

Response of Cabinet Member for Waste and Sustainability to Climate Change Scrutiny Report

Background

The Climate Change Scrutiny report was presented to Cabinet in May 2009 and was received by the Cabinet Member for PEP. Cabinet's full response to the scrutiny was deferred until after the Council elections. The following summarises my response to the report. A table detailing the response from across the County Council is appended.

Response to the Scrutiny Report

I broadly welcome the report as a thorough and wide ranging investigation of the role of WCC in tackling climate change. There are a large number of recommendations and I have some concern, given the current level of resource available for this work, over the ability of the Council to implement them all. The report's recommendations appear to miss out on the need for better energy efficiency advice and support to small businesses in the County.

That said, there is support from across the Council for many of the recommendations and a significant number of them have either already been implemented or are the process of being taken forward. Where this is not the case, this is often because resources have yet to be identified.

Responses to Issues Raised

Council Support for the Transition Movement

Transition movement hand books are now available from all County libraries. PEP and Children's Services (and some district council) staff are currently helping to support Transition groups. Clarification of the level of 'senior officer' required as a named contact for Transition groups would be helpful. Currently the Sustainability Officer and the Sustainability Advisor for Children's Services are the most senior regular contacts. In terms of other support for the Transition movement, the council is increasing emphasis on reducing fossil fuel use both in it's own operations and countywide and is working to support local businesses. It also offers grants to voluntary groups.

Council Support for Local Food

Allotments

Agree in principal that Council land should be used for allotments or by community groups to grow food, however it appears there are few landholdings not ear marked for development. Some schools already have allotments and Countryside Services and Adult & Community Services have both set up demonstration allotments and run staff gardening clubs.

Awards scheme for local food

It is suggested it would be more cost efficient to promote existing schemes run by other agencies than set up a stand alone WCC scheme. WCC recently supported the Worcester News 'Buy Local' campaign which included local food. Destination Worcestershire recently ran the 'Worcestershire Breakfast ' Awards.

Council should procure locally produced food wherever possible. New contracts involving food provision should also encourage tenders with reduced packaging

This is agreed and will be implemented by Strategic Procurement

Schools should know & have influence over food being consumed

The Schools catering team will continue to recommend that schools ask contractors to show evidence of how they procure food and use local produce during the tender process and award contracts accordingly.

Awareness Raising**Use terms such as 'Climate Change' rather than 'sustainability'**

WCC Marketing & Communications Team will ensure this in most public communications. The 'Sustainability Stewards' would rather retain their name as they feel this reflects their wider remit; of which tackling climate change is a very important part.

Increase messages on greener lifestyles in WCC communications

WCC Communications Team, PEP and Environmental Services are working to deliver this. Already including in WOW, promoting Green Directory, regular stories on SID & website, press releases, use of screens in buildings.

Reducing Council's Carbon Emissions**Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC)**

DSCF guidance on how CRC should be dealt with in terms of allocating gains/costs to schools, (most emissions covered in this scheme are from schools), went to Worcestershire Schools Forum in early October.

The first CRC payments are now due in 2011/12. From 2011/12 there will be provision for extra cost/gains from the new carbon trading regime (CRC) to be allocated to schools by the Council according to how well each school does reducing CO2 emissions.

Paper on proposals for dealing with CRC planned to go to COMB in November.

Employ an Energy Manager

It is agreed that this post should save the Council, including schools, money and pay for itself several times over – a spend to save measure, however there is a need to agree how this post will be funded in the first place. This will be considered in next year's budget.

***Note:** The annual employment costs of an Energy Manager and Energy Officer team, as recommended by the Climate Change Scrutiny Report, would amount to around £76,500. Typically, the employment of an Energy Manager can save at least 5% of an organisation's energy costs through improved staff awareness and education programmes alone. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that annual savings of up to £250,000 are potentially available from the Council's and schools' estates' £5 million energy bill relating to energy use in buildings. The employment of a permanent Energy Manager and Energy Officer team could be seen as making a strong contribution towards the Council's current and future plans for reducing expenditure.*

Based on a recent Carbon Trust report for County Hall Campus, it has been calculated the above employment costs would be recovered within 8 months if the team implemented the Trust's highest priority recommendations for the Campus; such as introducing a formal energy policy, monitoring and targeting, motivation and marketing, together with reviewing IT and data centre energy efficiency. The capital cost of these recommendations has been identified as £3,255. Total annual savings from these measures are predicted at £121,860.

Expand Green Champions Scheme

Corporate Training & Development & PEP to send paper outlining extended scheme to COMB in Oct/Nov

Fit energy monitors in all buildings & make occupants aware of energy use & their role in reducing it

Corporate Services are planning to do this by March 2010. They are currently working to find the cheapest way of doing this.

