to review the quality of the design and delivery of the Forum. The analysis below follows the basic structure and issues raised in the five Sciencewise-ERC guiding principles (context, scope, delivery, impacts and evaluation) to identify and review good practice in the design and delivery of the Forum. In this report, however, context and scope are covered together in one section, impacts are covered in a separate section (section 8), and this whole report covers the 'evaluation' principles.

### 6.2 Context and scope

**6.2.1 Clarity of purpose and objectives.** The aims and objectives were clearly spelled out early on in the development of the Forum (see section 4), and these very explicitly guided both the design and delivery of the Forum and this evaluation. The extent to which these objectives were met by the Forum is analysed in section 9.

The formal objectives for the Forum focused on the Forum helping to identify research priorities, and areas of particular public concern about environmental change. However, the Forum was also established to experiment with and pilot a new methodology (the Forum) to work with the public, and to increase LWEC's own awareness and understanding of the principles and practicalities of engaging with the public.

The implications of these other objectives included a sense from some of the feedback in evaluation research that this was a method in search of a purpose. Comments from interviewees included:

*This seemed to be more about methodology and exploring how we might do it than fulfilling a specific need but I might be wrong. (LWEC interviewee 3)*

As a result, the Forum was to be established as a pilot and then some issues were to be identified to work on, rather than the method (the Forum) being designed to meet a specific purpose and answer specific policy questions. This is not a problem in principle, although it can (and did) create some problems in finding appropriate issues and questions for the Forum to consider at the appropriate time. Working this way round does bring additional challenges over timing and methods of working with the public.

The need for greater clarity around the purpose of the public engagement being undertaken was an issue for several interviewees:

*Being clear ... what engagement is for and what it can do – that it is information not research. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*Be much clearer about the specifics of what we're trying to achieve and how it would be used. There has to be a specific need. (LWEC interviewee 3)*

*Define better what it is you want to achieve, what outcome you want and how you want to get there. (LWEC interviewee 7)*

Forum members themselves were largely clear about the purpose of the Forum and how the results would be used:

- all agreed that they understood clearly the purpose of the Forum
- most agreed that they understood clearly how the results of the Forum would be used (all agreed except 2 who neither agreed nor disagreed).

**6.2.2 Timing.** There were initial problems of timing for the project overall caused by external factors outside the control of LWEC, such as the General Election (which delayed the issue of invitations to tender and contracts). Timing for the design and delivery of the Forum was then squeezed between the delayed starting date and the deadline of 31 March 2011 for projects funded under the then current Sciencewise-ERC programme budget.

The tight timescales limited the potential for the contractors to develop innovative approaches to the design, and they were largely limited to delivering the project as it was outlined in the initial Invitation to Tender for the work.

The delays also resulted in the first meetings of the Forum taking place later than had originally been planned, and the meetings had to be held quite close together. Feedback suggests that the public participants had no problems with that timing of meetings and, indeed, one participant suggested that they would have preferred meetings being held even closer together. The contractors also felt that there could have been advantages in holding the meetings closer together to maintain Forum members' interest and thinking. However, the tight timescale did put pressure on the design and delivery team to complete all the preparation for each meeting, and their feedback was that additional time between meetings would have been very useful.

The problems from these squeezed timescales were exacerbated by delays in identifying and agreeing the themes and questions for the Forum to address. Early email discussions (from May 2010) and an early meeting to generate ideas from the LWEC Directorate (early June 2010) were not conclusive. Ideas for themes and questions were still being considered at the inception meeting with contractors on 12 August 2010. Interviewees commented:

*I think in an ideal situation it would have been good to have had longer to develop the topics for the Forum meetings. It was partly down to funding and timescales. But it was hard to get people to agree on a topic and get it to a stage it could be discussed. We tried to ask the right questions but with a bit more time... (LWEC interviewee 5)*

*A better design of the questions – more upfront thinking and more time between forum meetings to develop things [would have made the Forum more valuable] (LWEC interviewee 2)*

When the topics for the Forum meetings were finally agreed (flood risk management research, climate change adaptation and governance and decision making), the time for identifying expert speakers and producing written information to brief the public participants was very tight indeed, particularly for the final Forum session. Partly as a result of tight timescales (but also because of difficulties in achieving the level of engagement in drafting needed from senior managers and expert presenters), information materials were written by the contractors, and checked for accuracy by LWEC experts and expert speakers, to very short timescales.

Finally, on timing, there was feedback from some interviewees that the model of the Forum, with the same Forum members working together over time on different issues, was just starting to work very well. There was a clear sense that the group had gelled and that they were able to work together effectively. Comments included:

*It was the last one so it seemed like the group had got into it by that point. The issue we were discussing is quite abstract so it took a little while to get them going, but once they did they got into it. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*The public were obviously very engaged with the discussion and I liked that the group had formed and were comfortable with each other – so using the same people worked. (LWEC interviewee 3)*

**6.2.3 Clear links to policy targets and timescales.** The delays in running the workshops did cause some problems in identifying exactly where and when the results of the Forum would or could be used. However, this was not a major problem as many of the targets for the results were committees and other groups that met at regular intervals (e.g. the LWEC Partners Board which met bi-monthly, and the Public Engagement Special Advisory Group (PE SAG) which also met regularly).

These two groups (Partners Board and PE SAG) were identified early on as key targets for the results from the Forum, and key members of these groups were involved early on. For example, the Chair of the PE SAG attended one of the Forum meetings, and senior members of the LWEC Directorate attended other meetings (two attended the first, and one each attended the second and third meetings). This buy-in and commitment from senior policy figures was a positive element of the planning of the Forum activities in aiming to maximise policy influence (see section 6.3.4 for more details on the value of the personal involvement of key senior LWEC partners).

For some of the policy targets, the results from Forum meetings were coming very early in the policy process (as recommended in the Sciencewise-ERC principles); others came later in the decision making process. The work on governance and decision making fed into the early stages of thinking on a new research call being developed by ESRC. The Forum considered issues of flood research at the meeting in October 2010, which was designed to link directly to the development of a new flood research strategy which was being finalised at the end of 2010 and due for publication in March 2011. This flexibility to consider inputs to policy at very early and also at later stages can be seen as one of the strengths of the Forum. Plans for building in this future influence were seen as an important issue.

**6.2.4 Openness and transparency.** Reports of the Forum were circulated soon after meetings to Forum members, and other interested parties, which encouraged openness and transparency. In addition, there was consistently transparent information provided to Forum members about how their thinking would be used, and what policy areas it would feed into. Final project and evaluation reports will all be openly published. Overall, there were no problems with openness and transparency throughout the project.

**6.2.5 Resources of time, skills and funding.** Resources of time have already been dealt with. The overall costs of the project were relatively low compared with most other Sciencewise-ERC funded public dialogues. The total budget for the project was £30,450 (excluding VAT); Sciencewise-ERC funding contribution was £17,625 plus evaluation costs. This budget covered all the planning, recruitment of public participants, information materials, running and reporting of three full-day Forum meetings (including venues), the final project report and a final review meeting among the team.

These costs exclude LWEC costs for hosting various planning meetings with the LWEC Directorate, costs for time from LWEC Directorate for taking part in those meetings, public participant time, time for other scientists and other experts taking part in events, costs of Sciencewise-ERC support (DES, evaluation, project management, BIS oversight). Although the time from all those involved can be counted as a cost to the project (and is, as is very often the case, almost impossible to quantify accurately), it can also be seen as a benefit in that the project brought together a great deal of knowledge and expertise both about public dialogue and about the topics to create a strong set of events and activities.

Feedback from some of those involved identified the tight budgets as something that did affect the process, although this resulted more in pressure on the small number of people involved (more funding could have allowed more people to help with the work) than major impacts on the quality and effectiveness of the project overall.

One specific area where more resources were seen to have been potentially valuable was in the actual Forum meetings. More resources would have allowed more facilitators to be present at the first two meetings (only two facilitators attended those meeting, with LWEC helping with small group facilitation).

*The key things to mention are time, slightly more resources (money and people), and on [the contractor's] side, the number of people running it could have been more (LWEC interviewee 2)*

It is also ideal for small groups to have a facilitator plus a separate person recording public views; that would have eased pressure on those involved, and potentially increased the quality of recording and facilitation. See below for more on the issues of facilitation and recording.

Other areas where a small amount of additional funding could have had quite significant impacts on the value of the process include more time for support for initial planning and decisions about topics and questions for the Forum (including facilitated meetings), post-project contractor support including presentations of the Forum results at LWEC meetings and one extra Forum session to allow for further exploration of priorities for research beyond the specific topics.

A little additional funding may also have eased the problems of recruiting experts to attend Forum sessions by offering payment. LWEC's structure means that experts are not directly employed by LWEC but by partner organisations. Their connection and commitment to the work of the Forum was therefore less close and direct than might have been the case if they had worked directly for LWEC.

Finally, on where a little additional funding would have helped: it had proved impossible to procure a contractor to undertake the evaluation of the project, in spite of extensive efforts to do so. Informal feedback to LWEC from potential contractors suggested that the original budget proposed for the evaluation (£2,500) had been too small. That budget had been calculated as around 10% of project costs; a conventional benchmark for evaluation budgets. However, in the light of this experience, it was felt that a minimum budget for evaluation may need to be set in future (say £5,000) in order to ensure that independent evaluation can be procured and delivered.

Consideration was also given to where money could have been saved with no loss of quality of process and there were no immediately obvious areas for savings. One area which was considered essential, and therefore should not be reduced in future such exercises, was the incentives paid to participants (£150 for the three sessions). Interviewees suggested that incentives at this sort of level are essential to maintain commitment from people who do not have environmental research as their main priority (and there was a relatively low level of drop-out), and to enable those that want to come to cover costs of attendance such as child care.

**6.2.6 Governance.** Feedback suggests that the governance structure of LWEC itself created some particular issues for the design and delivery of the project, in that it is a large partnership of 22 different organisations with complex governance arrangements that allow individual partners to develop their own strategies and then look for overlap and find potential collaborations. Partner organisations also had widely varied levels of knowledge and experience around public engagement and what it could offer.

