Energy Saving Trust | Practical help

Updated October 2004

Renewable Energy
Information for Scrutiny members

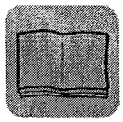
Relevant to: England, Scotland and Wales

Introduction

Scrutiny reviews involve looking in detail at a particular service or policy over a short period and making suggestions about how it can be improved. The end product is a Scrutiny Report, which outlines what is good about a service and what needs changing, together with suggested improvements. Scrutiny reports are debated at council meetings and, if the proposals are accepted, an action plan is created stating when the changes to an existing policy or service will be made.

Ideally, there should be separate Scrutiny of renewable energy if it is not already part of the general environmental Scrutiny process. It is possible for the Head of Scrutiny to set up a separate Scrutiny panel on an ad hoc basis for this purpose.

The Scrutiny process should consist of around three meetings. In the first, the Scrutiny panel should find out exactly what information they will need to know when scrutinising the Council by calling on advice from experts in the field. There is a selection of pertinent questions for this purpose within this briefing note. The second meeting should deal with collating and sending out appropriate questions to the officer(s) responsible for making use of and promoting renewable energy. It would also be appropriate to involve the officer's Head of Service to help ascertain what priority and support is given to his/her area of work. The third meeting should be used for the analysis of the information that the panel have received.


Information


Support


Funding

This briefing note assumes a certain level of knowledge of renewable energy issues. Please refer to the Practical help briefing note on local authorities' use of renewable energy in buildings and facilities for more information.

Strategic issues

The following are some questions that may be asked by a Scrutiny panel.

Does the council have a target for the percentage of electricity consumed in the local area that should be generated from renewable sources? If so, is this in line with national and/or regional targets?

The Government has set a target of producing 15 per cent of England and Wales' electricity from renewable energy by 2015 through the Renewables Obligation (RO). The Energy White Paper, published in February 2003, built upon this and set an aspirational target of 20 per cent to be achieved by 2020.

This national target has been complemented by a series of regional targets in England. For example, the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber has set a regional target of energy to be generated from renewable sources of at least 10 per cent, whilst the Government Office for the South West has demanded a minimum of 11 per cent to 15 per cent (call the local Government Office or check their website for local targets). Some councils have also set their own targets, for example the council-supported Newark and Sherwood Energy Agency has a target of 10 per cent of local electricity generation from renewables by 2010.

The Scottish Executive has gone beyond the UK target and published 'Securing a Renewable Future: Scotland's Renewable Energy' in 2003. This sets its own target for the production of renewable electricity, which currently stands at 40 per cent by 2020.

The RO is the main mechanism through which progress will be made towards the 15 per cent target and beyond, and is an obligation on all licensed electricity suppliers in England and Wales to supply a specified proportion of their electricity supplies from renewable sources. In this way

the Government can actively encourage the increased supply of renewable electricity while leaving the choice of technologies to the market. The RO Scotland works in the same way as the RO for England and Wales but contains the higher target of 18 per cent by 2010 although this has been superseded by the Scottish Executive's target to produce 40 per cent by 2020. For the first and second RO periods (2002-3 and 2003-4 respectively) the technologies which have benefited the most in terms of the number of RO Certificates (ROC) issued were: landfill gas, biomass, large-scale hydro and on-shore wind. Currently, only 3.86 per cent of the UK's total electricity supply comes from renewable sources.

Does the council have a target and a strategy for decreasing carbon dioxide emissions from activities in the local area? If so, what priority is given to renewable energy in this strategy?

The UK Government, as part of the European Union, is a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. This means that the UK is committed to cutting emissions of a 'basket' of six greenhouse gases to 12.5 per cent below 1990 levels over the period 2008 to 2012. In addition, the Government has set a voluntary domestic target of cutting levels of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas, to 20 per cent below 1990 levels by 2010. The devolved administrations have agreed to work towards this overall UK target, with Wales and Scotland producing their own climate change strategies. Increasing the proportion of electricity that comes from renewable sources will play a major role in meeting any commitments to carbon emissions reductions.

The Government recognises that each country and region has its own part to play and is encouraging the creation of local climate change programmes such as those that were implemented under the pilot 'Councils for Climate Protection' programme. This programme has since evolved into the Local Authority Carbon Management Programme managed by the Carbon Trust. The programme provides councils with technical and change management support and guidance to help them realise carbon emissions savings. Through the work a number of different tools have been developed to assist local authorities implement carbon saving initiatives and develop strategies. These are available from the Carbon Trust website at www.thecarbontrust.co.uk.

