

Sustainability Committee

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Inquiry into Carbon Reduction in Wales: Carbon Reduction by Industry and Public Bodies

Response from the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)

Mick Bates AM
Chair - Sustainability Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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Dear Mr Bates

Sustainability Committee Inquiry : Carbon Reduction in Wales

I am writing to introduce the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) and its potential to support Welsh local government's contribution to carbon reduction.

The LGiU is an independent research and information organisation which has represented the interests of local authorities across England and Wales for over 20 years. It has done this by providing practical, independent advice, training and policy support to local councils to assist their strategic leadership and delivery of excellent services at community level. The LGiU's Centre for Local Sustainability is engaged in developing practical yet challenging policies and projects to help local authorities to address issues which stretch, literally, from global to local. This is work with direct relevance to the Committee's area of concern.

Although based in London, the LGiU has a designated officer in Wales and a history of collaborative working with both the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association. The LGiU's particular strength in these partnerships has been its capacity to bring a 'wider-than-Wales' dimension to matters of concern in Wales through jointly organised conferences, training and publications. We are keen and committed to continuing this work in Wales and are in the process of launching a new briefings service specific to Welsh local government.

Submission to the Committee's Call for Evidence: Public Bodies and Industry

The LGiU welcomes the Committee's role and its current scrutiny inquiry on what is, in our view, such an acute issue. The LGiU would argue that local authorities have a unique role to play in terms of sustainability:

as large organisations, local councils are directly responsible for their own energy consumption, procurement and employment;

as the major commissioner/provider of local services, local councils' responsibilities span housing, education, social care, planning and waste;

as strategic leaders, local councils work across public, business and voluntary sectors, charged with facilitating local democratic engagement and driving local sustainable development, as well as shaping wider economic and spatial developments beyond their immediate boundaries.

In the LGiU's view, these factors combine to place local authorities at the heart of the sustainability agenda - and, in particular, at the centre of actions to address climate change mitigation and adaptation by catalysing local action and facilitating a local response to the consequences of this global/local agenda.

In this context, we would like to offer the following specific observations in response to the issues raised in the Committee's call for evidence in relation to the role of public bodies and industry. For the purposes of brevity, we have confined our contribution to those questions on which we have something of substance to offer. We would, of course, welcome chance to discuss these issues in more detail if you felt that might be of value.

Question 3

What particular challenges does Wales face in reducing carbon dioxide emissions from industry and public bodies, and how can these challenges be overcome?

We would identify the key challenges facing local authorities as:

measuring baselines, knowing the level of current consumption and identifying the priority action required to reduce carbon emissions.

accessing information about the simple actions they can take to conserve carbon emissions and the best value long-term investments

that will deliver significant savings.

developing skills and capacity in this area, in particular the kind of financial channels necessary to supporting long-term investment in carbon reduction.

We would propose the following potential solutions:

within their different service areas, local authorities need to identify clear responsibility for recording and monitoring their carbon emissions. This requires clear accounting procedures to ensure accurate, consistent recording of information, In addition, energy suppliers need to provide more accurate statements and councils should investigate smart metering.

many of the actions to reduce carbon emissions already exist - the problem is accessibility! The information requires bringing together so that local authorities can establish their own carbon reduction action plans. The WLGA is already providing consultancy on a wide range of sustainable development activities. The LGiU would be keen to complement that work through the projects in which it is engaged - for example, our Down to Zero leaflets provide practical actions local authorities can take as an organisation, a service provider and a community leader. These leaflets could be easily adapted for the Welsh context and made available to Welsh local authorities.

greater clarity is required on the long-term efficiency savings that can be secured through improved investment in carbon reduction. Clearer channels for resources - grants, use of Energy Saving Companies for instance - and real attention from Value Wales to such matters as whole life costings would be helpful.

Question 4

Do the current Welsh Assembly Government economic development policies give sufficient emphasis to carbon reduction?

Notwithstanding their emphasis upon the importance of sustainable development, the existing economic development policies pre-date the growing sense of clarity and imperative as to the immediate need for carbon reduction. The current policies evidently require revision in that context. Given the fundamental role played by local authorities in development and regeneration at local level, the Assembly Government must engage the contribution, expertise and experience of local authorities in that work.

The specific challenges inherent in embracing both sustainability and development are issues on which the LGiU is devoting attention and which may be of interest to the Committee and the Assembly Government. For example:

Greening Growth: how local government can build the green economy sets out our very recent assessment of the contribution potential of local agencies, such as local authorities, to engineer a transition to sustainable economic development. In particular, it explores "the apparent conflict between economic growth and environmental sustainability and aims to show, through theory and examples of what local authorities are already doing, that one need not cancel the other out. See enclosure.

Question 7

What examples from other administrations (devolved, UK, and overseas), where other means have been used to achieve reductions in carbon dioxide emissions from industry and public bodies, could be adopted in Wales under current powers?

The LGiU is engaged in a rolling programme of policy monitoring and analysis on behalf of its 150 local authority subscribers. This is turned to practical ends through ongoing information exchange with local officers and members - in our output of policy briefings, publications, seminars and conferences. In terms of sustainability, the Climate Change Bill, the Carbon Reduction Commitment, Renewable Energy Directive, planning issues, fuel poverty, flooding, microgeneration, the 'green' aspects of the Lyons Review and the UK Treasury Budget and Energy Measures Report are all issues on which the LGiU has briefed local authorities in the past 6 months.

Unfortunately, our policy information exchange remains focused on support in England with comparatively less dissemination in Wales. Further, it is our concern that the constituent nations of the UK have yet to capitalise on the real strengths offered by devolution - i.e. the benefits of comparing a diversity of innovation, practice and experience. This 'cross border' information exchange remains inadequately resourced and, therefore, insufficiently developed to engage in the kind of ongoing dialogue from which all nations might benefit - and which might assist the Assembly Government's exploitation of its existing powers. It is evident, from our discussions with officers at the WLGA, that there could be real value in progressing this kind of 'cross border' thinking further to the very real benefit of local practitioners and leaders in Wales.

Question 10

How will the Carbon Reduction Commitment affect your business? Should the proposed Commitment be amended in any way?

The LGiU is already engaged in supporting local authorities' obligations in terms of carbon reduction.

DEFRA envisages the imposition of a carbon reduction commitment via a carbon trading scheme which is likely to present a mandatory 'cap-and-trade' scheme for large organisations in the private and public sector. If, as the Department has indicated, schools' carbon emissions are included within local authorities' carbon calculations, the vast majority, if not all, unitary authorities in Wales may fall under such a mandatory commitment. In the LGiU's view, this is a constructive development in terms of carbon reduction - but does present considerable challenges to local authorities in terms of skills, capacity and culture.

We are currently recruiting to a pioneering CO₂ Scheme - carbon trading councils. CO₂ will allow local authorities to experience a

simulation of carbon trading and test their skills and ideas in allow risk environment. It will generate experience and learning with which to inform and support the wider local government family through briefings and events during the year.

Considerable interest has been indicated from local authorities in England and we would urge the Committee to consider the merits of such an approach in Wales.

I do hope that our input is of some value to the Committee and attach relevant supporting documents which may be of interest. We would be more than willing to contribute further in person if you felt that would be helpful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Andy Johnston
Head of the Centre for Local Sustainability, LGiU.