

Carbon Trust has rolled out the sixth phase of its carbon management programme for local authorities

What can local authorities expect to achieve by taking part in the Programme?

We checked with the Public Sector Manager at the Carbon Trust to discover how the LACM Programme has evolved since 2003

Changing the dynamics of a complete sector of the national economy is never easy. To have any long-lasting effect, changes in direction must be fundamental rather than quick fix solutions to skirt round initiatives imposed by Whitehall or Brussels. They must reach deep into the sub-culture of the sector rather than simply implant pockets of new practice to create the impression that an organisation is 'on message' and that all is well.

That root and branch approach is critical to the viability of the UK Carbon Management Programme where patterns of energy consumption in the public sector have been based on generations of cheap energy and the lack of any requirement to minimise the impact of wasted resources on the environment.

Turning the concept of carbon management into practice is therefore a major challenge for the institutions charged by central government with its implementation. A target of x% reduction in y years has to be interpreted as an action plan to which the organisation can be committed.

But rolling out that plan effectively requires more than commitment on the part of council leaders and the top tier of executives: it takes the close involvement of everyone associated with an authority who can have any influence on carbon emissions.

In practice, that means the politicians and the executive team, administrative and customer-facing staff and – in the case of the education sector, which accounts for more than 80% of local authority carbon generation – teachers and students.

If the council can demonstrate to the community it serves that what it is doing is economically justified, the buy-in will extend far beyond the boundaries of the Council Offices.

Local authorities' commitments

Faced with the prospect of meeting their obligations to reduce carbon emissions, the overwhelming majority of UK local authorities have already recognised the need for action by signing up to The Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change. Indeed, 326 English local authorities have made this commitment to

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From the City of Bristol which joined the first Phase in 2003. . .

reduce carbon emissions since the Declaration was established. Launched at a conference in Nottingham in October 2000, the project was conceived by Nottingham City Council, and partnered by organisations as diverse as Carbon Trust, the Environment Agency, the Energy Savings Trust, and the Local Government Association.

The event attracted 200 council leaders, chief executives and senior managers of UK local government. Now managed by the Energy Savings Trust, with the support of its partners, the declaration is a voluntary undertaking to address the issues of climate change, representing a high-level, broad statement of commitment that any council can make to its own community.

The Nottingham Declaration is a pledge to take actions on climate change within two years of signing. Lacking any legal or contractual force, it can be fine-tuned to the operational requirements of the councils signing up, though the principles remain the same whatever the final format of the statement.

As a public relations exercise, however, each council can leverage extensive value from its ceremony for signing its copy of Nottingham: having the chief executive and leader of the council signing on behalf of the authority, is meant to demonstrate the commitment both of the elected representatives and the permanent administration.

Gravitas is heaped on to the document by the pre-printed signatures of the relevant

DEFRA Minister – currently Phil Woolas MP – and Parmjit Dhanda MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Signing up to the Nottingham Declaration is viewed by the carbon sceptics as having little more strength than a promise to be kind to animals. To the extent that the document is voluntary and there are no penalties for failing to comply, that would be a reasonable observation.

The argument is that a two year time frame for taking action is long enough for the local press and self-appointed watchdogs to forget that a commitment had ever been made, in the event that there were no subsequent action that could be called on to boost a council's re-election prospects.

Good intent into action

The Local Authorities' Carbon Management Programme (LACM) of Carbon Trust pins down the acres of good but imprecise intent expressed by Nottingham signatories and converts it into structured action that helps the entities within its scope actually reduce their carbon emissions.

A key member of the Carbon Trust team responsible for rolling out the LACM Programme is Tom Cumberlege, the Public Sector Manager. He outlined the primary role of the Trust in reducing local authority carbon emissions. "We look for a concrete commitment from

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. . .to The Lake District National Park, which joined Phase 6 in 2008

local authorities that they can secure the internal resources for the five-step carbon management programme which forms the LACM Programme.”

