

**DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS
ENTERPRISE & REGULATORY REFORM**

**SUMMARY FOR WELSH TOWN AND
COMMUNITY COUNCILS**

Energy Measures Report

September 2007

IN ASSOCIATION WITH:

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT FOOD
AND RURAL AFFAIRS

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL
GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT

WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

Climate change mitigation and fuel poverty alleviation

A summary of the 2007 energy measures report, for Welsh town and community councils

This summary highlights the drivers for local authority action on climate change mitigation and fuel poverty alleviation, and describes the main areas in which local authorities can take action. The full report details possible actions that can be taken in each of these areas.

The role of local authorities

The overwhelming majority of scientific opinion supports the view that emissions of greenhouse gases (such as carbon dioxide) from human activities (such as the production and use of energy) are changing the earth's climate and that likely future changes present a serious threat to human society and the natural environment.

In October 2006, the Stern Review of the economics of climate change was published. This assessed the evidence on the impacts of climate change and on the economic costs. The Review concluded that there is still time to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, if action is taken now and in concert with other countries. A conclusion was that in the long term the costs of inaction would be far higher than the costs of tackling climate change now.

The UK Government and the Welsh Assembly Government share the view that taking urgent action to mitigate the effects of climate change is the only strategy consistent with long-term economic growth and global stability.

Alongside this, the UK Government and the Welsh Assembly Government remain committed to tackling fuel poverty and minimising the risk of UK households suffering from the associated detrimental health, social and financial effects. Government efforts to remove households from fuel poverty are having a positive impact but there remains much work to be done, in particular following fuel price increases.

Local authorities are uniquely placed to act on climate change mitigation and fuel poverty alleviation. They can take action on their own estates and housing stock but can also play a key role in motivating the wider community to take action, based on their understanding of local priorities, risks and opportunities.

All parts of the UK will be impacted by climate change and all areas have the potential to benefit from action to tackle it. Improving the quality of housing will help to bring warmer, healthier homes to those people living in fuel poverty. Increasing energy efficiency can save money for individuals and businesses, benefit the fuel poor and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

Local authorities already have a number of responsibilities to incorporate climate change and energy policy considerations into the way in which they carry out their powers and functions.

Purpose of this report

Given the important role that local authorities can play in tackling climate change and fuel poverty, the Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006 required the Secretary of State to produce an energy measures report on the measures that would help local authorities tackle climate change and fuel poverty. The report must contain information on measures that local authorities can use to:

- Improve energy efficiency;
- Increase the levels of microgeneration or low carbon technologies;
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and
- Reduce the number of people living in fuel poverty.

Local authorities must have regard to the report when exercising their functions.

The Government does not expect local authorities to have to incur additional costs in having regard to this report. The report itself does not therefore impose any unfunded new burdens.

Key sources of advice and support

There are various sources of advice and support that local authorities can access when thinking about how they could contribute to tackling climate change and fuel poverty. The major sources of this advice include the Energy Saving Trust, the Carbon Trust, The Nottingham Declaration Action Pack, the Local Government Climate Change Commission, the Improvement and Development Agency, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. These, and others, are referred to throughout the report, as appropriate.

Ideas for action

This energy measures report details actions that local authorities can take. For any given authority some actions will be more appropriate and more feasible than others. Only someone within a local authority can judge precisely which are the best alternatives for them. To help you make this judgement, this report details options for action in a series of modules and offers examples of action from a wide range of local authorities.

A good practice strategic approach

Taking a strategic approach to climate change mitigation and fuel poverty alleviation can help ensure that all appropriate actions are considered, that progress can be reported and that potential partners can see the value of proposed actions. This report is focused on climate change mitigation but any strategic approach should include adaptation to inevitable climate change also.

The report sets out the key stages involved in a strategic approach. The ideal depth and breadth of any strategy and action plan will to some extent depend on the resources available to an authority but the key steps of the process can be of use to all.

Effective action will include the development of appropriate partnerships. These can increase the resources available for initiatives, provide expertise and offer routes to reach and persuade the right people to take action. Monitoring the effectiveness of actions is something that can often be neglected, particularly when resources are constrained. However, it is an essential part of an effective approach.

Own estate and operations

The energy consumption of local authorities is estimated to be at least 26 billion kWh per year. This results in annual emissions of more than 6.9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (MtCO₂) and corresponds to energy expenditure in the order of £750 million per year. However, there are some common areas of excessive energy consumption where savings can be made, such as lighting, heating, ventilation, air conditioning and office equipment. Energy management within local authorities will contribute directly to climate change mitigation, lead to cost savings for the local authority, and form a key part of the local authority's community leadership role in this area.