Carbon dioxide emission targets have also been incorporated into the Regional Planning Guidance produced by the various Government Offices for the English regions. The Regional Spatial Strategies which will replace this guidance should also include renewable energy capacity targets for the region, disaggregated into sub-regional targets where appropriate. A strategy to tackle climate change should address a variety of issues, such as energy efficiency, clean transport and increased use of renewable energy. It should also seek to quantify potential carbon dioxide emissions and savings, broken down by sector, such as transport, domestic buildings, industry and so on. Finally it should detail how those savings will be achieved.

What partnerships has the council made locally to promote and develop renewables?

Partnerships with a range of public and private organisations will be essential in order to increase local renewable capacity. A good example of this type of approach is that encouraged by the Community Renewables Initiative, which is co-ordinated by the Countryside Agency. In ten different areas of England a partnership of organisations, called a Local Support Team, has been formed to help communities devise their own ideas and developments for renewable energy. These partnerships involve local councils, energy experts, Government bodies and other specialists.

In another example of a council partnership, Scarborough Borough Council set up a partnership with the York Energy Efficiency Advice Centre, North York Moors National Park Authority, John Cantor Heat Pumps, several Parish Councils and the Environment Agency to provide ground source heat pumps to hard-to-treat rural homes and farms, for which mains gas is not available.

What other policies does the Council have to encourage the development of renewable energy?

For example, does the Council attempt to promote the environmental benefits of renewable energy generation to individuals and groups within and outside the Council? If so, how successful have these attempts been? Kirklees and Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council's Simply Solar Scheme involves partnership and promotion with a wide variety of organisations including the Hebden Bridge Alternative Energy Centre, Kirklees Energy Services and two solar hot water system manufacturers, Filsol Ltd and AES Ltd. The scheme aims to achieve around 200 installations a year and establish a sustainable solar economy in Kirklees and Calderdale.

Another good way of encouraging the development of renewable energy measures is for the Council to use its own buildings as showcase projects to increase awareness. Examples of this type of project are Craigavon Borough Council's use of wind turbines to power a new watersports centre; Fermanagh District Council in Northern Ireland has used a solar hot water system on their town hall in order to reduce their reliance on electricity for heating hot water within the building; and Cheshire County Council's Kingsmead Primary School has been developed as an exemplar project of sustainable construction, using both energy efficient techniques and renewable energy, including solar photovoltaics (PV), hot water heating and a biomass boiler.

The council's use of renewables

Does the council purchase its own electricity from renewable sources? If so, what proportion?

Several councils purchase some or all of the electricity used in their office buildings and other facilities from renewable sources. Most energy suppliers offer 'renewable energy tariffs' that go beyond their commitments under the RO and although some are at a premium to 'brown' energy (ie that from fossil or nuclear fuel), some councils have managed to negotiate a new green tariff that saves them money based on their old tariff. An example is the London Borough of Lewisham, which has switched to using 100 per cent renewable energy and in the process has managed to realise large savings on its electricity bill. Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council has also signed up to a 100 per cent renewable electricity tariff.

It may be that certain barriers to the increased use of renewable electricity exist within the Council itself. A strategic statement on green purchasing may be required from Councillors who will need convincing of the need for such a strategy and of the likely costs involved. Such support was seen as crucial in the success of Lewisham's bid to use 100 per cent green electricity (referred to above). Support will also need to be garnered from financial departments and/or major decision-makers such as chief executives who may be worried that green electricity will be more expensive than 'brown'. The development of a green procurement strategy would promote council decisions such as purchasing electricity from renewable sources. Green procurement, unlike conventional purchasing decisions, has the opportunity to take into account the full lifecycle impact of a product or service, rather than simply the end of lifetime output. A briefing note on green procurement is available from Practical help.

The purchase of renewable electricity is of particular importance because green electricity is exempt from the Climate Change Levy (CCL). The CCL is a tax on non-domestic fuel, introduced in 2001, which is designed to curb energy use by increasing the cost of non-domestic energy bills (electricity bills increased by 8-10 per cent nationally). Initially, the CCL was revenue neutral to the Government as the increase in revenue from the levy was offset by a reduction in the amount of money an employer is required to spend on their National Insurance contributions, however it is still possible for local authorities to save money by switching to green electricity and avoiding the CCL. More information on the CCL can be found in the relevant Practical help briefing note.

