



Committee of the Regions

**DEVE-042**

Brussels, 24 November 2005

**OPINION**

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 17 November 2005 on

**The contribution of local and regional authorities to combating climate change**

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THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

**Having regard to** the request from the UK Presidency of the European Union of 30 June 2005 to draw up an opinion on *The Contribution of Local and Regional Authorities to Combating Climate Change*, under Article 265(1) of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

**Having regard to** its President's decision of 25 July 2005 to instruct its Commission for Sustainable Development to draw up the opinion on this subject;

**Having regard to** the conclusions of the Council of 22 and 23 March 2005, and of the Environment Council of 7 March 2005;

**Having regard to** its opinion of 21 September 2000 on the Green Paper on *Greenhouse-gas emissions trading within the European Union* and the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on *EU policies and measures to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions: Towards a European Climate Change Programme (ECCP)*, COM(2000) 87 final and COM(2000) 88 final - (CdR 189/2000 fin<sup>1</sup>);

**Having regard to** the draft opinion (CdR 65/2005 rev. 1) adopted on 28 June 2005 by its Commission for Sustainable Development on the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *Winning the Battle Against Global Climate Change* (COM(2005) 35 final);

**Having regard to** its draft opinion (CdR 215/2005 rev. 1) adopted on 6 October 2005 by its Commission for Sustainable Development (rapporteur: Cllr. Ken Bodfish, Leader of Brighton and Hove Council (UK/PES));

**Whereas:**

1. the climate is changing. Scientists universally recognise that by 2100 we can expect global temperature increases of 1.4 to 5.8°C;
2. the EU Council of Ministers stated in 1996 that it "believes that global average temperatures should not exceed two degrees above pre-industrial levels";
3. the effects of climate change will be felt across the globe and at the local level above all, through impacts such as reduced crop production; floods; forest fires; soil damage and erosion; restrictions on water use; damage to road and rail infrastructure; biodiversity loss; interrupted power supply;

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<sup>1</sup>

[OJ C 22, 24.1.2001, p. 30](#)

reduced fossil fuel reserves; structural damage and subsidence; heat island<sup>2</sup> and air quality problems;

4. extreme weather conditions such as flooding already have a significant impact on the European economy, and could prove catastrophic with further predicted climate change;
5. it is recognised that prevention of climate change does achieve results, but a combination of mitigation and adaptation to the already emerging effects of climate change will also be needed;
6. local and regional authorities play a major role in monitoring and assessing climate change and informing local and regional communities of potential impacts, as well as developing strategies to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change and promoting sustainable energy use;

**unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 62nd plenary session, held on 16 and 17 November 2005 (meeting of 17 November):**

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## **1. Views of the Committee of the Regions**

The Committee of the Regions

### **Introduction**

- 1.1 **welcomes** the leadership demonstrated so far by the European Commission and Council of Ministers on climate change and urges this commitment to continue within the forthcoming post-2012 climate change policy and beyond;
- 1.2 **appreciates** the commitment shown by the Council of Ministers in March 2005 by agreeing to further emissions reductions targets, and urges the EU to strengthen its focus on the global response to climate change to ensure that this commitment is matched elsewhere;
- 1.3 **emphasises** that local and regional authorities have a pivotal and indispensable role in climate security. Local and regional government is where responsibility to promote the well-being of an area, delivery of key services, influence over how people live and work, enforcement powers, practical know-how and democratic legitimacy, all come together. Local and regional government can contribute to a stable climate by using sustainable energy in a way no other single organisation can match;

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<sup>2</sup>

On warm days the air in urban areas can be up to around 4°C higher than surrounding areas. In cities the combination of extensive urban and suburban landscapes combined with little wind and little cloud cover leads to "heat island" effects.

