

Service delivery case study

Beacon theme	Sustainable energy
Authority name	Shropshire County Council
Case study title	Partnership working

Overview of service delivery

A climate change strategy has been guiding this area of work in Shropshire since 2000. Within this framework, corporate and community actions have been developed, recognising that there is no one single solution to climate change, but rather a portfolio of locally appropriate solutions covering a variety of issues, including transportation, education, waste and construction.

Addressing the unsustainable use of energy and developing locally appropriate responses to the threat of climate change are very great challenges. Shropshire County Council acknowledges that it doesn't have all of the answers to these global issues, which is why partnership working is key to the progress being made in the county.

Two organisations are better than one, which is why in 1995, the county council decided to apply for European funding to set up the Shropshire Energy Team, to champion the sustainable energy agenda. The organisation, now renamed Marches Energy Agency (MEA), is one of nearly 400 similar bodies established across European Union member states, to encourage the rational use and production of energy. In Shropshire, the county council and MEA, with additional partners, have begun to define how a rural, sparsely populated county, accepts the climate change challenge, and responds in practical and appropriate ways.

In partnership with Marches Energy Agency, Shropshire County Council works with different types of organisations across the English Marches. A partnership approach has proved invaluable in creating the spark to challenge the old ways of doing things, both internally and externally. No single body has all of the answers to climate change, and working in partnership is the key to working effectively.

Other organisations, such as churches or the Women's Institute, may have a 'branch in every village', and working with such bodies can lead to effective changes in behaviour.

On a strategic level, vital new partnerships - not just at the local scale, but regionally, nationally and internationally - have been facilitated through project work and cooperation. This has led to the inclusion of sustainable energy objectives into the regional planning guidance and Shropshire's integrated community strategy.

Below are a few examples of the approach to partnership working in the county.

Objectives

Know your baseline and where you are going - the Councils for Climate Protection project, in partnership with International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, was a defining partnership project in Shropshire, which started in 2000. This defined the carbon dioxide emissions - both corporately and within the wider community - and provided a route map to a reduce carbon emissions in Shropshire.

Let the carbon lead you - don't focus on specific technologies. Locally appropriate solutions will become apparent, and these need to be across a variety of technologies - from the simple low energy light bulb, to the generation of renewable energy. It is essential to avoid the 'one size fits nobody' approach.

Use different methods to engage different organisations - work with South Shropshire Housing Association is helping to deliver a low carbon future in the county. The Carbon Forum has been established to initially help social landlords in Shropshire understand and benefit from the significant support available for low carbon dwellings. This is especially significant in Shropshire, where much of the county is without mains gas, and has to rely on often expensive and carbon intensive alternatives.

In Bishops Castle, a community group called The Wasteless Society forms the main method of communication with the wider community on the 'BC2AD' Project (Bishops Castle to Active Decarbonisation), where they have developed one of the country's first community climate change strategies. This rural community produces 40 per cent above the national average CO₂ per household - a result of having no access to mains gas and an eclectic housing mix.

Using local people to contact their neighbours about climate change and behavioural change is much more successful than any kind of cold call or mail shot from a large organisation.

Engage different organisations to get your message out - the Anglican Church is one of the few organisations which has a 'branch in every village' in Shropshire. 'Congregations for a Low Carbon Future' is seeking to use the network of faith groups across the county to coordinate sustainable energy action in communities. The project - funded by the Energy Saving Trust - is aiming to help individuals care for creation in a very practical way.

In a similar vein, the Women's Institute has more 215,000 members nationally, with 3,700 members in Shropshire. This community of interest has been identified as a key conduit for the sustainable energy message. Thus Shropshire WISE (Women's Institute Sustainable Energy) was conceived as an Energy Saving Trust Innovation Fund feasibility study. Shropshire WISE will explore the potential of the WI, as catalysts for positive action to tackle climate change within their own communities. This project expects to publish its findings in autumn 2005, with a view to implementing the findings thereafter.

Look for partners with similar concerns - a partnership between the Environment Agency and Shropshire County Council has led to a resource assessment of waste frying oil as a potential raw material for the manufacture of biodiesel. There is also a promotions campaign encouraging people to use the fuel in the West Midlands.

Bring in expertise when required - GFleet Services, an environmental transport consultancy, who share an office with Marches Energy Agency, are another key partner to progress sustainable energy actions in the transport sector. Work with the county council includes an analysis of the taxi fleet used, and optimising the routes taken by mobile library vans.

Methodology

The methodology of working in partnership must vary, depending on whom you are trying to engage.

For larger organisations used to formal structures and systems, a formal approach works very well.

However, if this approach is brought down to the local community level, it does not engage ordinary people. In order to create real behavioural change, a person-to-person approach is required, with a large element of hand-holding, particularly where technologies or billing issues are being discussed. This approach is very time consuming, but also very successful. The key to engaging people seems to be in giving them the responsibility for both understanding the situation, and being able to do something about it for themselves.

Examples of the methodologies used within the various projects include person-to-person visits to individual households, talks at public gatherings, themed evening events, questionnaires, and displays. The more formal projects work through more robust structures, with steering groups directing the project on behalf of all the partners.

Outcomes

The level of engagement generated by individual, focussed projects, appears to be very high. This is because they are designed around specific interest groups – housing associations, WI members, geographical village communities etc. Many of our projects are in the early stages, but indicate the huge potential that this type of approach can unlock. The feasibility reports indicate

savings in the region of 96,000 tonnes CO2 for the Congregations project as it is implemented over the next two years. Similar savings are expected from the WI project if the feasibility study is successful.

Positive learning points

- working with a variety of organisations can bring fresh ideas and perspectives
- local people know how to engage other local people, and this can often be the best method of making progress, leading to long-term change
- people are interested in the issue of climate change and want to know what to do about it. If you give them the practical tools that they can use in an easy and accessible format, they will act

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