Does the council know what impact the Climate Change Levy has had on its total expenditure?

As stated above, the intention of the CCL is to encourage the uptake of renewable sources of electricity by making non-renewable sources comparatively more expensive. Therefore, it is in the Council's interests to know how much the imposition of the CCL is costing and whether it is possible to increase the amount of renewable electricity the Council uses in order to reduce costs.

By increasing the amount of renewable electricity used in council buildings, the Council can reduce the amount of money it pays as part of the CCL.

What funding opportunities has the council made use of in relation to renewable energy projects?

Does the council have any plans to apply for funding from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Clear Skies programme?

The Clear Skies programme provides funding for projects able to demonstrate a strong community or household interest. However, eligibility is restricted to renewables deployed at the level of households or buildings/land owned by non-profit making organisations.

Is the council utilising grants from the Energy Saving Trust's (EST) solar grants programme for its own buildings and for housing, streetlighting and pay-and-display machines?

This programme is divided into two streams: one focusing on small scale systems producing between 0.5 kiloWatt peak (kWp) and five kWp; and one focusing on systems producing between 5 kWp and 100 kWp. Grants are paid out at a level of 50 per cent of total project costs for small-scale developments, 40 per cent for large scale commercial businesses and 60 per cent for large scale non-commercial organisations.

Is the council attempting to access funds under the EST's Innovation Programme?

This programme encourages local authorities and other key organisations (eg energy suppliers and housing associations) to develop new and innovative ways of delivering carbon savings (70 per cent carbon savings from each scheme should come from the domestic sector, the remaining 30 per cent can be from transport or other sectors). Projects can include, for example, community renewables, solar water heating and/or ground source heat pumps. Funding and technical support are provided at two stages, to help carry out feasibility studies and to implement projects that reduce carbon emissions.

There are a number of additional funding sources to which local authorities can apply for grants to support renewable energy developments and projects. Further information can be obtained from Practical help.

Planning activities

Does the Council's Local Development Framework identify renewable energy as a priority?

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 has brought about the reform of the planning system in England and Wales. Policies set out in Planning Policy Statements (PPS) will need to be taken into account by regional planning bodies in the production of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS), and local planning authorities in their Local Development Documents and Local Development Frameworks. Of particular importance to local authorities, PPSs will be critical to decisions on individual planning applications. Those submitting a planning application know to take the Council's policies into account in order to maximise their chances of getting planning permission. By ensuring that policies on renewable energy are included, those submitting applications will be encouraged, for example, to incorporate solar panels into new build developments.

In England and Wales, PPS11 – Regional Spatial Strategies and PPS12 – Local Development Frameworks has replaced Planning Policy Guidance 11 and 12. PPS11 does not include topic

specific advice, unlike its predecessor, but rather signposts to PPS22 on renewable energy, which must be taken into account by local planning authorities as they prepare their Local Development Documents. PPS12 calls for regard to the conservation of finite resources and non-renewable resources such as land and energy and the need for more sustainable development.

In Scotland National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) 6 on renewable energy was revised in 2000 and is generally a positive document as regards renewable energy developments. A good example is the withdrawal of the requirement on local planning authorities to notify Scottish Ministers of their approval of wind developments consisting of 10 turbines or more.

Appropriate planning for renewable energy requires detailed knowledge and understanding of local environments and economies, as well as the ability to broker agreements between different interests. This is where local authority involvement becomes crucial. In addition, the Government is keen for communities to become involved in determining what renewable resources can acceptably be developed locally, within the national energy supply context.

Again, it may be that barriers to the promotion of renewable energy within the development framework exist within the Council. Concerns over costs and the impact of renewable developments on an area, as well as resistance to change within the Planning Department and among elected members could damage the prospects of such promotion. Education regarding the true nature and cost of renewable developments is important in overcoming such concerns.

Does the council have supplementary planning guidance on renewable energy developments?

A useful way to encourage renewable energy generation through the planning system is via the provision of supplementary planning guidance (SPG) that is relevant to the local area and that complements national guidance. For example, Newark and Sherwood District Council has prepared supplementary guidance relating to proposals for wind turbines in the district. Its purpose is to explain the opportunities that exist for exploiting wind energy in Newark and Sherwood, and to set out in detail the factors that the Council will take into account when determining planning applications for wind turbines.

