



Mobilising individual behavioural change through community initiatives: Lessons for tackling climate change

The Energy Review Study

SUMMARY REPORT TO GOVERNMENT

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Centre for Sustainable Energy
The CREATE Centre
Smeaton Road
Bristol BS1 6XN

Tel: 0117 934 0913
Fax: 0117 929 9114
Email: simon.roberts@cse.org.uk
Web: www.cse.org.uk

Registered charity no.298740

The Project Team

This study was undertaken in two phases under contract to Defra between December 2006 and June 2007 by a project team consisting:

Simon Roberts, Mark Letcher and Zoe Redgrove of the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE)

and (for the Phase 1 study)

Beth Longstaff and Amanda Inverarity of the Community Development Exchange (CDX)
(see www.cdx.org.uk)

CSE is an independent charity which advances sustainable energy policy and practice through direct advice to the public, education and training initiatives, technical consultancy and policy analysis. CSE seeks energy solutions that engage people and communities to meet real needs for both environmentally sound and affordable energy services. For more details see www.cse.org.uk or contact simon.roberts@cse.org.uk.

This report does not represent the views of the Government or any Government department, and should not be interpreted as a statement of current or future policy.

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Background to the study

The Energy Review 2006 included a commitment for Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Communities and Local Government (CLG), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department for Transport (DfT) and Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) to undertake a joint study to:

“look at the role of ‘community level’ approaches to mobilising individuals, and the role of local authorities in particular in making them work effectively. It will draw on experience of what initiatives have worked and which haven’t in both the environmental area and other policy areas, such as public health. In the light of this information, the study will also examine what new policy options, such as tradable personal carbon allowances (PCA), could be deployed to stimulate local action and consider their relative pros and cons.”¹

The study was overseen by Defra with a steering group of representatives from each of the above departments and the Office of the Third Sector (OTS). It was broken into two phases:

- The *first phase* reviewed existing community initiatives aimed at changing individual behaviour to identify key success factors and to identify potential lessons for community-based approaches to engaging individuals with tackling climate change. This phase was undertaken by the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) in partnership with Community Development Exchange (CDX). The resulting report published in March 2007 and is available at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/individual/index.htm.
- The *second phase* examined stakeholder perspectives of how Government policies and programmes could encourage and enable communities and local authorities to fulfil their potential in helping to mobilise individuals to tackle climate change. This phase involved two workshops in May 2007 (in London and Manchester), attended by 84 representatives of the third sector², local authorities, and central government. These workshops were facilitated by CSE and a report of the workshops can be found at the above weblink.
- In addition, a short study was carried out by CSE to provide a snapshot of existing community initiatives that are seeking to engage individuals through voluntary carbon trading and footprinting schemes. This study was carried out by CSE to assess the potential for such approaches to stimulate behaviour change. The report of this study is available at the above weblink.
- An overview of Government policy impacting on the third sector and local government was prepared by the Energy Saving Trust as background reading for workshop participants. This is available at the above weblink.

This summary report, detailing the overall findings and recommendations of this study, is being presented to Ministers: a Government response will be published.

1 Department of Trade & Industry (2006) *Our Energy Challenge: The Energy Review Report 2006*. London: TSO, p.53, para 2.84 (see www.dti.gov.uk/files/file32003.pdf)

2 The Government defines the third sector as “non-governmental organisations which are value-driven and which principally reinvest their surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives. It includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals” *Interim Report of the Treasury & Cabinet Office Review on Future Role of the third sector* (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/53E/94/pbr06_3rd_sector_428.pdf)

Key findings from the study: Implications for Government policy and programmes

Overall findings

- **There is a lack of definitive evidence on the impact, costs and benefits of community initiatives designed to secure individual behaviour change. Nevertheless, community initiatives clearly play a key role in establishing and reinforcing positive social norms and engaging and educating individuals through existing, trusted relationships.**

The study found a frustrating lack of unambiguous evidence to demonstrate the impact and the specific costs of community-based approaches. However, it is not easy to imagine a successful national response to climate change which does not involve effective community-based initiatives in stimulating individual behaviour change and establishing social norms to reinforce 'low carbon lifestyles'. The challenge for policy-makers and funders is therefore to justify supporting such initiatives in the absence of such evidence and to be clear what role such initiatives fulfil.