As Cumberlege explained, the process starts with the authority's chief executive, who needs to be confident about the reasons for moving down the carbon management route.

Having established the case for the council to take action, he has to be able to identify a senior manager at officer-level grade who can champion the cause and take responsibility for project management.

“What Carbon Trust brings to the table is technical support and change management skills. We get local authorities into a position where they have a strategy that looks across all their carbon emissions and highlights areas where they can make real reductions.”

The Carbon Trust team provides support and guidance to its ‘clients’ rather than taking on the carbon reduction task on the authorities’ behalf.

“Our objective is to determine how we can get them into a position where they can sustain the initiative themselves. Along the way, they will have identified the resources within their authority needed to continue reducing emissions.

“We are looking for authorities to be proactive in monitoring the success of their actions, and implementing further rounds of changes if the carbon reductions fall below the target agreed with us.”

More than 200 councils

Carbon Trust can demonstrate that 215 councils have joined the LACM scheme, being taken on in a total of six batches since 2002. The most recent phase has seen the largest number of new entrants, with 74 local authorities joining Phase 6 in the 2008-2009 financial year.

With more than 150 authorities having already ‘graduated’ from the Programme, there is a wealth of experience that can be drawn upon by those who are at an earlier stage.

As Tom Cumberlege observed, “Those joining the scheme know that another energy manager has been going through the same pain barrier in another part of the country: they will gain from the insight and ideas that can be applied in their own authority.”

Five basic steps

What the LACM operation sets out for councils embarking on the Programme could never be described as rocket science. It is more the definition of a process that will carry the organisation through the 10 months that it takes to complete the LACM Programme. In summary, those five steps are . . .

- 1 To identify the objectives – financial, specific energy reductions, cultural etc – and the people who can assume responsibility for achieving these.

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When a local authority joins the Carbon Management Programme, it commits to taking five steps

Turning good intentions into real savings

Step 1 – Identify what has to be done

Identify the action that is required, and build the team needed to achieve it. Given the tendency for local authority departments to operate as 'silos, where information is passed up and down a chain of command without being shared across those departments, the team has to include representatives of all of the functions within a local authority. The finance department is absolutely essential to this process.

Step 2 – Calculate the starting point

Determine the present carbon footprint, which sets the baseline against which subsequent consumption will be compared. Targets for reducing emissions over the following five years will be set at this stage, and take into account how any planned developments – a new sports stadium or council offices, for example – will impact upon them. It is important that local authorities can translate carbon consumption in financial terms, and see the additional net revenue that will be available as energy consumption falls.

Step 3 - The options for reducing carbon

Identify and quantify the options for reduction. How are the targets for reducing carbon footprint to be achieved? This is the technical phase of the process and involves change management procedures. Tom Cumberlege of Carbon Trust describes the Opportunities Workshop which his organisation provides to help draw together the different departments involved in a typical authority.

"These departments normally work in 'silos' which have limited channels of communication between them but the workshops provide an opportunity for all of those involved to brainstorm ideas for reducing carbon emissions. Perhaps more important, they help councils assess the relative ease of implementation, the cost-effectiveness, and the amount of reduction achieved."

Workshops are a powerful vehicle for communicating with the staff to dispel many of the myths which have sprung up around carbon management. Why, for example, are council buildings not adorned with solar panels at every turn? (They have a long payback period). "The message that has to be projected is that we look at practical changes that will make a large reduction in carbon. This is not necessarily going to

put renewables at the top of the list. We are looking for schemes that have a short-term payback, so we are interested to see which projects the authority includes in its plan.

It is not a case of Carbon Trust recommending the risk-free tried and tested options, however. If primed by the Trust to think broadly about the problem and its solutions, some authorities will attempt more ambitious projects. Cumberlege was keen to lend his support to such organisations. "We will support them by helping secure the hearts and minds and the buy-in of the different teams in the council to take whatever steps are necessary."