PEP's annual Switch it off Campaign as well as EcoSchools work promotes student and staff awareness, however there is ample potential to do more.

Expand installation of Wood Fuel Boilers in Council Properties

This looks likely – Corporate Services are applying successfully for grant funding for these.

Switch off street lights in early hours

Street Lighting will endeavour to attain savings in energy and carbon emissions by use of new technologies and initiatives. Before implementing a programme of switching off lights, serious consideration must be given to legal precedent, and extensive local consultation undertaken. Pilots of other energy saving methods, such as street light dimming and LED and solar powered lighting are now taking place.

Incorporate sustainability standards into PFI contracts

e.g. min CO2 emissions & max energy efficiency over lifetime of contract also locally sourced food & recycling of waste

The scope of services to be provided by the PFI contractor are agreed between the Authority and Schools. The performance specifications and quality threshold form part of the contract. Schools are required to 'sign up' to the contract specifications and conditions, as such these will be discussed and considered for future contracts based upon an evaluation and value for money assessment. All of the matters can be included within the output specifications and subject to value for money assessment

Corporate Services Design Unit agree that consideration of low carbon design and design for future climatic conditions should form part of design brief for WCC led PFI projects.

Introduce low-carbon procurement policies for ICT

While the first priority is for ICT equipment and systems to be robust and fit for purpose, (thus avoiding waste & promoting resource efficiency), WCC IBS already consider energy efficiency when procuring and planning IT systems, (as the scrutiny report states), and they will continue to do so. Clarification on what is meant by 'low carbon ICT procurement policies' would be helpful.

Recycling service for schools

Most (not all) schools already have a recycling service run by district councils. Those not covered could be included in the corporate recycling contract planned by the Facilities group.

Reducing CO2 Emissions Across Worcestershire***More help & information on home energy efficiency***

WCC are leading various projects including: Warmer Worcestershire, 'Switch it Off' campaign, home electricity monitor lending scheme from libraries.

The Council is working to increase funding in this area jointly with districts and the LSP as a whole. Have successfully obtained support from Energy Savings Trust and begun working with them.

Bids for Green Loans and preinsulation loft clearance schemes have been submitted and AWM funding obtained for energy efficiency & renewables grants to small businesses.

EcoCommunities pilot (starting Jan 2010) will expand EcoSchools programme into communities in areas of Redditch & Bromsgrove.

Promote County's Climate Change Pledge to Businesses

This is being done through the Chamber of Commerce

Map Activity Across the County

Depending on the level of detail required this could be prohibitively resource intensive, however the Climate Change Pledge and CAA are helping to map activity.

Develop Worcestershire's 'Green Economy'

This is being incorporated into Worcestershire's economic development work. AWM funding has recently been obtained to promote the green technology sector.

County Council should take a strong leadership role in promoting consistency in planning frameworks for renewable energy

WCC has produced a renewable research paper for Districts to use as evidence when developing Core Strategies, but the Council does not have the power to require district councils to more vigorously apply the Merton rule. Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) policies will set minimum expectations for core strategies on this issue. WCC can make sure District's Core Strategies conform with the RSS.

WCC commissioned a study into the potential for large scale renewable projects in the County. The study concluded that wind, biomass & hydro are the most suitable renewable energy types and that 3.5 % of county's energy consumption could be provided from these large scale renewables by 2026. Discussion is underway as to how this technical piece of work can be developed into a strategy & implemented.

Improved transport for rural areas & more footpaths on road & to bus stops, safer walking & cycling

The IPTS is based on accessibility to services criteria, which fully supports the improvement to the County's road & footway networks, and promotes the use of more sustainable transport opportunities. There have been many improvements to walking bus routes, bus stops, footways and national cycle routes in rural areas from schemes delivered under the current and previous Local Transport Plans. Any improvements must however be subject to the cost benefit analysis process, and demand led (potential users) approach, of assessing schemes

Planning for Climate Change Impacts Across Council

A Climate Change Risk Assessment has been developed and Directorates asked to identify service continuity issues from the potential impacts of future climate change. This information will be shared with District Councils and partner organisations where applicable

Climate Change as a Corporate Priority

This was considered by Cabinet during corporate strategy week. A draft of the Corporate Plan is due to be released in December 2009.

Future Plans

The Council will be working with the Energy Savings Trust over the next year making use of its 'one to one' support programme to refocus and increase effectiveness of CO2 reduction work within the Council and the community and will do this in the light of the climate change scrutiny. It must be recognised that in order to make an impact some investment will be needed, and this will show pay back in many ways, not least reduced energy bills for the council and the community (as well as meeting CO2 reduction targets).

Anthony Blagg

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Waste and Sustainability