- **Community initiatives are unlikely to treat climate change as a priority without intervention, even if efforts are made to make climate change “locally relevant.” They will need to be led and supported to action, if they – and the individuals within them – are to be mobilised successfully to change behaviour.**

The issue of climate change poses specific challenges for community-based initiatives since it shares few of the characteristics of typical issues for such initiatives (local and immediate, known beneficiaries, and clear sense of agency and potential for feedback). This challenge applies similarly for initiatives aimed directly at individuals.

Programmes such as the Community Action for Energy (CAfE) of the Energy Saving Trust indicate the scope for stimulating and supporting action to engage communities with sustainable energy and addressing the threat of climate change.

- **Local authorities have a clear role to play in making national policy locally relevant, supporting and partnering a vibrant third sector, embedding low carbon approaches into all of its work and services, and in showing leadership and exemplary practice.**

However, many local authorities are not currently performing this role adequately. Changing this situation will require stronger guidance from Government, tangible performance objectives for local authorities and a clear duty to act to tackle climate change.

- **A key requirement for future success is to establish a clear and realistic sense of collective agency which motivates and justifies individual and group action to cut carbon emissions.**

While this should honestly reflect the scientific insignificance to the threat of climate change of such actions on their own, it should also make explicit the political significance of many people starting to take action in concert, and demonstrate the way in which this underpins the legitimacy of UK leadership in seeking a global solution.

- **Evaluation of the impact of community initiatives on individual behaviour is generally low quality and terms such ‘behavioural change’ and ‘behavioural measures’ were not meaningful to community groups, even though they are widely used by the sustainable energy sector and government.**

Research Councils should initiate a systematic longitudinal study of community-based initiatives, particularly in the field of sustainable energy, to assess their impact on social norms and individual behaviours with a view to establishing a more robust evidence base for future policy and funding and to improving evaluation techniques.

- **The study found an extensive interest amongst third sector and local authority representatives and a strong willingness to engage with the issue of tackling climate change. They also identified clear requirements of Government to enable them to do so effectively.**

Workshops were heavily subscribed, highly productive, and feedback was very positive. Many participants expressed a frustration that there were not further and deeper opportunities to work with one another to improve policy and practice across these sectors.

- **Stakeholders were generally surprised to learn of the wide extent of current Government activity to tackle climate change: they simply are not aware of much of current policy and programmes**

Stakeholders anticipated that it would be valuable for the Government to communicate more clearly and vigorously what it is actually doing since this would reduce cynicism and encourage others. They had particularly low awareness of measures addressing business carbon emissions (such as the EU Emissions Trading Scheme) and energy suppliers (such as the Energy Efficiency Commitment). There was, however, still a general sense that there was much more for Government to do, particularly to engage communities and individuals and drive improvement in local authority performance on the issue of climate change.

- **The extent of voluntary approaches to individual carbon budgeting and trading was less significant than anticipated. There is nevertheless a risk that, without intervention and guidance, planned activities will be incoherent and ill-considered.**

Many of the initiatives identified had not thought through the full implications of running individual carbon trading schemes. Yet some report planning to ‘proceed with trials’, running the risk of trials being ill-conceived and inadvertently undermining the core concept of personal carbon trading. To avoid this, there would be merit in taking action to prevent a confusing array of approaches to voluntary carbon trading emerging ‘in the market’. If a workable, standardised and easy-to-use personal carbon trading scheme and tools were developed for use in voluntary initiatives, there is likely to be extensive interest amongst community initiatives in using such a scheme to engage people to stimulate interest and action on their own carbon emissions.