The potential diversity of projects which the ten months Programme can uncover demonstrates that carbon management is not a task for a single player in the council, no matter how senior.

Right from the first step, a local authority needs to have the right people focussing on the task. It is probably the only way that there will be sufficient resources to make the changes needed to affect climate change. If an authority succeeds in communicating the message that people can make a difference.

Step 4 – Complete the strategic plan

Finalise the strategy and focus on its implementation. Secure whatever budgets are required to make any structural or operational changes that will achieve the planned savings. Public Sector institutions will already be familiar with Salix Finance, the government-funded vehicle which makes matched loans for facilitating investments in this area of operations.

Step 5 – Implement the plan.

As Carbon Trust's Tom Cumberlege noted, this is where the hard work comes in. "We look here to see what we can do to sustain the authority's plan going forward. There is a level of detail which gives us the confidence that the council has thought through the mix of plans needed to implement it throughout the organisation."

Timing is important in this step. The LACM is looking at the planned changes being effected over a five year period but within that framework, projects should be phased, so that there will be a few 'quick wins' to secure the confidence of the management team. §

2. Establish the energy consumption baseline and the targets to have been achieved at key stages.
3. Identify and quantify the options for carbon reduction
4. Finalise the strategy and focus on implementation and costing and financing eg the Government-backed Salix Finance.
5. Implement the strategy.

The most cursory examination of local government in the UK illustrates interlocking tiers of district councils, metropolitan borough councils and county councils. Not only do the remits of these three styles of administration differ, but within any one type of council, the size of the administration can vary significantly.

In terms of the kind of authority now joining the LACM Programme, does any one style or size of administration dominate? With the major metropolitan councils and county councils now part of the Programme, the newest entrants are being drawn primarily from amongst the smaller district councils.

Changing profile

While Cumberlege and his colleagues would accept the changing profile of the Programme's members, they are keen to show how the councils serving key areas of the country are working together to achieve carbon management across geographical borders.

Of the more recent entrants, at least half are smaller borough and district



Bolton Council was one of the 73 which joined Phase 6 of the Programme in May 2008

councils working in collaborative ventures. "A good example would be in Oxfordshire, where the county council joined Phase 4 of the LACM Programme. We are now working with the City Council and – in the latest phase – South Oxfordshire District Council to see what strategies we can identify for reducing emissions across the region covered by those authorities."

Do councils really work this way?

It would be easy to see the LACM Programme in a somewhat idealised setting. What Tom Cumberlege has been describing is a council where there are short lines of command; where it is feasible to bring not just the senior management players together in workshops, for example, but their colleagues from across their organisation.

The real world has institutions such as schools within the local authority orbit. Changes in the way that management of finance for education has been devolved to the schools and colleges means that this sector can easily become 'semi-detached' from the council's

mainstream carbon management brief. This would not be a problem were it not for the fact that some 80% of all the energy consumed in a typical local authority is consumed by the education sector.

Energy savings in schools

Cumberlege maintains that this does not prove an obstacle in practice as the LACM Programme has established good working relationships directly with schools:

"We encourage them to develop their own strategies for carbon reduction. Systems for converting energy savings into tangible resources for the school help raise awareness, for example, and we are keen to work closely with boards of governors.

"But education is certainly a different business model and every establishment has to be treated on a case-by-case basis. Our objective is to promote a framework of good practice across all organisations under local authority control and ensure that it can be implemented effectively in the education sector."

The fact that Carbon Trust is now in Phase 6 of its Programme for local authorities might suggest that there only remains some tidying up to be done: with all of the high carbon-spending authorities in the scheme, this aspect of the Trust's work is almost over.

In practice, however, the experience gained at the local authority level is now being rolled out in programmes for the universities and NHS trusts. The momentum which the LACM Programme has developed is probably unstoppable. §

The Carbon Trust's objective is to promote a framework of good practice across all organisations under local authority control and ensure that it can be implemented just as effectively in the education sector.