

Exemplary role of the public sector

In a nutshell

SUMMARY
It is best practice to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• show ambition by exceeding existing national or international targets for the local authority's own energy use and for the energy use of its territory, with a firm commitment from the highest levels of the municipality and the engagement of the other relevant stakeholders;• lead by example: the municipality can implement exemplary measures and achieve exemplary energy performance levels, both to demonstrate that it is possible and to foster the local market for sustainable energy solutions; the municipality can also deliver flagship projects to showcase the public authority's commitment to sustainability;• communicate effectively to the general public: the public administration needs to be seen to be delivering the ambition in order to encourage other stakeholders to follow suit;• support the creation of incentives schemes: create local schemes to finance residents in their actions to reduce their environmental impact;• help overcome institutional barriers for the adoption of sustainable energy solutions.
Target group
Local authorities
Applicability
This best practice is applicable to all local public administrations.
Environmental performance indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivery of flagship and demonstration projects (y/n)• Achievement of an ambitious level of energy performance across all buildings and activities of the public administration (y/n)
Benchmarks of excellence
N/A

Description

Public administration has a leading role to play in driving carbon reductions and it is important that successes (and failures) are showcased in order to encourage individuals, organisations and businesses to play their part. Research shows that although the general public is concerned about climate change and understands the need to take action, they want government in general to take the lead in driving change. Because of its direct relationship with citizens, the engagement and leadership of local government in delivering change can have a particularly positive knock-on effect in changing residents' and businesses' behaviour and encouraging them to take individual actions.

Municipalities that have taken a leading role have undertaken the following actions:

- Showing ambition and engaging stakeholders;
- Leading by example;
- Communicating effectively with the general public;
- Supporting the creation of incentive schemes;
- Helping overcome institutional and infrastructural barriers.

1. Showing ambition and engaging stakeholders

The most successful municipalities are usually the ones that show ambition and encourage residents and businesses to share that ambition. This can involve committing to being carbon free (e.g. Siena, Italy), aiming to become a European Green Capital (e.g. Copenhagen, Denmark) or a One Planet City (e.g. Brighton & Hove, UK). These ambitions are impossible for the public authority to achieve on its own and require engagement of the wider municipality.

Ambitions should:

- Exceed existing national or international targets;
- Involve commitment from the highest levels of the municipality (mayor, council); and
- Require engagement of other stakeholders.

Such ambitions should be supported and delivered through an explicit strategy and action plan. This could focus purely on carbon or energy, but ideally should be broader and cover issues of economy, culture and environment. Authorities should be aware that carbon cutting is not the primary concern of the majority of people and to get broad engagement wider benefits should be highlighted, for example household savings or improved health.

An independent forum to engage with the municipality and hold it to account on its ambition is a good way to encourage wider “ownership” of the programme. This forum can be formal or informal, but often requires the authority to support its development. For example, the Bristol Green Capital Partnership has over 500 member organisations and an independently elected chair and vice chair, while also receiving funding from the City Council to support its operations. The partnership meets quarterly on a formal basis and has monthly informal meetings to encourage dialogue between its members (Bristol Green Capital Partnership, 2014).

2. Leading by example

The public authority should show the same ambition for its own properties and operations as the wider municipality. In fact, it should hold itself to a higher standard in order to show best practice. This can involve:

- Embedding the ambition in its operations (e.g. via EMAS) and communications;
- Inducting staff and ensuring job descriptions are consistent with the ambition;
- Having a strategy to address its own properties and operations;
- Supporting external organisations to help deliver the ambition;
- Showcasing successes and being honest about failures; and
- Sharing knowledge with other municipalities.

3. Communicating effectively with the general public

It is not enough to simply deliver the actions required to meet the ambition, the municipality needs to be seen to be delivering the ambition in order to encourage other stakeholders to follow. This could involve:

- Creating a brand around the ambition, e.g. “Terre di Siena, carbon free 2015”, and encouraging others to use the brand if they meet certain requirements. Usually these requirements are not too expensive or onerous. For example in Siena, organisations need to “undertake environmentally sound practices that reduce CO₂ emissions”. These

brands generate a sense of collective action and encourage organisations and people to take additional action (Terre di Siena Green, 2014).

- Publishing brochures and reports, delivering TV/radio/internet campaigns, and holding events and workshops to discuss the ambition and individual projects.
- Prominently displaying and explaining Energy Performance Certificates in public buildings.