These structural governance issues contributed to an initial lack of clarity over who would and could make decisions about the topics for the Forum to discuss. There was also some uncertainty around ownership of the Forum and where Forum results would go within LWEC's complex governance structures, and therefore the extent to which the results would be influential in later decision making.

LWEC's structure also results in regular changes in staff, who are largely seconded from partner bodies, with obvious implications for managing intensive projects such as the Forum. During the CAF, the lead LWEC staff member changed twice (from the project initiator to someone new to LWEC, and then back again) which inevitably lost some time. This was fully recognised by all involved:

*Knowing the key topic areas, who the key influencers are and at what level [is crucial] (LWEC interviewee 2)*

The challenging staffing and governance circumstances of the project did lead to difficulties in integrating the design of the Forum meetings with clear topic priorities. Ideally, a carefully selected team is identified at the start of the project which can manage the dialogue process throughout, including some content experts (e.g. on climate change adaptation) who understand enough about engagement to be able to fully participate in decisions on detailed planning:

*Make sure the people who develop the research agenda are absolutely involved in the development of the programmes for the events. Line up the people who write the calls with the people who do the public engagement. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*A bit more front planning in terms of the questions that really need to be answered. LWEC made it clear they wanted a proper conversation with the public but because LWEC is so diverse it was hard to decide (LWEC interviewee 5)*

Although the challenges of the circumstances were recognised by LWEC staff, it was also felt that early or late identification of topics for discussion at the meetings had pros and cons. Having topics identified early allows good time for planning including production of briefing materials and fully involving expert speakers. Not having topics identified at the start allows for quick responses to emerging opportunities (e.g. the major consultation on flooding that was discussed by Forum):

*I should say that this (the Forum) was not conceived as part of the core process for developing the research strategy. These forums were conceived as a good idea and then piggybacked onto the strategy process. So I was a little unclear about what the process was trying to achieve. It came at me from leftfield and wasn't part of my plan for achieving the strategy. I was encouraged to go with the flow and see what came out of it, so that's what I did. It was never a core means to feed into the strategy, just an interesting aside. (LWEC interviewee 7)*

There were additional difficulties in ensuring LWEC academic input to the process at the quite intensive level that was needed at particular times (e.g. around drafting information materials for the Forum members). These problems were resolved in very practical ways by the contractors, the Sciencewise-ERC DES and the ESRC secretariat to the project, but the difficulties added to the pressure around the project.

The complex relationships among those most closely involved in the design and delivery of the project were also challenging, with the different roles and responsibilities of the LWEC lead, LWEC senior managers, the contractor and the Sciencewise-ERC Dialogue and Engagement Specialist (DES) not being entirely clear at the beginning.

All those involved agreed that everyone had made the best of the circumstances, with extensive communications throughout which allowed for all relationships to remain very positive. However, it was felt that this was due largely to the individuals involved and it could have been much more difficult than it was. More formal information shared at an early stage would be very useful, particularly about the role of the Sciencewise-ERC DES and where lines of decision-making and responsibility lie. In this case, the role of the Sciencewise-ERC DES was valued by both LWEC and the contractors, and the personal expertise and experience of the DES in this case was particularly noted.

Some senior LWEC managers were involved in the early stages of the project, although greater involvement would have been useful:

*Making sure everyone is on board about what it is and what it can do ... Maybe members of the directorate didn't realise how much input they would have to provide (LWEC interviewee 5)*

However, the early involvement of senior managers that did happen (e.g. in selecting contractors and attending the project inception meeting) was seen to be vital both in securing their continued involvement and, through seeing the project development throughout and especially seeing the Forum in action, greatly increased their understanding of the potential role of public engagement in LWEC work in future:

*I felt the fairly broad kick off meeting was important. And especially to invite a mix of people to that kick off meeting including some subject knowledge, as it is easy to ask the wrong questions. That was also done in a fairly neutral way ... and came from a social science viewpoint. The format of the meeting seemed sound enough. (LWEC interviewee 4)*

One option for these sorts of dialogue projects is to create a clear project team, responsible for the detailed design and delivery for the project, and an oversight or steering group that focuses on content priorities and policy implications and targets (e.g. who should receive the results of the project, and when). This may have worked better in this case than the informal approach to decision making that sometimes worked excellently but sometimes did cause delays and difficulties.

## **6.3 Design and delivery**

**6.3.1 Competence in design and delivery.** Feedback from all those involved indicated an overall high level of satisfaction with the contractors commissioned to undertake the detailed design and to deliver the Forum for LWEC. There was particular praise for some of the facilitation, the contractors' flexibility to respond to changing demands over the topics for the Forum to consider, their ability to respond rapidly and turn decisions into detailed plans very quickly, and their willingness and ability to fill the gap when things needed to be done quickly (e.g. drafting information materials for Forum members at short notice).

In terms of the design process, the feedback was also largely positive. Several LWEC interviewees felt that the most valuable aspect of the whole process had been the extent to which they had been involved in the planning for the session from which they were most interested in the results.

*A real strength was the ability in the time available to address the content and structure of the event – the face to face meeting with OPM was very useful ... being able to set the agenda for the one I was involved in and focus it on something we are thinking of spending money on in the future (LWEC interviewee 1)*

This approach to the planning was commented on by others, along with the importance of bringing the 'content' people (from LWEC) to work closely with the 'process' people (contractors, Sciencewise-ERC) to develop the topics, questions and programme for the Forum - so that the questions were relevant for LWEC and the activities worked to enable Forum members to address those questions. This worked to a degree but, with more time, could have worked much more effectively, and last minute decisions and late planning might have been avoided.

There was clear feedback from Forum participants about the sessions they found most useful:

- In session 1, 8 of the 16 respondents identified the speakers and the Q & A sessions as the most useful, and 4 mentioned the small group discussions
- In session 2, very similar results: 9 of the 15 respondents identified the speakers and the Q & A sessions as the most useful, and 5 the small group discussions.
- In session 3, 4 of the 13 respondents identified the speakers and the Q & A sessions as the most useful, the same number (4) the small group discussions.

Also in feedback from participants, when asked about recommendations for how the Forum should be run in future, the emphasis throughout was on wanting more small group discussions. This was particularly evident in the final overarching feedback from Forum members in that the only tick box question that had any significant negative answers was around there being enough time to discuss the issues. Although 8 of the 13 respondents said there had been enough time, none of those 'strongly agreed', 3 neither agreed nor disagreed, and 2 disagreed. In addition, that feedback showed that the sessions that got the most positive feedback were the small group sessions: 6 of the 13 said these were excellent, and the other 7 said they were good. Similar feedback came from the other two Forum sessions.

This issue is something that is returned to below in relation to the balance of time in the design given to discussion among participants among themselves in small groups, and the time given to information provision.

Within the Forum activities, there were some techniques which were seen to work particularly well. One was in a priority setting exercise by the Forum, in which pre-printed cards were used and participants were asked to physically 'shape' relative priorities. This mix of options printed on the cards and the more visual approach to grouping them worked well.

On a very practical level, the venue worked very well. This is not a minor issue as the venue can significantly affect the mood of meetings with the public. In this case, the venue had been identified through the local knowledge of the Sciencewise-ERC DES (who knew it from previous personal experience), partly as a result of the team searching for a low cost option. The slightly quirky and informal nature of the venue, and generous catering, was entirely suitable and helped make participants feel at ease.

The limited budget did mean that the contractors could only provide limited staff to attend each Forum meeting, which resulted in some problems welcoming participants when they arrived, inadequate signage and setting up the meeting room in time. It was suggested in feedback that, where budgets are limited, additional staff resources can sometimes be found by involving other staff who would find it useful to observe public engagement of this sort first hand. They can learn through observation as well as contributing to the event.

**6.3.2 Facilitation.** In terms of facilitation of the small group working, the feedback from others involved was mixed. While there was some high praise for some facilitators, there were also criticisms that the facilitation was not consistent and in some cases poor. For example:

*Some of the [contractors] were superb – they were excellent in terms of facilitation skills and there was one in particular who really impressed me – they were very skilled at getting more verbose individuals to shut up and drawing others in. But there were also some who were not so good. One in particular asked leading questions and in my opinion misinterpreted some of what was being said. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

The limited budget for the project resulted in facilitators taking notes as well as managing group discussions. Evaluation feedback, as well as observation, suggest that facilitation would have been more effective if facilitators were not also having to take notes which was a distraction from managing group discussions and encouraging those who were less confident about speaking in public:

*There were some people who ... I think felt inhibited speaking up once they had heard others speak. (LWEC interviewee 6)*

Alternative options are to have one person facilitating plus a separate person taking notes (with obvious resource implications), or for groups to be self-managing and sharing out roles so that individuals in the group have responsibilities for time keeping, note taking and keeping the discussion to the point (plus possibly someone to report back to the main session). This latter option would clearly save resources (fewer facilitators needed) but probably works better once participants have been to several meetings and understand how small group working can and should operate. Self-managed small groups would also need very clear questions for the groups to work on, and probably fewer questions than in a fully facilitated session.

Another concern was poor timekeeping, with each of the three sessions suffering from this, and the final session running over for about 15 minutes. Some feedback suggested that there had been a degree of poor planning (e.g. not allowing enough time for expert input) and control (e.g. allowing people - experts and Forum members - to talk too much). The implications of this for timing were not something that only worried those involved in planning the Forum meetings; Forum members also mentioned this as a concern:

*Sticking to timings! People are giving up their valuable time so this needs to be respected. (Forum member feedback on questionnaire)*

One suggestion made in feedback was that deliberative public engagement of this sort may need quite specific facilitation skills, drawing on expertise from adult learning (e.g. designing processes which enable participants to quickly absorb the information needed to have the discussion they need to have, and to learn through working participatively on a task), rather than conventional small group facilitated discussions.