- 1.4 **considers** that there should be greater universal recognition of the comprehensive role that local and regional authorities can play in combating climate change. As such they should be adequately resourced to do so;
- 1.5 **highlights** that those most adversely affected by climate change are often the poorest, both in the EU and externally, and their ability to adapt to the effects of climate change is often limited. Tackling climate change must include a greater focus on tackling fuel poverty and energy efficiency improvements, and enabling communities to be more resilient in the face of anticipated future impacts;
- 1.6 **believes** that the energy hierarchy must be at the heart of all policies:
- a) Reduce the need for energy
  - b) Use energy more efficiently
  - c) Use renewable energy
  - d) Any continuing use of fossil fuels to be clean and efficient;
- 1.7 **notes** that there are often many benefits to be realised regionally and locally from tackling climate change, including improvements for the competitiveness of the regional economy.
2. **Climate change as an opportunity, not simply a threat**
- 2.1 **stresses** that climate change poses a direct security threat to Europe, through the increasing fragility of the security supply as fossil fuels dwindle, and negative impacts caused by changing weather patterns. Europe as a whole will face rising insurance costs, and in many cases property will become uninsurable;
- 2.2 **suggests** that climate change presents one of the greatest threats to our way of life, but also presents major opportunities to build a more sustainable, inclusive and competitive future;
- 2.3 **considers** that the experiences of local and regional government have a great deal to contribute to the future EU climate change policy. To this end, a series of short case studies are highlighted below considering some of the key themes for action on climate change and highlighting recommendations for the future.

### 3. **Examples of local and regional action**<sup>3</sup>

#### 3.1 **Promoting excellence and exchange of good practice**

Partnerships to promote expertise can strengthen and coordinate delivery of local and regional climate change strategies as well as disseminate knowledge and exchange good practice. The experience of local and regional authority partnership has demonstrated significant results and should inform European and national policies.

**The Climate Star Awards**, founded by Climate Alliance, awards exemplary activities in tackling climate change and documents the experiences gained and successes achieved across Europe. As well as rewarding excellence it promotes exchange between local and regional authorities. National schemes such as the **Beacon Council Scheme** on sustainable energy (**England and Wales**) also focus on exchange and communicating challenges faced at the local level.

#### 3.2 **Promoting renewable energy**

The threats to climate security mean that we will increasingly need to look to generate energy locally. Locally generated energy is often more efficient as it is transmitted over shorter distances. Local and regional government holds the key to the development of more renewable energy capacity. Through its role in planning and procurement, it is a major steward of local energy capacity and consumption. Development of local renewable energy is also vital to building a local skills and technology base. However, the commitment being shown at the local level is not matched by high-level commitment within the EU. This must be changed if we are to establish the skills and technology for a competitive low carbon future.

The **City of Malmö (Sweden)**, through the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives' Cities for Climate Protection programme, has built a new urban district with 1000 dwellings, which is supplied with 100% renewable energy. The energy supply is based on local resources of sun, wind and water together with energy from refuse and sewage from the district. The dwellings are fitted with individual electricity metering to ensure that the City can identify energy usage patterns and plan for renewable capacity accordingly.

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The following examples have been gathered through direct knowledge and local government networks across the EU. Many examples are from the UK, as a result of national climate change projects by the respective national local government associations in the UK. The rapporteur recognises that there are many further examples throughout the EU and welcomes a stronger focus on promoting exchange internationally supported by the EU.

### 3.3 **Measuring, and decreasing, the carbon footprint locally**

Local and regional authorities can play a major role in assessing and guiding the use of energy and the carbon footprint of their local community, including domestic and commercial energy use. To achieve this, more emphasis must be placed on developing tools to assess carbon impacts and increasing access to verifiable data on energy consumption.

**The Europe-wide DISPLAY** campaign helps local authorities and their municipal buildings calculate their energy usage through specialised software. It also encourages them to display energy consumption data in a user friendly way in public buildings to help promote energy efficiency awareness.

### 3.4 **Tackling climate change - a full range of social, environmental and economic benefits**

Adapting to low-energy consumption and production patterns will offer a higher quality of life for local citizens by reducing their exposure to risk, improving the safety on streets by promoting more sustainable mobility, and developing more comfortable homes irrespective of weather conditions. All of these improvements will be delivered through local and regional government working to promote local action and establishing more localised markets and improved resource management in the community.

**Brighton and Hove Council (England)** has established an Energy Action Partnership that focuses on delivering a more comfortable home environment to those most at risk, including the elderly and those in smaller dwellings, as well as people recently discharged from hospital. By 2005, just two years into the Partnership, it has improved the home environment of 361 private sector households and realised annual savings of 128 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. The streamlined grant administration procedures and careful construction of the Partnership tendering have helped the Partnership to deliver significant benefits to the community within a short period.

Working with the Scottish local authority of Midlothian, the **City of Heerlen (The Netherlands)** is developing a district heating system that uses hot water from abandoned coal mines to heat local buildings. This technology is combined with a massive growth in the use of solar power, including in municipal buildings to ensure a wide spread of innovation and awareness of renewable energy across the city and into the neighbouring communities in Germany.