Leicester's SPG aims to provide practical advice on how to incorporate energy conservation measures and on opportunities for the use of renewable energy. It is intended to support the policies of the City of Leicester Local Plan, which sets out expectations (but not targets) for renewable energy and energy efficiency for the area. The SPG is a comprehensive guide with lots of detail on site access, layout and orientation, overshadowing and microclimate, passive solar, appliances, embodied energy of materials, renewable energy sources (small scale wind/hydro, photovoltaics, biomass, energy from waste) and Combined Heat and Power (CHP).

Has the council undertaken a Community Renewable Energy Planning Study? If so, how does the council's Community Plan promote renewable energy?

The Community Plan is the main overarching strategy for improving quality of life in the local area. Therefore all other council initiatives and strategies should be integrated within it. As the Community Plan is an important high level document, just putting renewable energy targets and objectives in the Plan could provide a useful boost and commit local authorities to taking more action and allocating more resources to renewable energy. The sustainable development objective of community planning also provides potential for raising the profile of existing Local Agenda 21 strategies and processes.

The Community Plan could set innovative targets for energy use and installing small renewable energy schemes in council buildings, schools, hospitals and other public buildings and could complement the Council's Local Development Documents in incorporating renewable energy targets for the locality.

Other partners in the Community Plan, such as the police, health authorities, community and voluntary groups and local businesses could be encouraged to adopt targets for installing micro

renewable energy and energy efficiency measures in their buildings, and generally to encourage the community as a whole to think about renewable energy measures and the social, environmental and economic benefits that they bring. For example, under the Broxtowe Partnership which is leading the Broxtowe Community Plan, Boots the Chemist has set a target to reduce energy use by 10 per cent at identified sites over three years.

Are the departments responsible for putting together the various Local Development Documents being made aware of the environmental benefits and technological state of play of selected renewable energy technologies?

The Government has published a companion guide to PPS22, which contains technical advice and guidance on particular renewable technologies. The companion guide to PPS22 also includes examples of best practice within development plans and developments. This should benefit local planning authorities by allowing the sharing of knowledge and experience, in turn helping to promote renewables.

Does the council have an initiative to promote the environmental benefits of renewable technologies to the planning department and does the planning department have adequate information and published material to promote these technologies to developers and architects?

The planning department should be made aware of the environmental benefits of renewable generation technologies and they should be given literature that they can use to promote the technology to architects and developers during preliminary planning meetings.

London Renewables have recently published a number of resources promoting renewable energy including a toolkit for planners, developers and consultants, 'Integrating renewable energy into new developments'. The toolkit and summary documents designed for a number of particular audiences: planners; developers; councillors; housing associations and architects, are freely available at www.london.gov.uk.

Have renewable technologies ever been written into council policy or the planning specification for a particular development involving council property?

Under current planning law a local authority can make any demands it feels are reasonable when specifying a tender for a building project on its own land. This includes a specification for the fitting of renewable energy generation facilities.

In 2003 Merton Borough Council introduced a renewable energy planning policy into its Unitary Development Plan. The planning condition requires all new commercial premises over 1,000 square metres to generate 10 per cent of their power from on-site renewable energy sources. The rationale for this was to assist in mainstreaming the use of renewable energy technologies and sustainable development principles in building design.

How is the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels viewed in the Local Development Documents?

It may not always be necessary to submit a planning application for the installation of PV panels on an existing building. This is because there is general planning permission or a "permitted development right" available in certain strictly limited circumstances, which may authorise a householder to install PV cells.

However if the local planning authority (LPA) considers that no permitted development right exists and if it is proposed to install PV cells on an existing building, the LPA will have to decide if the PV array would be a material alteration of the external appearance of the building. If the LPA considers it would not be a material alteration, planning permission will not be required. On the other hand, if the LPA considers it would be a material alteration, planning permission will be required. Making PV installations exempt from planning permission removes one of the most significant barriers to their wider implementation.

Further information

EST offers a free enquiries service via our dedicated Practical help team – the team will undertake to answer any query regarding sustainable energy or sustainable road transport within a maximum of 3 working days.

Abbreviations used

CCL	Climate Change Levy
CHP	Combined Heat and Power
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EST	Energy Saving Trust
LPA	Local Planning Authority
kWp	kiloWatt peak
NPPG	National Planning Policy Guidance
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
PV	Photovoltaic
RO	Renewables Obligation
ROC	Renewables Obligation Certificate
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategies
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance

At the time of publication and to the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this briefing note was correct.

Practical help cannot vouch for any of the organisations involved.

Practical help

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