There was, however, positive feedback from Forum members at the final meeting on the facilitation overall:

- all, except 1, agreed that they were able to say everything they wanted (1 disagreed)
- all agreed that their views were valued and listened to with respect
- most agreed that no single view on the issues was allowed to dominate (2 neither agreed nor disagreed), and
- all agreed that the facilitator encouraged everyone to participate fully: 10 of the 13 respondents agreed 'strongly' that this was the case.

**6.3.3 Number and type of participants.** It is well understood that public dialogue needs to involve a number and demographic of the population that is appropriate to the task to give robustness to the eventual outcomes and to be appropriately 'representative'.

The Sciencewise-ERC principles state that "Public dialogue does not claim to be fully representative, rather it is a group of the public, who, after adequate information, discussion, access to specialists and time to deliberate, form considered advice which gives a strong indication of how the public at large feels about certain issues. The methodology and results need to be robust enough to give policy makers a good basis on which to make policy".

Within those parameters, the Forum was appropriately representative. The recruitment of the Forum members is described above in section 5.2, and the mix of people that was achieved in the final Forum membership was sufficiently diverse for the purpose:

*Strengths – it was a very useful cross-section of people. It is clear someone had put effort into getting all strata of society engaged. (LWEC interviewee 6)*

This was also the view of the Forum members themselves: almost all of them felt that there was a good mix of people. The mix of people is important to public participants and often influences the extent to which they feel their conclusions should be taken seriously - if they feel the group is too small or unrepresentative, that often causes some discomfort about the extent to which they feel their views should be listened to.

From observation at the last of the three sessions (which had the smallest number of participants), there was a good mix in terms of age, gender and socio-economic groups, although more of a presence from black and minority ethnic communities might have been expected given the location in Bristol.

There were concerns about the size and diversity of the Forum from LWEC interviewees, several of whom raised questions about the number of participants:

*I did feel it was quite a small group and there was not a particularly broad range of people from across society. That's OK as it's not meant to be representative ... Concerns over representativeness and levels of input are always an issue in these kinds of activity (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*The forum itself had a limited number, although it was not meant to be representative (LWEC interviewee 2)*

*There was a question on representation as you always have with these kinds of things. However, we had a good range of people ... The question of representation does come up and I sometimes struggled to convince people of the validity because of that (LWEC interviewee 4)*

*...the difficulty in something as big as LWEC is that such a small scale activity has the risk of being disregarded. And with the small number of people there is the question over impact (LWEC interviewee 5)*

*From an LWEC perspective I would think the sample size is too small to be representative, and I'm not sure you could point to the significance of it for the UK as a whole based on the size and on only three topics ... I'm not sure [the results are] in sufficient detail to really influence and I would be concerned about the sample size of the group (LWEC interviewee 7)*

The number of comments on this issue, unprompted beyond asking for strengths and weaknesses of the process, suggests some real concerns that need to be taken into account in planning for future public dialogue events.

The question of the 'right' number of people to involve in any particular engagement exercise is dependent on the purpose, context and other issues. The feedback here suggests that the number involved here (13 - 18 depending on the session) may have been insufficient to gain maximum credibility for the results for LWEC policy leads.

**6.3.4 Recording and reporting.** The difficulties of facilitators also taking notes of Forum members' views have already been raised above (although the back up audio recording of all sessions was used to ensure that points were not missed). A full report was produced (drafts in March and publication in April 2011), and circulated to all those involved (see section 5.6 for details).

Unfortunately, the research for this evaluation has taken place before many of the LWEC partners had read and digested the final report of the Forum activities, so it has not been possible to gain feedback on the value of the approach taken to reporting by the contractors. The report is clearly comprehensive and covers both the process and the results from the Forum discussions.

One interviewee identified the value of reports providing a short list of things people have agreed on, but that was not done in this case:

*It [an agreed list of things people agreed] would have made the outputs more reliable for LWEC to use and would help to develop a list of topics (LWEC interviewee 6).*

The feedback received did include comments about the potential for innovation in reporting so that the results are meaningful to different audiences. One LWEC interviewee had a specific suggestion:

*As a way of trying to show people not there what sort of things went on and what was discussed, make the outputs of events more exciting. For example tape recordings or video footage from the day, or a couple of people talking about what was discussed and what they thought of the day. People might not read the whole report but might be engaged by 30 seconds of video. If you go on DECC's website there is a film for the Low Carbon Communities project which shows people talking about what they are doing; it's great. Something like that would be good. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

This idea was, in fact, taken on board in the early stages of planning the Forum. Sciencewise-ERC created a five minute video which was published on Sciencewise-ERC website, using footage filmed at the second Forum on climate change adaptation (see section 5.6 for details).

There was extensive feedback from LWEC policy interviewees about the importance of decision makers attending meetings and seeing the public dialogue first hand as well as reading reports:

*It is essential. I wrote down notes relating to what I was interested in. A report doesn't necessarily reflect these nuances and is not necessarily framed in a reflective way. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*If you understand and know what a forum can do then reports work really well. If you have no concept then you must attend, or if it's a specific subject area you are involved in. (LWEC interviewee 2)*

*I think being involved in part of it is useful. It sets the scene and gives a sense of, for example, what the genuine level of knowledge is – and you might not get that just from reading the report. (LWEC interviewee 3)*

*There is absolutely no doubt that I understood it much better by attending as I have no experience of this stuff. Personally it was very valuable (LWEC interviewee 4)*

*It is vital. It was by going along that I really started to understand. You think people will never understand the complexity but actually they can ... [seeing it in person gives] something the report couldn't. I think someone who had been along would probably put more weight on the results than someone who hadn't, unless they had knowledge of dialogue processes. (LWEC interviewee 5)*

*Essential to see in person as we cannot get a feeling for what it was like through reading reports. (LWEC interviewee 8)*

However, some feedback identified the value of written reports as well and not everyone was convinced of the value of personal attendance. Comments included:

*Having the written output is most useful, but being able to go back to people who were there and say 'do you recognise what you talked about here?' is also very valuable – it helps to show impact (LWEC interviewee 6)*

*I'm not so sure in terms of outputs. I would have liked to have been there but I couldn't make it. The people involved certainly found it interesting and useful to be there but I'm not sure it gave them anything different in terms of outputs (LWEC interviewee 7)*

Given the importance of decision makers seeing the dialogue and hearing the public views first hand, it was an important achievement for those running the Forum to succeed in attracting senior LWEC partners to each of the three Forum sessions: one or two senior partners attended each meeting.

**6.3.5 Information provision.** Deliberative public engagement requires information to be given to the public, so that they can come to their conclusions on the basis of a grounding in the necessary knowledge. In this case, the information for Forum members was provided in four main ways: written information in advance, presentations on the day by the contractors and by external experts, and written information in handouts for reference during Forum meetings.

The provision of written information was one area where the timing and governance issues mentioned above around the whole project created some significant problems. Written information was produced, and was fairly comprehensive, but the process was fraught with difficulties and frequently last minute. As one interviewee suggested, it is "painfully time-consuming" to do these things properly and, in this case, there was very little time available.

In the event, all the information materials were drafted by the contractors and then checked with LWEC experts and, while this worked to save time, it may not have been the best approach as it meant that the contractors rather than LWEC framed the materials (decided what should be provided and how). It should be stressed that the contractors did an excellent job in the circumstances, and were seen to be very flexible in response to comments on draft materials.

One of the implications of this approach was that it led to the contractors presenting the information themselves in many cases, and for the written information to be branded by them. This does have implications for the process, as it is normally expected in public dialogue that the contractors will be responsible for delivering the 'process' and the commissioning body is responsible for oversight of the 'content'. In this case, those boundaries became blurred.

The separation of content and process in this case was not crucial but, on more contentious topics, these boundaries can become vital in participants (and others) trusting that the process has not been biased by the commissioning body: the facilitator may need to be seen to be entirely neutral and ensuring the process is fair and balanced. It is for these sorts of reasons that it is usually seen to be good practice for the information on content to be separated from the process management.

The Forum members were largely very satisfied with the information they received. All respondents from the final Forum meetings agreed that the information that had been provided for all the Forum meetings had been sufficiently relevant to enable them to contribute fully, that they could understand and use the information provided, and that they felt able to ask questions about anything they did not understand. Almost all agreed that *enough* information had been provided to enable them to contribute fully (1 neither agreed nor disagreed).

There was a difference of opinion among Forum members on whether they would have liked more information in advance of meetings: 4 said they would but 4 said they would not.

In terms of the different ways in which information was provided, the most highly rated mechanisms among Forum members were information from scientists and other experts in person, and (equally highly rated) talking to other Forum members in group discussions. This is a very familiar finding in dialogue project evaluations: public participants find the information they gain from talking to each other as valuable as the information from expert presentations. Forum members also highly rated the written information, but not as highly as the other two sources.

Feedback from others involved in the Forum was more mixed, with some criticisms of some speakers who talked for too long and did not stick to their brief or the topic. The problems of some expert speakers having a rather tenuous connection to LWEC and to the Forum, and therefore committing less time to the planning of the sessions they were taking part in, and framing the questions for work with the public, have already been identified. More specifically, although detailed templates were provided for speakers, some did not follow these at all. The LWEC structure, in which staff are not directly employed by LWEC but by partner organisations, reduces the leverage that can be exerted on speakers. The potential need for communications training for scientists and other expert speakers was also identified in feedback.

Ideally, speakers are skilled communicators, experts in their subject and experienced in public engagement. While such individuals remain rare, it is important to recognise the demands being made on all speakers in terms of the time needed for preparation as well as the willingness to give up time to attend events, often out of normal working hours (the Forum meetings took place on Saturdays).

The concern overall about the difficulties with recruiting and working with expert speakers was that the poor quality of some presentations (although some were excellent) may have reduced the amount of information the Forum members could absorb and on which, therefore, they could base their discussions.