Local authorities also have opportunities to influence practices in undertakings in which they have a part interest, e.g. a joint venture with a private sector company and services that are contracted out.

Planning

Planning is one area where parish, town and community councils have a key role to play. Although they are not able to block planning applications, their views must be taken into account and if they do not agree with the application, a decision on it must be taken by the local planning authority executive rather than an individual planner. The extent of influence that these councils can have will very much depend on their relationship with the local authority and its planners.

The planning system helps define local authorities' place shaping role and is centred on sustainable development. As such, it offers one of the largest opportunities for local authorities to influence energy use and hence carbon dioxide emissions arising from new developments. National planning policy in England and Wales has an increasing focus on climate change mitigation and adaptation and this has a direct influence on expectations for local planning policy and practice.

The new Planning Policy Statement (PPS) on climate change, due to be published later this year, will set out how planning, in providing for the new homes, jobs and infrastructure needed by communities, should help shape places with lower carbon emissions and resilience to the effects of climate change now accepted as inevitable. The PPS will be supported by a practice guide. In Wales, local authorities are expected to take account of the Ministerial Planning Policy Statement on Climate Change (currently in draft form).

The planning system can be used to help minimise the carbon footprint of new developments. The design and location of new developments, including accessibility to public transport to permit sustainable transport options, are also important elements of low carbon developments.

Spatial planning also has an important role in shaping sustainable communities that are resilient to the consequences of climate change that are now accepted as inevitable.

Local authorities can substantially influence carbon emissions through their spatial planning role by producing development plan documents which make a full contribution to delivering the Government's climate change and energy policies and, in doing so, contribute to global sustainability. A key role can also be played by local authorities in helping shape regional spatial strategies which are ambitious in addressing climate change.

In addition to implementing planning policies, local authority development control officers can encourage and educate developers to progress beyond minimum standards and towards a zero carbon standard, which will shortly be required for homes in England and potentially for all buildings in Wales. For existing buildings, local authorities can require or encourage use of sustainable energy options whenever refurbishment, conversion or extension work requires approval. Both development control and building control officers have a role to play here. In the domestic sector, this can in turn improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock, reducing levels of fuel poverty.

Transport

Tackling climate change is a priority for transport policy. A good transport system is central to a prosperous economy, better access and greater mobility, but must balance the increasing demand for travel against the goals of protecting the environment and improving the quality of life for everyone, whether or not they are travelling. As people become more prosperous, they tend to travel more, and in ways that release more carbon dioxide. Carbon emissions from domestic transport have risen by 10% between 1990 and 2004.

Local and Regional Transport Plans are a key element of the response to climate change. There are also important areas of influence for all local authorities, whether or not they are responsible for the

development of these plans, such as encouraging sustainable travel through the planning system, improving the infrastructure for all travel modes and working with schools and other partners to explain the benefits of low carbon travel in order to allow the public to make informed travel choices.

Measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector will have a range of benefits beyond climate change mitigation, such as health benefits and improved air quality.

The Government recently published a draft Local Transport Bill (www.dft.gov.uk/localtransportbill). It contains proposals to support the Government's efforts to tackle congestion and improve public transport, by ensuring that local authorities have the appropriate powers to take local action to meet local transport needs. Where they choose to exercise these powers, local authorities could in many cases also contribute to climate change mitigation.

Energy advice

Local authorities can play a key role in ensuring that appropriate energy advice is provided to all sectors of the community. The Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006 empowers parish councils in England and community councils in Wales to encourage or promote (through advice and assistance, including financial) energy-saving measures. Effective energy advice can help change behaviour which can result in more efficient use of energy in all sectors. It can also help householders choose the most appropriate renewable and low carbon energy technologies for their homes.

Training local authority staff to be energy aware is likely to result in carbon and financial savings for the council as well as in the wider community. Also ensuring that members of the community have access to high quality energy advice can assist in efforts to reduce fuel poverty as well as to tackle climate change.

Adaptation to climate change

The focus of the report is on measures for mitigating the causes of climate change. However, some degree of climate change resulting from past and present emissions of greenhouse gases is already inevitable. Therefore it is important for local authorities to take into account both steps for mitigation (to reduce future emissions) and adaptation (to adapt to the changes already taking place).

Local authorities provide many services that will be affected by climate change. The UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) climate scenarios project demonstrates that we could have wetter winters, hotter and drier summers and more frequent extreme weather events such as storms and flash flooding. These are likely to have implications for services including: emergency planning, waste management, planning, estates management, provision of leisure facilities and social services.

This report does not attempt to outline what local authorities can do with regards to adaptation (although it does point out some key resources for this). Rather it aims to highlight how a strategic approach to both mitigation and adaptation is important.