

# Climate change: Recommendations for good local practice

These recommendations are for local councils, voluntary and community organisations, and environmental organisations.

They are taken from 'Thirty-three ways forward? The London 21 climate change report', written by Chris Church for London 21 in January 2008.

This is downloadable at:

[http://www.london21.org/uploads/files/london21/Newsletter/Final\\_Report\\_Edit.pdf](http://www.london21.org/uploads/files/london21/Newsletter/Final_Report_Edit.pdf)

There is an urgent need for better coordination and for links between councils and those seeing to develop more effective action at a local level. This should ensure that all interested organisations have a clear perspective on who does what, on how the information and resources available can be accessed and how they can influence and take part in decision-making that may affect their work.

Action on climate change is most likely to work if it is done with people and organisations rather than being done to them. At the moment it is not clear to many at the local level what is being done and how they can get involved. A more effective partnership, with a clear focus on building skills and capacity around all the issues where change is needed, should be a priority for every locality.

## **Recommendations for Local Government**

There is a great deal that local councils can and should be doing to help the UK move from talk to effective action on climate change. These 12 recommendations set out some ways forward; all of them are feasible and most of them are being taken forward already by some councils.

### **1. Sign the Nottingham Declaration**

Over 200 Councils in England and Wales have now signed this declaration. While the

Declaration would benefit from strengthening and updating, the key issues remain very valid and the LGA Climate Change Commission report also calls for councils to sign up. It may only be a statement of intent but it remains the best starting point and links the council into a support network.

### **2. Develop and publish a climate change strategy and action plan.**

This should include a straight forward 'plain English' summary for widespread distribution to local people and stakeholders. It should cover both mitigation and adaptation measures. It should also set targets in line with national and regional goals plans should include measurable and quantifiable milestones at 2010, 2015 and 2020.

### **3. Incorporate climate change goals and actions within the Local Development Framework (LDF).**

The goals of the climate action plan should also be incorporated within the LDF, which is going to become the key document to set out how future developments take place in any borough. The LDF should also prioritise work towards improvements in the key climate indicators set out by the Government in the new performance framework for Comprehensive Area Assessment. The LDF is also perhaps the best framework in which to ensure that moves towards a low carbon society do not have negative and disproportionate impacts on poorer communities within the borough.

### **4. Make basic energy-saving and energy efficiency measures a core part on the management systems for all council-managed buildings.**

Annual targets should be set and reported on regularly. Ideally the amount of energy any key building uses on a monthly basis should be tracked and displayed within that building. Existing heating and air conditioning systems using fossil fuels should be reviewed with the aim of maximising efficiency.

### **5. Support the Merton Rule and develop its implementation in local planning decision.**

The recent Planning Policy Guideline starts to incorporate the Merton Rule in to national policy, but there is still scope for local councils to lead the way on this and to go 'further, faster' in including renewable energy systems in new developments.

### **6. Educate, engage and support staff to use less energy, both in their work places and at home.**

Staff should be expected to attend briefings on the councils' climate change strategy and on basic energy saving. Energy efficiency measures should included in all staff induction work

### **7. Look for appropriate cost-effective locations for the installation of high profile renewable energy systems** (in addition to those installed in new developments) and build partnerships to get such systems installed.

### **8. Support the rapid development of zero-carbon housing within the borough and of improvements to existing stock.**

This will require the effective use and enforcement of existing powers. The issue of existing stock, especially in the private rented sector is one where strong action is urgently needed.

### **9. Set standards and goals to help reduce carbon emissions in procurement policies.**

Local councils spend billions on goods and services: each Council's procurement policy should ensure that such spending is made in ways that wherever possible maximise energy and carbon savings.

### **10. Consult on and plan for adaptation measures.**

Climate change is already happening – some impacts are inevitable. An adaptation strategy can help get this message across while also working on the improvements that will be needed (including issues such as wider drains and sewers to cope with heavier downpours). This work should be integrated fully with work on biodiversity and housing to maximise mutual benefits.

### **11. Develop a cohesive approach to working with the VCS on these issues**

Councils need to work with all their local communities. This may involve education, training and capacity-building but also should involve those communities in planning and decision-making.

### **12. Develop and support an ongoing public engagement programme.**

This should provide a local focus and identity, and help people make sense of what climate change means to them and their neighbourhoods. It should also link in to national initiatives that will lead to 'Climate change literacy' where people have a good understanding of the key issues and can make decisions based on that understanding. This work should be done at every level using all council communication channels.

## **Recommendations for voluntary and community sector organisations**

Voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations are more likely to be trusted by those they work with and who use their services than local or central government. They can thus play a key role in awareness building work and in getting people and communities actively involved in this work. To do that they need themselves to become more engaged. There are a number of ways forward:

### **1. Develop an action plan.**

VCS organisations should have a plan to set out their own targets for action on climate and related issues, which also sets out how they will develop the resources needed to carry out this work.

## **2. Train staff and support a 'climate champion'**

Work on any issue can only be effective if there is a person responsible for that work. Every organisation needs to appoint a lead person and to ensure that they are properly supported to identify and lead the changes needed.

## **3. Sign up to the Third Sector Declaration**

The Third Sector Declaration on Climate Change\* provides a valuable context for this work. Organisations should sign up to ensure that they are kept in touch with other relevant developments within the sector.

## **4. Make links with other local climate activity**

Every locality has some level of both voluntary and public sector action. VCS organisations and networks should find out what is being done and explore how they can effectively support and promote this activity.

## **5. Promote the need to engage with climate change issues to service users and other local organisations**

The unique value of the VCS is its extensive outreach. VCS organisations can get messages about the need to act to avert climate change to a wide range of communities. Every organisation should look to set up a meeting or other suitable discussion forum for its members or users.

\* Third Sector Declaration on Climate Change can be accessed at [www.everyactioncounts.org.uk/declaration/](http://www.everyactioncounts.org.uk/declaration/)

## **Recommendations for environmental organisations**

Over the last ten years environmental organisations have played a key role in building awareness of climate change. Now that awareness has grown it is perhaps time for environmental organisations to carefully consider their role. Their priorities should include:

### **1. Develop a clear understanding of what their local council is (or is not doing) and establish a mechanism for exchange of views and information.**

Environmental groups vary widely in their views of and relationships with local councils. Groups should as a priority get clear on what their council is doing. The group may have access to information that may be of value to the council (and vice versa): effective cooperation can benefit both sectors.

### **2. Identify priorities for action within their locality**

An environmental organisation may be well placed to develop an independent viewpoint in terms of the priorities (whether on policy or infrastructure) and to learn from innovation and progress elsewhere.

### **3. Build their skills to act as watchdogs and advocates for effective action**

If a group is to be genuinely effective in encouraging their council and other organisations in their locality to take serious action on climate change, they will need to assess their own skills and to consciously build those skills.

### **4. Use their networks to exchange information and to deliver joint action**

Many groups are linked through local or issue-based networks. They should use their networks to spread information about what they are doing and to learn from action elsewhere.

### **5. Build better links to non-environmental organisations within their locality.**

It is often easier for groups to work with those who they know and where they share common values: if environmental organisations really want to see more action in their neighbourhoods in 2008 then they should look to engage with a wider range of local groups.