One technique that worked particularly well in terms of getting information across quickly and easily to participants was an exercise led by one expert speaker (from UKCIP) on the seriousness of climate change and the extent of the need for adaptation and action, which was illustrated by image and metaphor. For example, a spanner was used to illustrate a point at which 'we just need to tinker to adapt'. This exercise was highly rated by observers and was very popular with Forum members, 9 of whom thought it excellent and the remaining 8 thought it was good.

Approaches to information provision which are more visual, such as the UKCIP material (and others, such as using film clips), were suggested in feedback. These approaches were seen as potentially more effective in enabling discussion and feedback without entirely relying on individuals being verbally skilled.

Finally, on information provision, there is a correlation between the quality of the information presented, the extent to which the public participants can absorb and use the information in their deliberations, the amount of time the public participants have to deliberate on what they are learning, and the value of the results of that deliberation to decision makers. LWEC interviewees commented:

*It's about the level to which the public are informed enough to discuss the issues. Maybe a more sustained dialogue to enable better informed conversation around a single topic. (LWEC interviewee 3)*

*The topics were very challenging and in hindsight we maybe could have done more to get people to a stage where they could have a more rounded discussion. (LWEC interviewee 5)*

*One of the key things for all of this is thinking about who is the educator – who gives the information people want or need to hear. (LWEC interviewee 2)*

However, the ability of the participants to absorb and use the information presented was impressive. Comments included:

*It is also amazing how quickly people get up to speed on things – that general level of intelligence within the public is sometimes surprising (LWEC interviewee 7)*

**6.3.6 Deliberation.** It is important in deliberative public engagement for there to be an appropriate balance between information provision and time for discussions among the public participants themselves so they can come to their own conclusions. Sciencewise-ERC principles define deliberative working as "allowing time for participants to become informed in the area; be able to reflect on their own and others' views and explore issues in depth with other participants".

In the case of the Forum, there was rather too much emphasis in the timetables overall to information provision compared to discussion. A quick scan of the timetables for each of the three sessions illustrates the point: in session 1, there was only 75 minutes of work in small groups across the whole day; in session 2, there was 80 minutes across the day; and in session 3 there was 60 minutes.

The remainder of the time was not all information provision, as there were also whole group (plenary) discussions, but the time for small group discussions (which many public participants find the most effective to develop their thinking fully and come to conclusions) was clearly limited.

The lack of time for small group working is reflected in the points made by Forum members above around the improvements they wanted to see being more time for group discussions. Another Forum member felt that the 'least useful' aspect of the Forum was being talked at too much:

*A couple of the expert talks were too long - 3 in a row for example (too much being 'talked at'). (Forum member questionnaire response)*

There were also issues around the short time on each topic, with different topics at each meeting. One initial plan had been to try to extend the time for deliberation (especially thinking and talking among participants) by running the topic of flooding across two sessions, so the discussions could start in session 1 and then participants

could come back and continue the discussions in session 2 after reflections on their own. However, this proved impossible.

The danger with short time for small group working is that the emphasis can shift from deliberative discussions among participants to a process that is closer to focus groups and social research: with facilitators asking questions, participants responding on the basis of what they already know and all discussion being funnelled through the facilitator. This did happen at Forum events in some cases. Although, there was a level of deliberation, more time allocated to small group working would have strengthened that aspect. Feedback suggests that, with a little more time and money, each session could have been one hour longer (as the enthusiasm among Forum members was there), and an additional session could have been added (a fourth event) to continue to develop in depth consideration.

## 7. VALUE AND BENEFITS TO THOSE INVOLVED

### 7.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the value and benefits identified by the various participants in the project overall: LWEC as the commissioning body and the public participants as Forum members.

### 7.2 Value of the Forum to LWEC

For LWEC, there was value in working to set the agenda so the Forum discussed issues of direct relevance to LWEC partners. For example:

*For me [the value] was being able to set the agenda for the one I was involved in and focus it on something we are thinking of spending money on in the future ... A real strength was the ability in the time available to address the content and structure of the event – the face to face meeting with OPM was very useful. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*...the preparation for the forum – a couple of the decisions about how the forum operates were made prior to the forum – e.g. not involving people from recently flooded areas as they would have a very particular set of views. That preparation was a very important step. (LWEC interviewee 4)*

There was also seen to be value in public engagement as a way of validating LWEC research and the issues it is working on. Comments included:

*[We wanted to explore] the validation of doing this research and indeed the validation of adapting to a change in climate. It is not an issue that everybody has engaged with ... [it is] an issue that not many people have started to think about ... We are looking for ways to validate what we do and this is a useful way of helping to do that. (LWEC interviewee 6)*

The value to LWEC partners also included the results of the Forum providing new information on the views of the public. For example:

*We were able to get the views of people on key topics. It was very useful and showed that people were able to engage with the topics. They can answer questions where we don't have the evidence to know what the public think ... If you know what you want to ask you can get some very clear answers and look at where else you can plug it in. (LWEC interviewee 2)*

*For me it was getting that non-informed public view of the issue. And seeing the recency and saliency effect – unless people are wearing a professional hat they can find it hard to cope with anything beyond next year. (LWEC interviewee 6)*

*[Strengths] Tapping into the knowledge of the public ... the public have extremely good and knowledgeable insights. (LWEC interviewee 8)*

In addition, there was felt to be real value in talking directly to the public rather than relying on other stakeholders to provide insights into what the public think:

*We tend to rely on, for example, local authorities knowing what people want, but to get to the bedrock of citizens rather than going through an intermediary is of real value. (LWEC interviewee 6)*

*From our perspective it's good to groundproof our work with the public. A lot of us had more contact with the public in previous roles and having moved into the research arena that level of contact has decreased (LWEC interviewee 7)*

There was also seen to be value in experimenting with this model of public engagement which was more deliberative, and demonstrating that to LWEC partners:

*For me the most valuable aspect is to be able to show people what we mean by deliberative and what can be achieved ... It was a model to demonstrate what public engagement can be from a deliberative side. (LWEC interviewee 2)*

The depth of discussion that can come with deliberation was also recognised as a particular value of the process:

*Strengths came with the depth of the discussion – it seemed to open up the deep and personal views of attendees, who had through exposure to the issues begun to explore what the issues meant to them. (LWEC interviewee 4)*

This interviewee went on to comment about the value of this level of discussion given the superficial media coverage of many of the issues of interest to LWEC:

*One of the things was that science has been becoming more interdisciplinary and holistic for around the last 10 years now, and the public and media haven't caught up with it ... Most media issues are single issues. Because of the depth of discussion some people got into those issues – a systems-type way of looking at the bigger picture. It is difficult to get these issues across so I personally liked that aspect. (LWEC interviewee 4)*

### **7.3 Value of the Forum to Forum members**

Overall, Forum members were very satisfied with the way the Forum overall was structured and run (all quotes in this section are from Forum members questionnaire responses).

- All 13 agreed they had enjoyed taking part; 6 of those agreed strongly. 10 were very satisfied and 3 were fairly satisfied with the Forum overall. Comments included:

*I found all 3 sessions very thought provoking and enjoyable. And I believe these aren't just cosmetic. I think our views will feed into policy decisions.*

*Educational yet adding my opinion*

*I am very impressed that LWEC was compelled to seek the opinions of the public in such important issues*

- All 13 said they thought it was important for LWEC to involve the public in discussing these sorts of issues. Only two gave reasons for why they thought it was important:

*These types of forums allow the wide range of public opinions to be represented outside the formal structures and these more likely to be more representative*

*Because, as a society, we are the ones affected by the outcomes and changes made*

The most valuable benefit identified by Forum members for themselves was learning (see section 8.4 for details). Learning is a very common benefit for public participants from deliberative engagement. In this case there was also another benefit cited by several respondents, and that was having their views listened to and taken into account. Comments included:

*Opened my eyes to the fact people at high level do actually want to know what the man on the street thinks*

*I felt I had an opinion that was listened to. Lobbyists influence government. Lets hope that our opinion does*

This feedback suggests that Forum members took seriously the information they had been given about how the Forum would influence future strategic decision making. Further details on this are given in section 8.2.

Overall, Forum members clearly felt valued and empowered to state their views through the Forum process:

- All 13 respondents agreed they felt their views were valued and listened to with respect; 8 of the 13 agreed 'strongly'
- All (except 1) agreed they were able to say everything they wanted to say
- All agreed they could ask questions to clarify anything they did not understand; 10 agreed 'strongly'
- All agreed that LWEC would listen to and consider the views from the Forum, except 1 who neither agreed nor disagreed.

## 8. IMPACTS OF THE FORUM

### 8.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the differences and impacts the Forum has made in terms of policy influence (both on the various topics discussed and on future public engagement), as well as the impacts on LWEC partners and on public participants. This section also summarises the written outputs from the Forum, the use of those outputs and the potential for demonstrating impacts and influence.

### 8.2 Influence on policy

**8.2.1 Introduction.** This evaluation is reporting very soon after the conclusion of the Forum deliberations, and so it is difficult to identify clear influence on policy at this stage. We have therefore looked for indications about where the findings will be going, who to, and how they are being and might be used in the near future.

Public participants' expectations of influence were high, as shown in feedback from Forum members on the influence they felt the Forum *should* and *would* have on LWEC:

- All respondents thought the views of the Forum *should* influence LWEC's future priorities for research: 6 thought it should influence these priorities 'a great deal', 5 thought it should influence 'quite a lot' and 2 thought it should influence 'a bit'
- All respondents also thought the views of the Forum *would* influence LWEC's future priorities for research, although not quite so much: 2 thought it would influence these priorities 'a great deal', 9 thought it would influence 'quite a lot' and 2 thought it would influence 'a bit'.

This feedback does demonstrate high levels of trust in the process in relation to the extent to which Forum members believed their views would be taken into account. Indeed, 9 of the 13 respondents said they were 'very satisfied' with the influence they felt the Forum would have on LWEC, and the remaining 4 were fairly satisfied.