### 3.5 **Promoting local action on a range of policies**

Existing buildings, settlements, livelihoods and lifestyles need to be adapted to ensure that we can cope with unpredictable, varied and potentially extreme weather. Simplicity, robustness and short supply lines will assist communities to achieve this. Resilience to climate change

can be improved by making sure that basic needs such as food, warmth, light, and amenities such as shopping are met as locally as possible.

**Bristol City Council (England)** is working on a Food for Life pilot scheme in 20 of the area's schools – buying unprocessed, fresh, seasonal healthy food for school dinners – the Council is working in partnership with the Primary Healthcare Trust and the Soil Association.

### 3.6 **Promoting job growth**

Climate change and sustainable energy strategies present an opportunity to address the fundamental problems threatening our communities, and develop a strong expertise and skills base for the future. Partnerships between the local community, local and regional government, the education and healthcare sector and, importantly, private companies will result in a stronger sense of common purpose and a strong "invest to save" approach.

**Newark and Sherwood District Council (England)** has almost eliminated fuel poverty among residents in public sector housing. In 1984, just 6% of dwellings were capable of delivering affordable warmth - now, 98.4% do as a result of investment in energy efficiency. The improvement programmes have created 30 jobs locally each year for 18 years. The overall spend for 7,500 properties will have been approximately EUR 24 million (£16 million) for the period 1988-2008. As well as creating jobs, Newark has witnessed an improved performance in schools and fewer mental health problems. The Council has found that the associated benefits paid for themselves within four years.

### 3.7 **Improving the health and well-being of the local community**

Fuel poverty affects many households in Europe and poses a significant health threat. Similarly, excessive heat in recent summers has already resulted in higher than average deaths from heat exhaustion. Local and regional authorities can work with their housing stock, and through building and planning regulations and more efficient heating and other appliances, to ensure that homes will be more comfortable and less susceptible to external weather conditions, whilst ensuring that the overall carbon footprint is reduced through better ventilation and improved energy efficiency.

**Carrick District Council (England)**, together with tenant associations and other members of the Beacon Community Regeneration Partnership, implemented energy efficiency improvements in the Beacon Housing Estate in Falmouth, once one of the most deprived areas in Cornwall. In terms of results: energy efficiency improvements have been made to 900 homes; central heating and insulation measures have been installed in 300 properties in the first year, and a total of EUR 274 000 (£186 000) was saved on fuel bills. The Regeneration Partnership believes a range of other changes can also be attributed to the housing improvements: there have been health improvements among residents, including a 50% drop in the numbers suffering from asthma; the local school reports a 100%

improvement in the standard school examination results of boys; the crime rate has dropped dramatically, including a reduction in domestic violence incidents and the number of children on the "Children at Risk" Register; vandalism is at an all-time low; there is increased employment; more people are wanting to move to the estate; and there is a remarkable upswing in community spirit.

The population of **Lewenborg (The Netherlands)** has suffered with health complaints as a result of moisture in their homes, problems with heating, and draughts. The city of Groningen is coordinating a project with the Province of Groningen, a federal agency, consultants and a large bank to undertake energy audits of the homes and provide low-cost mortgages to homeowners to help them improve the climate in their homes at no additional cost. The result has been improved health and lower energy bills.

### 3.8 **Changing behaviour patterns**

Local and regional authorities must work together with the private sector and other areas of the public sector to establish partnerships that lead to a low energy vision. This exercise has already been undertaken in England and Wales where the national Local Government Association has developed a vision of "Anytown" 2025 where it would be possible to develop a more sustainable community using technology that already exists. This sustainable future uses electric vehicles, more green space, combined heat and power generation and a street layout that discourages the use of cars, without having to develop any new technology. This type of vision should become a feature of policies such as the future Thematic Strategy on Urban Environment in order to help local and regional authorities take decisions to get them to a more sustainable future using existing technology and know-how.

The Mayor of **London** introduced Europe's first daily congestion charge in February 2002. The scheme has successfully reduced traffic congestion by 30% and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions within the charging zone are now 20% lower than 2002 levels. With fewer cars on the roads, journey speeds of public transport have increased and more and more Londoners are now choosing to cycle to work. The extra revenue created has helped to improve public transport in London. Other initiatives of the Mayor of London designed to tackle climate change include the launch of the new London Climate Change Agency. In partnership with private sector firms, the Agency will deliver low and zero-carbon energy projects across London using the very cleanest technologies and provide new economic development opportunities. The Mayor is also planning to introduce a Low Emission Zone, banning the most polluting lorries, coaches, buses and taxis from the streets of greater London by 2008.

