

10 April 2009

What would a model environmentally sustainable Council do differently?

BACKGROUND

The 'Innovation Council' has already hosted one session which looked to establish the guiding principles for a model environmentally sustainable Council. This document is an attempt at synthesising the ideas and suggestions made by a leading group of experts from the second session. They are categorised according to themes which emerged during the discussion. As one speaker in the second session noted, it is important to note that no single policy recommendation can be treated in isolation—and a much wider political view should be taken. It is for that reason that we have also included the guiding principles towards the end of this document, which are intended to ensure that any policy recommendations remain firmly grounded and meaningful.

IDEAS

Council should lead by example

- Green fleet management, public buildings (IDeA, Streetcar)
- Carry out high visibility activities (IDeA)

Council Culture and Role

- Consider the significance of place more widely – and the opportunities that offers (Keep Britain Tidy)
- A Council should engage with residents on priorities (Keep Britain Tidy)
- Services should reflect place, and adapt to real time issues (Keep Britain Tidy)
- Raise awareness of environmental issues to the public to build momentum behind initiatives. Eg Environmental report with tax bill (Aldersgate Group)
- Council should learn lessons from the past (Essex CC)
- Public sector in general should use their role to give consumers confidence

Working Together

- Develop coalition to encourage policy makers to act early

and strongly (Aldersgate Group)

- Combine resources and expertise (Aldersgate Group)
- Work with businesses to demonstrate that good company environmental performance makes good business sense
- Ensure that partnerships are in line with shared interests (Bio Regional)
- Measure relationships based on CO2 and social impacts and agree a common shared interest for the community (Bio Regional)

Encourage strong leadership

- Councils should go beyond traditional role (Keep Britain Tidy)
- Create a clear action plan
- Good example is the Chicago Action Plan (IDeA)
- 'Mini Stern' for each Council with plans for reducing CO2 (Energy Saving Trust)
- Carry out an audit of a Councils renewable energy resources (Centre for Alternative Technology)

Environment not treated in isolation

- Should not be in isolation ie separate departments not necessarily sensible (IDeA)
- All investment decisions should be checked against green targets (IDeA)
- Should run through all activities (IDeA, Centre for Alternative Technology, Keep Britain Tidy)

Towards a Zero Carbon Economy

- Release information on carbon emissions to better understand issues and focus attention (Aldersgate Group)

Be opportunistic

- Building schools for the Future – should make most of all opportunities they offer (IDeA)
- Integrate programmes so that efficiencies are captured e.g. doing free insulation and loan-backed renewable retrofits at

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the same time (Friends of the Earth)

Targets, Regulation and Measurement

- Allocate carbon reduction targets and SLAs to individuals (IDeA)
- Energy Saving target of 20% by 2030 (Cool NRG)
- Set 40% carbon reduction by 2020 (Friends of the Earth)
- 90% Co2 reduction across the board as in Sutton (Bio Regional)
- Traffic reduction targets in each Council (Friends of the Earth)
- 550ppm changed to 350ppm (Centre for Alternative Technology)
- Sensible environmental regulation creates innovation and opportunity across the economy (Aldersgate Group)
- Focus on 'smart' measurement of value including payback (Ernst and Young, Essex CC)

Promote energy efficiency

- Work with energy suppliers to promote awareness amongst the public of potential money savings eg distributing energy saving light bulbs (Cool NRG)
- Smart meter loan scheme (Essex CC)

Home insulation

- Roll out street by street as in Kirklees, funded through primarily public sources (Cool NRG, Friends of the Earth, Aldersgate Group)
- Allow Local Authorities to make a profit on long term energy bill savings eg Netherlands. Councils essentially acting as a holding bank (Cool NRG, JP)
- Fiscal incentives - Opportunistic approach to installing insulation to overcome problems with rental market, and tax subsidy concerns (FR, GH)
- Council should have a general 'handy person' to assist with insulation for people who would like to put it in themselves but struggle (Energy Saving Trust)

Local Energy

- Create a rotating fund to retrofit renewable energy generation facilities to buildings
- Develop incentives for local electricity generation (Energy Saving Trust, Friends of the Earth, Centre for Alternative Technology)
- Set up a Community ESCO to give greater access to funds
- Infrastructure (pipes, trenches and wires) should be managed efficiently and with a long term view (Energy Saving Trust)
- Public sector to control of energy infrastructure so as to tie up the multitude of schemes (Energy Saving Trust)

Efficient boilers

- Fund installation of new boilers (Cool NRG)