Forum members' expectations of influence were rather higher than LWEC's own expectations of the influence of Forum members. Several LWEC interviewees were not expecting the Forum to have a major influence on future strategic directions for research. For example:

*We'll be looking at them [Forum results] but I'm uncertain how much they will be used ... it was a reminder of how little the public really know about these issues. For LWEC it's more tricky – nothing came out that I though 'yes, we needed to know that' (LWEC interviewee 3)*

However, there was also a sense that the Forum results could be influential, alongside other influences:

*When taken together with other things you can influence policy and that even though the fora are small they can influence. The flooding one I was at is relatively well worked territory and its impact is alongside other things going on. Their voice along with others can influence. (LWEC interviewee 4)*

There was some sense that, although there may not be obvious direct impacts on policy, there would be more subtle impacts. Comments included:

*To the limit of what the scale of the Forum was, yes [would influence]. But often the impact is more indirect. I doubt LWEC will make some high level strategic choice and say 'this is due to the Forum'. I imagine it will be a lot more subtle than that but it's definitely added another facet to LWEC's thinking about various issues (LWEC interviewee 5)*

*It was interesting in terms of showing the skew towards particular aspects but I haven't lifted anything directly into the strategy from the results. But it is part of the context for the strategy. (LWEC interviewee 7)*

This interviewee went on to say:

*Although there is nothing new in there, if Forum members were to see the strategy they would be able to see some of the threads they had discussed and I hope they would feel that what they had discussed had got into the strategy, or at least some of the issues they care about are on the radar. (LWEC interviewee 7)*

There was also a view that LWEC should listen and be influenced by the public:

*I really hope so [that the results will influence future research agendas and priorities]. I think LWEC is almost unique in having so many non-scientists in its governance and I hope it is forward looking enough not just to do what scientists want to do, but to listen to what the public concerns are. LWEC will be looked at not just by the Treasury but by others as well in terms of what it has done for the country and society – there is a need to show it has listened. (LWEC interviewee 6)*

The credibility and validity of the Forum process is central to the extent to which the results are seen to be sufficiently robust for the purpose (in this case, influencing strategic policy development). The issue of the size of the Forum has already been mentioned (see section 6.3.3). The wider issues of credibility and validity were also questioned by some LWEC interviewees. For example:

*The question of credibility and validity is sensitive for social scientists. This kind of process has no credibility or validity at all, but it is not meant to. What it does do is bring up issues and give you information ... That is the difference between public engagement and research. Research provides evidence, engagement provides information (LWEC interviewee 1)*

It is important to understand this point in context. This apparently quite negative response to the credibility of the Forum should be understood more in terms of clarity of using the term 'evidence' than potential use of the results: this interviewee identified a whole range of ways in which they would be using the results themselves and disseminating them to colleagues. This point therefore provides useful clarification in defining the nature of potential outcomes (e.g. 'information' rather than 'evidence') and their value for future public engagement planning and in assessing the influence of that engagement.

In these terms, the information provided by the Forum may result in different ways of thinking for the LWEC partners involved. Although more difficult to track and demonstrate than direct 'influence' (other than feedback from the LWEC partners in question), shifts in thinking from new information could potentially make at least as much difference to final decisions as direct influence.

Finally, the nature of LWEC and the Research Councils generally was seen as very challenging in terms of how to achieve influence on strategic policy development. Interviewees commented:

*The Research Councils in general have trouble separating what is good for society from what is good for science. They tend to only think in their terms, and there is a divide at the interface between scientists and society at the moment. Engaging more frontline scientists in this kind of thing would be really very useful. (LWEC interviewee 6)*

*I think individual partners develop their own strategic thinking and then look for overlap, and from that the LWEC strategy develops. At the moment we are doing strategic challenge workshops. I haven't been to one yet, but I don't think the outcomes of public engagement activities have been fed into those yet. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*I think it will be difficult for [the results from the Forum] to do so [influence future research agendas and priorities]. For the Research Councils because they have a very structured and science-weighted way of creating forward plans – it is difficult to influence them or find an entry point and there is a strong emphasis on scientific excellence. Where it's more likely may be for things like geoengineering which is quite controversial. In those instances the science advisory panels can't give a full suite of advice as it is so emergent and there is still quite a bit of scope to ask ethical questions about the research. (LWEC interviewee 4)*

This interviewee suggested that it is easier to influence other parts of Government than Research Councils:

*For Government research strategies if phrased in the right way there is more scope to influence. In fact research is often influenced by the public – for example where fear arises perhaps as a result of public concern ... The government departments take a very different view to the Research Councils. Research Councils will probably think public engagement is quite useful but I suspect it wouldn't have as big an influence as the science advisory bodies. Government departments are more in tune as policy can be wrecked if the public don't like it. There can be a sensitivity over whether you are opening a can of worms, but also a recognition that it can be helpful. I am more inclined to think the outputs will have a greater influence on the government if phrased in the right way. (LWEC interviewee 4)*

**8.2.2 Influence on policy on topics.** The potential for the Forum to influence LWEC strategic policy was relatively clearly stated at the beginning of the project: it had been agreed that four areas of work would be funded within LWEC but the proportion of funding to each, and the priorities within the four areas, could and would change. It was seen to be at these levels that influence could be achieved. There was interest in LWEC in the priorities identified by the Forum but, almost as much, there was interest in the reasons (criteria) for those priorities and the values that underpinned them.

In practice, the focus for policy influence on three topics was agreed through negotiation with the relevant agencies leading on those areas: the Environment Agency on flooding, the UK Climate Impacts Programme on climate change and adaptation, and the ESRC on governance and decision making on scarce resources.

It is still too soon after the end of the Forum to be investigating influence on policy, but some pointers were identified which could be followed up at later stages to assess actual influence. Pointers from interviews in LWEC included:

*The one thing that I picked up on and have taken forward into discussions about research investment is that the public seemed united on the idea of investing more in prevention than picking up the pieces ... I have spoken to others about that. (LWEC interviewee 4)*

*One of the priority areas ... for future research is governance and regulation. The next step is to develop a collaborative programme and as that evolves we will write a call for proposals, and I will reflect on what came out of the Forum in order to inform the kinds of questions we ask. And that was very much down to being involved in developing the day and asking the questions we wanted answers to. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*Results have been fed into the Water Strategy – they fed into the consultation. (LWEC interviewee 2)*

Some interviewees said it was still very early days to be asking about using the results of the Forum, let alone identifying influence on policy:

*Not [used the results] as yet. That's not to say I won't. (LWEC interviewee 3)*

*I'd have to say that this is a work in progress. (LWEC interviewee 8)*

**8.2.3 Influence on policy on public engagement.** As outlined above, there was an expectation that the Forum would not only influence policy on the specific topics covered, but also influence future policy around public engagement (see section 6.2.1), through increasing understanding and awareness of the potential for future development. There were some indications that there could be influence on policy in these areas:

*We're looking at how public dialogue might be used in future work. Once we have identified what needs to be addressed we will look at whether public dialogue would be useful and if so, how ... We need to do more around what kind of engagement might be appropriate – it depends on the topic ... how much we need to focus on the public depends on the issue (LWEC interviewee 3)*

*I think the forum has been a success. It is a model – it got people thinking and understanding that engagement is not just about information giving or changing public opinions ... This was a trial, a first time this has ever happened in this way for a multi-partnered organisation and on the level we need. It is proof this kind of thing can work ... It has been shown to some key high level people in LWEC who were sceptical but willing to see what it can do. I think it has started to show them what it can do. The partners value public concerns but it is a matter of how these get taken into account ... If we reconvene a panel that would be an impact. (LWEC interviewee 2)*

*It gives an idea of what you can do; what can be achieved on a small scale. And the information you get back is valuable. It is an opportunity to properly talk with the public. (LWEC interviewee 5)*

Although the idea that the Forum would directly offer views on different methods of communicating results had been dropped at an early stage of the planning, there were some indications that the Forum could feed into future communications strategies. For example:

*The LWEC communications group are very interested, for example the confusion over adaptation issues can influence over how we communicate that. And hopefully it can influence communications research. (LWEC interviewee 2)*

*One of the LWEC comms managers attended and was very interested in following up on publicising the forum and ideas for communicating with the public. (LWEC interviewee 5)*

### 8.3 Impacts on LWEC partners

Beyond the specific potential impacts on policy, there were also indications of impacts on LWEC partners personally. While this may influence future policy decisions, at this stage of the evaluation analysis the focus is on impacts on LWEC partners' thinking and understanding rather than decisions about policy actions. Indications from feedback from LWEC interviewees include the following:

*It certainly prompted me to think about different issues to explore and to look at whether there is a need for research ... There were questions about understanding the relationship between economic growth and environmental degradation. There was an assumption the economy has to grow but it is one way in which we are more likely to damage the environment. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*Yes ... In communicating with others about integrated approaches and prevention. For example with climate change I suspect the public will take a different view to government – government think more about economics but try telling that to someone who suffers the effects directly. (LWEC interviewee 4)*

Some interviewees also reported being surprised by some of the things they saw and heard during the course of the Forum sessions; these surprises were almost universally positive:

*Yes, I think it was a fairly mundane one [surprise] I'm afraid. And that was that I enjoyed it a lot; I thought it was fun. It was an engaging activity and well structured. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*The ability of people to really grasp the issues – these were not surprising but were a pleasant result. A surprise was that a lot of people had done a lot of research beforehand into the topics. (LWEC interviewee 2)*

*I suppose I expected there to be a lot more fears or concern over adaptation than we got ... A lot of them seemed to take quite a pragmatic view. And the other thing is how the questions asked by some people really cut to the heart of the research. (LWEC interviewee 5)*

There had also been some developments in understanding how the public think in these sorts of processes, and what can be covered:

*They [the public] crave more information and understanding and challenging of their own views ... They talk locally but they are actually able to think globally. (LWEC interviewee 2)*

### 8.4 Impacts on public participants

The first and most immediate impacts of the Forum were on the knowledge and views of the Forum participants, and they reported significant personal changes as a result of taking part:

- 12 of the 13 agreed they had learnt something they did not know before; 9 of those said they 'strongly agreed'. 1 disagreed.
- All 13 respondents agreed that attending the Forum had helped them think more clearly about the issues covered; 8 of those agreed strongly
- Similarly, all 13 respondents agreed that the Forum had helped them think about some new issues for the first time; again 8 of those agreed strongly

Feedback from Forum members in their questionnaire responses gave some indications of the specific impacts on knowledge and understanding from taking part:

*Changed my ideas of climate change and what as an individual I can do to slow the process*

*Broadened my perspective on climate change e.g. buildings, infrastructure etc. This prompted me to research sustainable energy sources for a planned move of home*

*I was made far more aware of environmental issues than I ever was before*

Forum members also reported that taking part had affected their views. In feedback at the final session of the Forum, 10 of the 13 disagreed that the Forum had made no difference to their views (so it *had* made a difference), and 7 agreed that they had actually changed their views as a result of attending the Forum (1 disagreed). These changes in views did not just happen at the end of the Forum sessions but had been happening throughout: 7 of the 16 respondents from session 1 and 9 of the 15 respondents in session 2 also said they had changed their views as a result of taking part.