In **Italy**, more than 350 local and provincial authorities have adopted and applied Local Agendas 21, and in 1999 they set up an association to extend and disseminate the approach and the results of implementing local integrated plans. Working on the basis of a set of indicators, each town or city has drawn up a strategy for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by cutting energy consumption and raising the awareness of various categories and target groups of



citizens, including schools, promoting a shared environmental culture and carrying out schemes and information campaigns targeted at the short, medium and long term.

### 3.9 **Energy services, rather than energy itself**

Society must be encouraged to recognise that people do not want to consume energy itself, but want the services or benefits that energy can provide, such as warmth and lighting and private transport. Some of these benefits associated with energy can be established without energy itself by designing buildings to be warmed by the sun and allowing people to access the services they need without using cars.

The principle of "contract energy management" should be more widely rolled out across the EU to ensure that all communities can access the energy savings that Energy Savings Companies (ESCO) can bring. Clients benefit from ESCO's provision of energy by having a modernised energy system without needing to invest in or manage them. ESCOs act not simply as energy providers but also to provide energy services such as energy efficiency measures. Local authorities play an indispensable role as trusted intermediaries for energy projects through arranging for the installation of energy efficient appliances and providing grants for energy efficiency improvements in municipal housing. Local authorities are ideally placed to extend the potential for energy savings by establishing ESCOs, or encouraging energy companies to become ESCOs themselves by installing packages of measures for householders and recoup the costs for energy savings. It is vital that the local or regional authority is involved to ensure that all aspects of the domestic and business market can access energy savings.

### 3.10 **Using energy more efficiently**

The EU must focus on getting more benefit per unit of the energy we do consume, such as using higher-efficiency appliances, generating heat and power together, and insulating buildings to retain heat.

In 1990, **Leicester City Council (England)** set an objective to reduce consumption of energy and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 50% by the year 2025. A central focus has been monitoring the energy used in the city through intelligent metering that feeds data back into the Council every 30 minutes from around the City. The Council has also established an Energy Centre providing a comprehensive energy service to all parts of the community, including the sale of efficient and renewable energy appliances. The Energy Centre has pioneered the development of low carbon technologies by promoting these technologies and acting as a liaison between customers and contractors. This has involved the training of local tradespeople in the installation of low carbon technologies.

### 3.11 **Procuring renewable energy wherever possible**

Local and regional authorities are responsible for 16% of all GDP in Europe. Many authorities now specify some form of renewable energy for some or all of their consumption, and make it a criterion for the construction of new dwellings.

The **London Borough of Lewisham** has adopted a green energy procurement policy since 1999. By November 2000, 100% renewable electricity was procured, and it became the third largest purchaser of green energy in Western Europe. The lack of stability in the supply of green electricity meant that when the second tender process was established in 2004, only 80% of its electricity was renewable. Lewisham's aim was to assist in the creation of a market for renewable electricity and many local authorities and public sector bodies are now following suit.

### 3.12 **Mainstreaming climate change and "climate-proofing"**

EU, national, regional and local policies should be "climate-proofed" to ensure they are consistent with the threat of climate security. This could be achieved through the use of Regulatory Impact Assessments, but also by applying pressure on national governments to consider developing fiscal incentives towards more sustainable patterns of energy usage.

**Middlesborough Borough Council (England)** has developed an assessment procedure to identify the impacts of climate change across a range of the Council's services. A climate change impact assessment module was developed in cooperation with an NGO and has allowed all services within the Council to assess the potential impact of changing weather patterns on the services they deliver. As a result, from the 16 service areas that have now undertaken the assessment, there have been changes to service provision including: increased resources to highways services in the event of floods; shading to be installed around municipal buildings to avoid overheating and excessive glare; and the re-grading of bituminous road surfacing to factor in additional heat loads likely to be experienced in the next 20 years.

### 3.13 **Community engagement through climate change**

The scale of the climate security challenge means that adaptation and mitigation of climate change will only have a real impact if it is tackled by all aspects of society, from local and regional government, to consumers and businesses. It will also require a full package of measures to ensure that we can make the most of the improved quality of life that tackling climate change can comprehensively deliver. Many of the climate change solutions that have been highlighted here will only work as part of an integrated package of measures. For instance, a large reduction in private car use would only be acceptable to most people if there were high quality local amenities and good, sustainable public transport. The impact of less private car use would lead to reduced traffic and the freer movement of goods and services,

improving the flow of public transport, as experienced in the congestion charging zone in Central London. This in turn makes other forms of sustainable mobility, such as cycling, more attractive. To achieve such a "virtuous circle" of improvement, all aspects of the community must be engaged.