Recommendations for Government action

Recommendations for the Government emerging from the study, particularly from the stakeholder workshops, include:

Demonstrating and maintaining leadership

- Define the role which it expects the third sector to take in addressing climate change and how this fits into the broader programme of action to curb emissions.
- Promote more clearly and vigorously the full extent of its activities to tackle the threat of climate change, particularly those addressing businesses and energy suppliers.
- Review Government communications on climate change to ensure they create the credible sense of common purpose and collective agency which is necessary to make meaningful actions by communities and individuals.³
- Remove (or at least acknowledge and explain) the apparent inconsistencies in existing policy across Government departments which currently generate cynicism and reluctance to act amongst potentially influential groups and activists. This most notable inconsistency identified by stakeholders is that between the stated goal of achieving significant cuts in carbon emissions and the Government's simultaneous support for airport expansion.

Engaging and supporting the Third Sector

- Provide, either directly or through guidance to other funders such as the Lottery, dedicated and long-term funding for third sector initiatives which engage individuals in behaviour change to cut carbon emissions.
- Support programmes such as Community Action for Energy to provide the advice, training, capacity building and expert input to community initiatives to enable them to embed climate change as a priority within their existing work and future plans.
- Ensure funding is available for sustaining and replicating successful projects, not just for 'innovative' projects. And avoid the repetition of mistakes by making sure that lessons learned from unsuccessful projects are as widely and routinely disseminated as those learned from 'best practice'.
- Engage the third sector further to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of current and future funding programmes, including potentially adding a carbon reduction requirement in all third sector funding.
- Direct the Research Councils to initiate a systematic longitudinal study of community-based initiatives, particularly in the field of sustainable energy, to assess their impact on social norms and individual behaviours with a view to establishing a more robust evidence base for future policy and funding and to improving evaluation techniques.

3 This important issue is examined in more depth in section 6.11 of the Phase 1 report: see www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/individual/index.htm

- Take leadership in the development of standardised approaches and web-based tools to ensure future voluntary approaches by community initiatives to individual carbon budgeting and trading are intellectually coherent and technically consistent.

Driving improvement in local authorities

- Establish clear performance expectations of local authorities in relation to tackling climate change, particularly through engaging communities and individuals. This could be done through both the new local authority performance framework and a duty to reduce carbon emissions.
- Encourage, through funding and facilitation programmes, improved partnership working between third sector and local authorities in relation to delivering low carbon communities.
- Develop guidance and support programmes for local authorities which reflect better an understanding of the factors which contribute to good practice and the lessons which need to be learned to improve on poor practice.

Creating a more effective context for individual action

Third sector and local authority stakeholders alike highlighted the importance of the Government taking stronger action to create more opportunities and rewards for individuals to act to reduce their carbon emissions – and to discourage or penalise failure to act. This would enhance the impact of any local community initiatives by making individual behaviour change easier. Particular areas for Government attention identified were:

- ‘Choice limiting’ by removing more energy inefficient and carbon-intensive products from the market (such as incandescent light bulbs, patio heaters, and portable domestic air conditioning units).
- Providing tax breaks, reduced VAT and other incentives (eg reductions in council tax) to encourage lower carbon product choices and behaviours on a much wider and more significant basis than currently.
- Removing barriers to installation of domestic renewable energy technologies, through provision of generous feed-in tariffs⁴, product and installer standards, and clear guidance on planning rights and requirements.
- Establishing a standardised approach to lifecycle analysis and carbon labelling of products.

In combination, these recommendations to Government⁵ represent a comprehensive programme to engage, encourage and support the third sector and local authorities to fulfil their significant potential to engage individuals in effective action to tackle the threat of climate change.

4 The rate paid by an energy supplier to a householder for the electricity generated from his or her domestic renewable installation.

5 More detail on, and discussion of, these recommendations can be found in the reports produced for this study (for weblinks, see page 3)