Taking part in the Forum had also affected Forum members enthusiasm for future engagement. 11 of the 13 said they were more likely to get involved in public consultations in future as a result of taking part in this Forum, which clearly suggests that they felt it had been a positive experience for them (the other two neither agreed nor disagreed).

This final feedback suggests that taking part in the Forum has encouraged the Forum members to want to participate again, which suggests that their own experience in the Forum had been positive, and also suggests that a good experience of engagement can lead to greater enthusiasm for future engagement.

## **8.5 Dissemination of outputs**

At the time of the evaluation research, the outputs from the research were in the form of written reports on each Forum session, which had been distributed to all Forum members, others who had attended and some key people involved in the areas of work such as those leading on the flooding consultation. A full project report had also been published (see section 5.6 for details). In addition, all the newly produced information materials created for the Forum have been published on the Sciencewise-ERC website.

The formal plans for dissemination of the final report were to publish it on the LWEC and Sciencewise-ERC's websites, and publicise that publication to ensure that interested parties were informed (including through the LWEC project manager's blog). The report would also be sent to other key policy people:

*We will package everything up and send it out to partners, board, leads and put onto the website ... Ultimately it needs to go to the group of people who ask the question. Then we can send it to the partners' board and so on (LWEC interviewee 2)*

There was also feedback from LWEC interviewees that the results from the Forum would be disseminated personally by those involved in the Forum events. For example:

*I will send it around the group in [my research council] who work on this broad agenda and issues, and to other Research Councils. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

*We don't know exactly how [results from the Forum can be fed into decision making] yet. Upcoming strategic framework discussions would be a possible place to raise them. Some subjects will be easier to work it into than others. (LWEC interviewee 4)*

The willingness of interviewees to disseminate the results indicates some level of trust in the credibility of the process and results, as well as having the obvious practical impact that wider circles of policy may be influenced at later stages.

## **8.6 Demonstration of impacts and influence**

Those running public engagement processes usually need not only to make a difference, but also to demonstrate to others what differences and impacts have been made, especially in the current economic climate. For this Forum, there are demands to demonstrate to several different audiences what differences the work has made: to public participants, to other participants, to LWEC and other Research Councils, and more widely.

This evaluation report can provide some indications of differences and impacts made, but it is too soon after the production of the results of the Forum discussions to demonstrate some impacts. It is likely that some follow up would be desirable, probably by the LWEC secretariat themselves, to continue to monitor potential policy impacts and report them to the key audiences.

In the meantime, this report (or the Executive Summary) can be distributed to those immediately involved in the Forum process. One interviewee was committed to some personal follow-up with Forum members:

*If we do get collaborative funding, what I said I would do at the workshop is to send them all a copy of the call for proposals so they could see how what they talked about is part of the broader research agenda. And they may notice things in there they were discussing. It is really important we tell people who have been involved how what they have discussed fits into the broader future context. (LWEC interviewee 1)*

## 9. MEETING AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND SUCCESS CRITERIA

### 9.1 Introduction

This section summarises the extent to which the activities of the Forum met the aims, objectives and success criteria established at the beginning of the project.

### 9.2 Analysis against aims, objectives and success criteria

The table below summarises the aims and objectives, and success criteria, for the LWEC Citizens' Advisory Forum (see section 4 for details). The secondary objective of the Forum, to "offer views on different forms of communicating results and outputs to different audiences" was dropped at an early stage of the project and is therefore not considered here.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	How each objective has been met
To bring public attitudes and values into its [LWEC's] strategic decision making processes	The LWEC secretariat, and other LWEC personnel involved in the Forum have articulated their commitment to disseminating the final report of the Forum results, which summarises public attitudes and values, to LWEC's decision making groups.
To demonstrate that the public voice is important and should be heard alongside the voice of other stakeholders	<p>The investment in, and commitment to, planning and delivering the Forum is one demonstration of the importance of the public voice.</p> <p>The commitment to using the results of the Forum's deliberations is another indication of the importance of the public voice.</p> <p>The public participants in the Forum were satisfied with the level of influence they expected the Forum should and would have.</p>
To provide a space in which members of the public can deliberate on some of the issues that the LWEC partnership is seeking to address	<p>The three meetings of the Forum provided this space, enabling Forum members to deliberate on three key issues for LWEC: flood research, climate change adaptation, and governance and decision making.</p> <p>Deeper public deliberation would have been possible with a slightly different design (more small-group working) and more effective information provision, but there was clearly space for deliberation within the Forum meetings.</p>
<b>Formal objective 1:</b> To inform the strategic development of LWEC's research by helping to identify research priorities and commenting on strategic aims for the partnership	<p>The reports of the Forum results identify research priorities on the three topics which provided the focus for the three Forum meetings. These reports have now been circulated to those in LWEC responsible for strategic development on those topics.</p> <p>The final report of the Forum's conclusions is being disseminated to others responsible for the strategic development of LWEC's research.</p> <p>The final part of this objective, to comment on the strategic aims for the partnership was not directly addressed by the Forum. However, the contractors'</p>

	analysis of the Forum discussions identified emerging priorities for designing and using environmental research which can feed into LWEC's consideration of its strategic aims.
<b>Formal objective 2:</b> To identify areas of particular public concern about environmental change, so that the commissioning and communication of research by LWEC, and its partners, can take account of the needs and concerns of society	As above, the concerns of the public on the three topics and more generally are identified in the reports of the Forum discussions. The issue of 'prevention' rather than dealing with negative consequences of decisions has already been taken on by the LWEC directorate.
<b>SUCCESS CRITERIA</b>	
1. The LWEC governance groups take account of the Forum's views and recommendations in their development of LWEC's strategies and activities	<p>It is too early to provide definitive evidence that the LWEC governance groups have taken account of the Forum's views and recommendations, but individuals from these LWEC groups have heard the Forum's views first hand, and these have already influenced their thinking in some ways. There is evidence at this stage that some of these individuals are willing to take account of the Forum's views as they develop LWEC's strategies and activities in future.</p> <p>Further research will be needed to establish more specific and longer term impacts, once the Forum's results have been fully disseminated and discussed in those governance groups.</p>
2. LWEC partners use the outputs from the Forum to inform the development and dissemination of research	There is evidence that some LWEC partners are willing to use the outputs (as above) to inform the development of future research, although not all.
3. The members of the Forum feel valued and empowered to state their opinions.	<p>All the members of the Forum (at the last Forum session) said they felt their views were valued and listened to with respect, and they all (except 1) agreed that they were able to say everything they wanted to say.</p> <p>In terms of empowerment, all Forum members (at the last Forum session) agreed that the facilitators encouraged everyone to participate fully, and almost all agreed that LWEC would listen to and consider the views of the Forum (one neither agreed nor disagreed). All were satisfied with the level of influence of the Forum.</p> <p>In addition, 11 of the 13 Forum members at the final session agreed that they were more likely to get involved in public consultations in future as a result of taking part in this Forum (no-one disagreed). This suggests that the members of the Forum were empowered beyond this specific activity, and that they would go on to engage more widely.</p>

### 9.3 Conclusions

It is very soon after the conclusion of the Forum activities to be assessing the extent to which the project has met its aims, objectives and success criteria. Any analysis has to focus on where there is evidence of impacts, and on indications of intent where it is too soon to identify final outcomes.

The analysis in the table above indicates the following:

- **Meeting overall aims.** The overall aims of the project have been met in that the Forum has demonstrated that the public voice is important and would be heard alongside the voice of other stakeholders, and that a space has been provided in which members of the public can deliberate on some of the issues that the LWEC partnership is seeking to address. In addition, public attitudes and values have been articulated and captured through the work of the Forum and there are strong indications that these will feed into LWEC strategic decision making. However, it is too soon for there to be any evidence that public attitudes and values have been brought into LWEC strategic decision making at the time of writing.
- **Meeting the formal objectives.** There are slightly different findings for the two formal objectives:
  - Objective 1: As with the overall aims, it is too soon for there to be any evidence that the Forum has informed the strategic development of LWEC's research. The first stage of meeting this objective has been met as the Forum has identified research priorities. The final part of this objective, to comment on the strategic aims for the partnership was not addressed by the Forum, although the results of the Forum include information that could feed into consideration of these aims.
  - Objective 2: This objective was met to the extent that the Forum did identify areas of particular public concern about environmental change. In addition, some of these concerns have already been taken account in the thinking of one LWEC partner. However, it is too soon to be able to assess whether the commissioning and communication of research by LWEC and its partners fully takes account of the concerns identified by the Forum.
- **Meeting the success criteria.** It is too early to provide definitive evidence that the LWEC governance groups have taken account of the Forum's views and recommendations, or that the LWEC partners use the outputs from the Forum. However, there is evidence that individuals in LWEC who have been involved in the process have taken account of the information they have taken from the Forum's deliberations and that some of them will use the outputs to inform the development and dissemination of future research. The third success criterion, on whether the members of the Forum feel valued and empowered to state their opinions, has been fully met.