**The London Borough of Islington** has developed a scheme of "Energy Ambassadors" who are trained in energy efficiency and community engagement. They undertake visits with local residents, SMEs and schools, to highlight the Borough's energy usage and methods to reduce energy usage through the provision of energy health checks for buildings.

#### 4. **The Committee of the Regions' recommendations**

The Committee of the Regions

- 4.1 **calls on** the Commission to recognise that climate change must be tackled through a portfolio approach, through cooperation between all spheres of government, in partnership with the private sector, healthcare, community and education groups, and with energy efficiency organisations;
- 4.2 **calls on** the Commission to recognise the unique role of local and regional government and to provide adequate resources for demonstration and dissemination projects and to make this role overt within policy documents such as the future White Paper on Energy Efficiency;
- 4.3 **asks** that the EU commits to the further 60-80% emissions reductions targets by 2050 agreed at the March 2005 European Council as a minimum, and ensure that this same level of ambition is reflected in international fora including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;
- 4.4 **welcomes** the emphasis on climate change within the current Presidency of the EU and the G8, and calls on the future Presidencies of the EU to continue this focus;
- 4.5 **encourages** the Commission and national governments to "climate proof" their own policies and those of the World Trade Organisation and international financial institutions such as the World Bank;
- 4.6 **calls on** the Commission to undertake efforts to remove the most inefficient energy using products by raising the minimum permissible energy efficiency levels of appliances by 10 per cent or 20 per cent every few years in all categories where there is a significant difference in energy consumption between the best and worst;
- 4.7 **asks** the Commission to recognise that the significant growth in the provision of new dwellings that will be required to meet rising populations, especially in urban areas, provides a major opportunity to establish mandatory standards of energy efficiency in buildings much

higher than the 2002 Energy Performance in Buildings Directive. This opportunity should not be missed. Buildings standards should also focus more on promoting the use of natural shade and ventilation to reduce the reliance on climate control;

- 4.8 **supports** the integration of climate change into water resource plans and management;
- 4.9 **asks** the Commission to work closely with the private sector to develop new forms of insurance that recognise and respond to climate change;
- 4.10 **asks** the Commission to ensure that local and regional authorities have greater and more uniform access to locally-meaningful real-time consumption data of contemporary validity to the lowest postcode/zipcode level whilst protecting the privacy of individual users. Without this information it is impossible for local and regional authorities to fully guide the move towards a low-carbon economy;
- 4.11 **calls for** the Commission to consider the contribution of local climate change strategies and actions to the Lisbon Strategy goals of jobs, growth and competitiveness, and establish stronger links between the Lisbon policy agenda and climate change policies;
- 4.12 **calls on** the Commission and national governments to establish a single communication campaign, in cooperation with local and regional authorities, to identify and communicate the urgency of the situation of climate change and the need for immediate action;
- 4.13 **appeals to** the Commission to build on existing work undertaken at the local and regional level about the gender and social inequalities of the impacts of climate change to ensure that women do not suffer the impacts of climate change disproportionately<sup>4</sup>;
- 4.14 **supports** the proposal to use mainstream regional policy funding for sustainable development (and climate change);
- 4.15 **calls on** the Commission to promote strong links between the forthcoming Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment and the Thematic Strategy on Air Quality to ensure a strong commitment to tackling climate change across all policy areas;
- 4.16 **calls on** the Council of Ministers to commit to higher and more long-term renewable energy targets to enable local decision-makers to drive forward local renewable energy capacity;

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According to recent research undertaken by Climate Alliance, [www.klimabuendnis.org](http://www.klimabuendnis.org).

- 4.17 **calls on** the Commission to commit to working with local and regional authorities and their European networks to develop a strong vision for a low carbon future for different types of municipalities and geographies making the best use of existing technology and developing the necessary skills base to realise a truly low carbon future. This must be facilitated by the Commission through a stronger focus on exchange of practice from the local and regional level.

Brussels, 17 November 2005

The President  
of the  
Committee of the Regions

The Secretary-General  
of the  
Committee of the Regions

Peter Straub

Gerhard Stahl

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