4. Supporting the creation of incentive schemes

Financing the installation of reduction and generation measures can be a major barrier to reducing energy use. Municipalities are often able to access finance that is not available to private residents or commercial entities. This power can be used to leverage additional funding and create local schemes to deliver low carbon measures. For example, Bristol City Council applied for funding from the European Investment Bank's European Local Energy Assistance (ELENA) programme to develop investment programmes in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects in the city and the wider region – with an estimated potential investment of up to £140m (€175m) (Bristol City Council, 2014). This involved delivering measures in its own offices and other properties, but also in private residential properties, resulting in a city-wide retrofit programme launched in autumn 2014.

More information on private-public energy schemes can be found in the best practice on Information and advice services on energy efficiency and renewable energy for citizens and businesses and set-up of public-private partnerships.

5. Helping overcome institutional and infrastructural barriers

Municipalities have a unique role in towns and cities and their power extends beyond actively delivering projects. Some barriers are created by the municipality, for example their policy towards renewable energy on council housing or buildings may hinder installation if permission is too difficult to obtain, and they can facilitate change by changing policies and engaging with ambitious local organisations. Other issues are not barriers but the municipality can help enable sustainable practice, for example, Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a voluntary measure (Planning Advice Note) into their planning policy guiding new developments to facilitate local food growing where practical, e.g. in rooftop allotments for high density apartment blocks (Brighton & Hove Council, 2011). As a result 38% of proposed developments in the city contained food growing provisions (Sustainable Food Cities, 2014).

Authorities can also help overcome barriers where they deliver services such as waste collection, or have powers over infrastructure or transport.

Environmental benefits

The environmental benefits are varied but can be substantial. Some example benefits are:

- Siena achieved its ambition of being carbon free (net zero carbon) by 2015 two years early (EC, 2014a).
- Bristol domestic energy use reduced by 16 % (2005 to 2010), and the energy efficiency of housing improved by 25% (2001 to 2011) (EC, 2014b).
- Salerno (Italy) installed a 24 MW solar photovoltaic plant (UCLG, 2011), reducing total municipality emissions by 2.5% (Salerno Council, 2012).
- Freiburg achieved an 18% reduction (1992 baseline) in CO₂ emissions by 2009, below the target of 25% by 2010 but still a significant achievement (Freiburg Council, 2010).

Side effects

Individual projects undertaken by a public authority may have negative impacts on other environmental pressures, but the exemplary role of the public sector that this best practice describes does not in itself.

For example, a ground-mounted solar photovoltaic array could be installed on land that could be used for producing food or for wildlife. This would be a negative environmental impact in terms of food production or biodiversity, although this does not mean the project should not go ahead as it may be judged that the sustainable energy benefits outweigh this negative

impact. However, if the project creates controversy or is seen to be at odds with the municipality's public commitments it could damage its reputation.

Applicability

This best practice is applicable to all municipal and regional governments across Europe

Economics

As a minimum this best practice requires staff time and promotional costs. However, much of this should fall within existing budgets. Individual projects are usually subject to cost-benefit analysis and many projects generate significant financial benefits or help achieve strategic aims for the authority (such as job creation).

For example, City of Copenhagen's total cost reducing energy consumption in buildings in Copenhagen is expected to be at least €22.8m up to 2025. However, there will be a total economic saving of about €210m by reducing heat consumption by 20% and electricity consumption by 20% respectively in companies and 10% in households (City of Copenhagen, 2012).

Bristol City Council's Strategic Energy Unit received €3m European Investment Bank funding to deliver energy saving and renewable energy measures in the city, with a requirement to secure 25 times the funding in external investment to finance the projects. Some of the projects will reduce the council's own energy consumption, delivering direct financial benefits.

Driving forces for implementation

There can be multiple reasons for public administrations wishing to be exemplary. These may be political (a desire for the governing party/parties to show that they are achieving the public's ambitions), or to foster a sense of civic pride in its citizens. However, possibly the most important reason is that the administration may have commitments in the following areas and cannot achieve them without engaging the wider community.

These include:

- Carbon reduction commitments
- Reducing costs
- Mitigation against rising energy costs
- Improving the local economy (green jobs)
- Reducing poverty
- Reducing vulnerability to climate change impacts
- Improving health (e.g. via improved air quality from reduced transport)

Reducing waste

Reference organisations

Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano/Bozen, Italy

The Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen in Italy refurbished the public building "Ex-Post" to PassivHaus standard, the first public building in Italy to do so (PLEA, 2008).

Brighton & Hove City Council, UK

One Planet City
Bristol City Council, UK
European Green Capital 2015
City of Copenhagen, Denmark
European Green Capital 2014, aiming for carbon neutral by 2025
Stadt Freiburg, Germany
Green City
Provincia di Siena, Italy
Carbon free by 2015
Comune di Salerno, Italy
Energy strategy and public engagement

Literature

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