In summary, therefore, although it is too early to find definitive evidence that all the objectives have been fully met, most have been fully addressed and there are good indications that all the aims, objectives and success criteria will be met in the longer term.

## 10. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

This report summarises the activities of the LWEC Citizens' Advisory Forum and the findings of the evaluation research on the Forum. It analyses the design and delivery of the Forum against the Sciencewise-ERC principles of public dialogue and identifies the extent to which the project met standards of good practice, and provided value and benefits to the participants. It also identifies some early indications of the actual and potential impacts of the Forum on policy (on flood research, climate change adaptation, and governance and decision making, and on public engagement in LWEC) and on all those involved: LWEC partners and the public participants.

### Overall findings

- **The Forum was a cost effective approach to public dialogue.** The experience of the Forum shows that it is possible to undertake valuable public dialogue on complex technical issues on a small scale and with a small budget. The project had a total budget of £30,450 including evaluation. Some problems were caused by the tight budget, and a little additional funding could have achieved significantly more (see below). There were also questions raised about the small size of the Forum (also covered below). However, overall, the Forum has demonstrated that a small scale initiative of this sort has the potential to deliver significant value in terms of policy influence as well as impacts on those involved.
- **The Forum was completed quickly and effectively, and addressed all its objectives.** The development and delivery of the Forum was completed within 12 months from the initial business plan. It achieved a great deal for that small budget and over a very tight timescale, even within a complex organisational context such as LWEC and on complex issues of environmental research. The public participants were satisfied, it addressed all its objectives and delivered valuable results to LWEC.

New information materials have been created as briefing for the Forum meetings, and have been published on the LWEC and Sciencewise-ERC websites as a resource for others considering public engagement on similar topics. The Forum members have learnt a great deal, and had the opportunity to influence important national decisions on future environmental research. LWEC has been able to benefit from the time, effort and commitment Forum members have contributed. Detailed reports have been produced summarising the values, attitudes and conclusions of the public on research priorities of relevance to LWEC's work and strategic objectives.

The precise extent to which LWEC's future strategic policy decisions about environmental research within LWEC priorities is affected by the Forum results remains to be seen, but there are good indications from some LWEC partners that the results will be taken seriously and will have some influence in the longer term.

- **The Forum model has particular strengths.** This experience suggests that the benefit of a group of the public working together over a period of time is that it allows them to grapple quickly and effectively with new issues as they get used to the process and learn about each other. The group gels, trust is established in the process and they are able to very quickly grasp topics and engage with the questions. This Forum only met three times, so it is likely that further work is needed to fully test the model and build on experience, but there are signs that this approach can be effective.
- **Sometimes a lot more can be achieved for a little extra resource.** A little additional funding could have covered more support for initial planning, more facilitators at meetings, post-project contractor support, an independent evaluation contractor, fees to experts, and the costs of one further Forum meeting to enable the Forum to more fully explore priorities and agendas for environmental research beyond the specific topics. In addition, more time

for planning and in the overall timescale could have allowed slightly longer sessions (one hour could have made a real difference), and the potential for homework for Forum members (asking friends and family for their views on topics and questions).

- **It is important to demonstrate longer term impacts.** At this point, it is too early to find definitive evidence that the aims, objectives and success criteria of the Forum have been fully met. Longer term monitoring of the dissemination, use and impacts of the results of the Forum will be needed in order to test the effectiveness of this Forum to a range of key audiences: LWEC itself and other funders, the public participants who were the members of the Forum, and other interested parties. There is significant interest in the Forum model as a mechanism for high quality and cost effective public dialogue, and there will be interest in the extent to which it has been successful in this instance.

### **Practical lessons for future similar initiatives**

The evaluation has identified some overall key lessons for future public engagement practice from the experience of the LWEC Citizens Advisory Forum, as follows:

- **Clarity about purpose and potential.** There needs to be clarity about the purpose and boundaries of the work. In this case there were mixed objectives (piloting a Forum model as well as gaining public input on specific topics). A clear purpose helps ensure that those involved in using the engagement results in their decision-making know what they are expected to do to achieve the objectives (including the level of commitment likely to be required), and to get early buy in to the process itself and to the results of the process.
- **Clarity about how the project fits into the wider context and longer term.** Public dialogue does not take place in a vacuum, so it is essential to understand what has gone before, what the immediate context is and how it will fit into future planning.
- **Close links are established between process design and policy targets.** The people who will use the results of public dialogue must be involved in the identification and framing of topics for the Forum to discuss, and in the design and drafting of questions for the public, from the start and extensively throughout. This happened for some sessions of the Forum, and in those cases the Forum worked more effectively and influence of the Forum results are likely to be significantly greater as there is a closer fit into the agendas of those who take decisions on future resource investment.
- **Planning needs to bring process and content knowledge together.** Detailed planning of public dialogue needs to involve both those who have knowledge of the subject areas to be covered ('content') and knowledge and experience of public engagement ('process'). In this way, an effective process can be designed to answer the questions that need to be addressed. In this case, the process (a Forum) was agreed before the content.
- **The quality of information provision affects the quality of deliberation.** Effective information provision requires close working between content and process people to produce appropriate information that can be absorbed by public participants, and expert facilitation is needed to enable participants to use new information (possibly requiring new facilitation skills around learning as well as discussion management). There also need to be clear distinctions between facilitators neutrally managing the process, and those responsible for content provision and questions. Engaging external experts is also always challenging, especially if they are not employed by the organisation managing the dialogue. There were instances in this Forum's work which demonstrated this working well and less well. All these factors around information provision affect the quality of public deliberation, the quality of the conclusions that result and therefore the extent to which they are seen as credible and are used by decision makers and thus influence policy decisions.

- **Governance arrangements need to be clear from the start.** In an experimental pilot and especially within a complex organisational structure such as LWEC, it is particularly important that roles and responsibilities for decision making are clear. Ideally a small project team is established at the start and continues throughout the project to be responsible for detailed design and delivery of the project, plus an oversight or steering group that focuses on content priorities and policy implications and targets.
- **The number and type of public participants affects the credibility of the results.** In this case, there was always going to be a relatively small group of public participants involved. Some LWEC partners felt that the small scale reduced the likelihood, and desirability, of the Forum having a major influence on future strategic policy decisions. However, if the result sought is to provide information and inspiration to decision makers, rather than detailed research evidence, small numbers appear to be less of a barrier.
- **Being there is invaluable.** Although written reports of this type of public engagement will always be necessary, and additional communications such as video and audio can be particularly useful, all LWEC interviewees who had attended were clear that being involved in public deliberations personally, through being at events and hearing public discussions first hand, is completely different (and preferable) to only reading reports.

In conclusion, this evaluation shows that the aims of the project have been met in that the Forum has demonstrated that the public voice is important and would be heard alongside the voice of other stakeholders, and that a space has been provided in which members of the public can deliberate on some of the issues that the LWEC partnership is seeking to address. In addition, public attitudes and values have been articulated and captured through the work of the Forum and there are strong indications that these will be fed into LWEC strategic decision making.

In summary, therefore, although it is too early to find definitive evidence that all the objectives have been fully met, most have been fully addressed and there are good indications that all the aims, objectives and success criteria will be met in the longer term.

It would be very valuable to continue to monitor the dissemination, use and impacts of the results of the Forum over the coming months, and to update this analysis in due course.

# **Evaluation of the Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) Citizens' Advisory Forum**

Annex 1: Questionnaires, with results

**LWEC Citizens' Advisory Forum**  
**Evaluation questionnaire: Summary of results**  
 Bristol, 5 February 2011

Response rate: 13 questionnaires returned from 13 participants = 100%

**1 How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Forum overall?**

Please tick <b>ONE</b> box in each line	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
The events were well organised and well structured	8	5				
I enjoyed taking part	6	7				
I learnt something I did not know before	9	3		1		
There was enough time overall to discuss the issues properly		8	3	2		
I was able to say everything I wanted to say	4	7		1		
My views were valued and listened to with respect	8	5				
The facilitator encouraged everyone to participate fully	10	3				
No single view on the issues was allowed to dominate unfairly	5	6	2			
There was a good mix of people on the Forum	6	6	1			
I understand clearly the purpose of the Citizens' Advisory Forum overall	5	8				
I understand clearly how the results of the Forum will be used	3	8	2			
I think LWEC will listen to and consider the views from this Forum	3	9	1			
I am more likely to get involved in public consultations in future as a result of taking part in this Forum	6	5	2			

**Are there any comments you would like to add on any of the above?**

- Very well organised! Very interesting

**2 How do you rate the sessions at today's event?**

Please tick <b>ONE</b> box in each line	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Introduction from OPM: icebreaker	1	11	1		
OPM presentation: Decision making around limited resources	3	10			
Group discussions: Decision making around food and water	6	7			
Whole group feedback session after lunch	3	9	1		
Whole group discussion: Decision making around carbon emissions from transport	3	10			

**Please add any comments:**

- Facilitation was very skilled and effective [related to Group discussion decision making around food and water]

**3 What do you think of the information that has been provided for all the meetings of the Forum overall?**

Please tick <b>ONE</b> box in each line	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I would have liked more information in advance of events		4	5	4		
There was <i>enough</i> information to enable me to contribute fully	1	11	1			
The <i>relevant</i> information was provided to enable me to contribute fully	3	10				
I understood and could use the information provided	2	11				
I felt able to ask questions to clarify anything I did not understand	10	3				

**Please add any comments:**

**4 How do you rate the different types of information you have had during the three Forum sessions?**

Other (please specify):	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Information from scientists and other experts in person	7	6			
Written information	3	10			
Talking to other Forum members in group discussions	7	6			

**Other (from table):**

- Website addresses [excellent]