Waste management

- Support businesses and homes more with their waste management (Energy Saving Trust)
- Dustbin wagons travel community each week – perhaps they could have a wider street scene role (Keep Britain Tidy)
- Reduce subsidy of waste (Bio Regional)
- Waste as a resource – re-use where possible (Bio Regional)
- Make landfill taxes visible (Kensington and Chelsea)

Principles of Incentives

- Provide incentives from year one instead of further down the line (David Godfrey)

Green local industry

- A Council could lay the groundwork for a green industry within their area, which would naturally percolate sustainability and create jobs

Transport

- Recharging facilities for electric vehicles such as YouDrive and see also - BetterPlace (Friends of the Earth)
- Shift to low carbon vehicles through planning policy, procurement, infrastructure etc (Friends of the Earth)

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- Replace fleet cars with Car Club cars to take more vehicles off the road (Streetcar)
- Policy of actively encouraging Car Clubs eg cut congestion charge and preferential parking (Streetcar)
- Road charging (Essex)
- We seek simplicity
- We communicate openly and in plain language
- We respond to our residents, and not to central judgement

Housing and Planning

- Planning reform is imperative (Bio Regional)
- Housing density can improve efficiency Kensington and Chelsea is one of the most densely populated areas (Kensington and Chelsea)
- Communal living does not have to be tower blocks (Kensington and Chelsea)

Innovative financial mechanisms

- Utilise buying power to enable new technologies to emerge (Friends of the Earth)
- Set up residents trusts to facilitate management fees and local ownership (Keep Britain Tidy)

Knowledge, Support and Advice

- Provide more personalised support, information and advice to individuals and Councils (Energy Saving Trust)
- C.P.D programme for all decision makers – keeping them compliant with emerging evidence. WISE can offer this (Centre for Alternative Technology)
- Council provide advice to residents (Ernst and Young)

PRINCIPLES

1. Keep it simple, real and relevant

- If we can't understand it—we can't do it
- If we can't explain it—we can't get people behind us
- If we can't feel the benefit—we're not going to support it
- If it doesn't resonate with what we care about—we are not going to believe in it

Therefore

2. Offer opportunities to everyone to improve environmental performance and actively challenge them to do so

- If we allow people freedom—they will create improvements
- If we restrict actions—we reduce participation and innovation
- If we listen more, we get more ideas

Therefore

- We seek to provide incentives for people
- We will seek out opinions, ideas and improvement opportunities
- We will challenge people and organisations to do more
- We support those who lead or champion an idea

3. Dare to be different

- We are not afraid to try something new and we understand that failure is sometimes a price worth paying
- We see innovation as investment.
- We are not afraid to re-visit old ideas
- We don't need to wait for guidelines and regulations before acting
- We are not afraid to use our unrivalled democratic accountability and freedoms to instigate change

4. We do what we say and say what we do

- If we're honest and open about our aims, objectives and timescales—we are more accountable and more likely to be supported by our residents
- Informed people are more likely to challenge us and create new ideas

Therefore

- We put two-way communications at the heart of all these activities

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- We set and report against realistic goals
- Partnerships offer real benefit to both parties
- Report against environmental goals in all that we do
- Partner's views are fundamental to our decision making process
- If we isolate the environment as a single issue—it will never be the top priority
- Partners share in our success

Therefore

- We measure against environmental goals across all of our work

6. Balance short term concerns with long-term vision

- If we focus only on the short term—we will never be able to deliver significant environmental improvement
- If we ignore today's concerns—we lose support of our residents

Therefore

- We know exactly where we are going but it is not always a straight line which will take us there
- We should make rapid progress when conditions will allow
- We work across political boundaries to agree long term goals

7. We recognise value and opportunity beyond the obvious

- If we look at things in new ways—we will see new opportunities
- Sometimes opportunities come during changed circumstances

Therefore

- We will drive new behaviours by changing old perceptions
- We will look for value in unusual places and understand that, 'where there's muck, there's brass'
- We will take opportunities when we can

8. We seek out meaningful partnerships

- If we do it on our own—we are limited by resources and experience
- If we partner badly - we gain no benefit

Therefore

- We actively seek new partnerships

CONCLUSIONS

Over the course of the first two sessions, we have clearly established a good platform upon which we can build some successful policies for local government to adopt and adapt. The next couple of sessions will look to do precisely that—using some of the ideas suggested here and coming up with new ideas, all under the guidelines of the principles outlined in the previous section. If you would like to be involved in the process, or would like to showcase some innovative and interesting policies for the Innovation Council—please do get in touch.

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