**Please add any comments:**

- Difficult for experts to explain in time given, especially in lay terms

**5 Has being involved in the Forum overall made any difference to what you think?**

Please tick <b>ONE</b> box in each line	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Attending the Forum has helped me think more clearly about the issues covered	8	5				
Attending the Forum has helped me think about some new issues for the first time	8	5				
Attending the Forum has reinforced the views I already had		7	4	2		
Attending the Forum has made no difference to my views	1		2	6	4	
I changed my views as a result of attending the Forum	3	4	5	1		

**Please add any comments:**

**6 What do you think about the influence that the Forum overall will have on LWEC's future decisions?**

Please tick <b>ONE</b> box in each line	A great deal	Quite a lot	A bit	Not much	Not at all
To what extent do you think the views of the Forum <u>should</u> influence LWEC's future priorities for research?	6	5	2		
To what extent do you think the views of the Forum <u>will</u> influence LWEC's future priorities for research?	2	9	2		

**Please add any comments:**

**7 How satisfied are you with the influence you feel the Forum overall will have on LWEC?**

- Very satisfied - 9
- Fairly satisfied - 4
- Not very satisfied - 0
- Not at all satisfied - 0

**8 How important do you think it is for LWEC to involve the public in discussing these sorts of issues?**

- Very important - 11
- Fairly important - 2
- Not very important - 0
- Not at all important - 0

**Please say why you think this is important:**

- Public engagement with the political / decision process is very weak. These types of forums allow the wide range of public opinions to be represented outside the formal structures and these more likely to be more representative.
- Because, as a society, we are the ones affected by the outcomes and changes made.

**9 Can you suggest any particularly important issues on which you think LWEC should consult the public in future?**

- Issues of food shortages within the future and to look at issues of waste
- All energy issues
- Public transport issues
- Generation of sustainable energy sources. Research, incentives for households / businesses / schools etc
- Peak oil
- CO2 emissions
- All aspects that they cover / study

**10 Which aspects of the Forum overall did you find most useful, and why?**

- Expert speakers presentation - as he clearly explained the issues we discussed [Event 3]
- Experts' contribution
- Having experts on hand to explain the issues
- Presentations by experts because their info is reliable and right up to date
- First and second groups [sessions] as I was not really aware of what it was about
- When we broke into groups and had a chance to say all we feel
- Discussions
- Information relating to actual impacts and the ways the various parties are looking to resolve problems
- Group discussions so we could develop ideas
- The last session: food, water and fuel

**11 What was the most valuable benefit for you personally in taking part in this Forum (if any)?**

- Changed my ideas of climate change and what as an individual I can do to slow the process
- Taking my views into account
- Opened my eyes to the fact people at high level do actually want to know what the man on the street thinks
- I felt I had an opinion that was listened to. Lobbyists influence government. Lets hope that our opinion does
- Broadened my perspective on climate change e.g. buildings, infrastructure etc. This prompted me to research sustainable energy sources for a planned move of home
- Made me more aware
- Getting educated about these important issues
- Learning from others
- Giving a wider view on many environmental issues
- I was made far more aware of environmental issues than I ever was before
- Learning about the issues and how there are so many areas to focus more on!
- Being more knowledgeable on flooding, fuels etc

**12** Which aspects of the Forum overall did you find least useful, and why?

- None
- None
- N/A
- N/A
- Long introductions in the first / second sessions
- Lack of time and therefore necessary limits on what is discussed
- A couple of the expert talks were too long - 3 in a row for example (too much being 'talked at'). Only in one of the sessions though

**13** Do you have any recommendations for how any future Citizens' Advisory Forums should work?

- More time for group discussions
- Bring in broader section of public
- Little more time for discussion exercises
- Possibly more information beforehand. More website sources
- More active events
- I would have preferred evening sessions rather than Saturdays
- Sessions closer together, not long days, earlier starts and finishes i.e. 9 - 1

**14** Overall, how satisfied were you with the way the Forum overall was structured and run?

Very satisfied - 10  Fairly satisfied - 3  Not very satisfied  Not at all satisfied

**15** Is there anything else you would like to add?

- Feedback on what does happen after our meetings
- I found all 3 sessions very thought provoking and enjoyable. And I believe these aren't just cosmetic. I think our views will feed into policy decisions.
- Educational yet adding my opinion
- Venue and food was top notch
- I am very impressed that LWEC was compelled to see the opinions of the public in such important issues
- Sticking to timings! People are giving up their valuable time so this needs to be respected.

**16** If you would like to receive further information from LWEC or Sciencewise, please complete the following section.

- 11 people gave their details

**Many thanks for your comments.**

- And thank you!

## LWEC Citizens' Advisory Forum – Evaluation questionnaire. Session 1.

Before you leave, we would appreciate it if you could answer a few questions about the event you have taken part in. This information will help us to understand how successful the session has been, and will help to improve future events.

### Q1. Please tick in the box that most closely matches your response to the statements below (total responses 16)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The event was well organised and well structured	9	6		1		
I enjoyed taking part	8	7	1			
I learnt something I did not know before	8	8				
Attending this event has helped me think more clearly about issues around flooding and research	7	8	1			
Attending this event has reinforced the views I already had	1	5	7	2		1
Attending this event made no difference to my views	1	2	2	9	2	
I changed my views as a result of attending this event	2	5	8			1
I had enough information to be able to take part in the discussions	5	9	2			

### Q2. How would you rate the following sessions? (total responses 15)

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Introduction from OPM: Icebreaker, aims of the forum, ways of working together	4	10	1	
Opening presentation from LWEC	5	9	1	
OPM Presentation: Introduction to flooding and flooding research	6	8	1	
Presentations from expert speakers	9	5	1	
Q&A with expert speakers	10	4	1	
Group discussions: Priority setting	6	8	1	
Whole group feedback session	4	9	2	

### **Q3: Which aspects of the day did you find most useful and why?**

- The Q&A session because you can go more in depth
- Practice and participation was most useful
- The last session – the discussion helped a lot
- I found the group discussion most useful as it gave us the opportunity to put our opinions across helping us to understand the whole presentation
- Q&A session with experts very useful to gain a broad knowledge
- Discussions with experts from Environment Agency. Gave us a chance to understand predictions, risks and flood defences better. This then helped with the group discussion.
- Group discussions enabled me to consolidate own views.
- Presentations from speakers
- Q&A session – to gain knowledge
- Good introduction to topics before discussions took place
- Presentation from expert speakers
- Expert speakers and when they visited our small groups – very approachable and able to explain their work in ways a layperson could understand. Our small group facilitator Kate, was excellent.
- Group discussions – putting learning into practice
- Small group discussions made me aware of peoples views

### **Q4: Which aspects of the day did you find least useful and why?**

- None (4 people explicitly wrote “none”)
- Less theory would be better as this elongated the session (not necessary)
- None really, obviously we won't need introductions next time
- I felt slightly patronised at times but understand that those delivering the day don't assume any previous knowledge.
- A couple of distracting attendees!
- Seemed like a long time spent on introduction and going through the days agenda.

### **Q5. Do you have any recommendations for how you would like the forum to be run differently in future sessions?**

- More Q&A in groups – I feel more comfortable to talk in front of people.
- Less theory more discussion
- Same as last session
- No, run very well and informative
- A bit more interaction earlier in the day, a lot of information was given in a lecture style.
- Venue was a bit cramped and stuff but overall it was really informing
- No
- Quite satisfactory overall. Perhaps a little more time for group discussion?
- Perhaps a little more statistical data about flooding trends, and cost of research. Send the agenda ahead, so there's no need to go through it? And more time for group discussion. Very interesting day!
- It was fine

## LWEC Citizens' Advisory Forum – Evaluation questionnaire. Session 2.

**Q1. Please tick in the box that most closely matches your response to the statements below (total responses 15)**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The event was well organised and well structured	9	6				
I enjoyed taking part	5	9	1			
I learnt something I did not know before	7	8				
Attending this event has helped me think more clearly about issues around flooding and research	8	7				
Attending this event has reinforced the views I already had	2	6	4	4		
Attending this event made no difference to my views	0	1	4	7	3	
I changed my views as a result of attending this event	1	8	4	2		
I had enough information to be able to take part in the discussions	5	7	3			

**Q2. How would you rate the following sessions? (total responses 15)**

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Introduction from OPM: Icebreaker	5	9	1	
OPM Presentation: Beginner's guide to adaptation	7	8		
UKCIP Beginners guide to adaptation research	9	6		
Q&A with expert speakers	9	5	1	
Group discussions: Priority setting	10	5		
Whole group feedback session	6	8	1	

**Q3: Which aspects of the day did you find most useful and why?**

- Presentation by the experts
- Q&A event with speakers
- Expert talks
- Didn't realise beforehand what a huge subject and the amount of things and people affected
- Natural resources, interested in animal welfare
- The afternoon in smaller groups because its easier to understand
- Energy and recycling
- The expert talks about the five different areas – listening to experts about what is happening behind the scenes!
- Listening to the experts but they were so interesting and time was short. Groups discussions and sharing views. Lunch
- Group discussions –priority setting, talking to the expert speakers, its gave me more information on the subject
- The expert speakers, went into more depth about adaptation and effects - made it more understandable
- Q&A with the expert speakers (and then with the group discussions)
- Expert and personal views being expressed
- Q&A with experts
- The Q&A session which gave a more in-depth detail

**Q4: Which aspects of the day did you find least useful and why?**

- May have been too short on time; may have been better to have had same time scale as first one
- Building because I'm in the trade
- Beginning because its wider talk and you can't always ask the questions you want
- Beginners guide to adaptation as had already read it

**Q5. Do you have any recommendations for how you would like the forum to be run differently in future sessions?**

- Less talking about the subject, more discussions
- Feedback about the 'disruption' in the group – just a shame it wasn't acted on –just think you could had had more constructive input from them...
- Carry on as you are but I would have no problem and even enjoy longer or more sessions