

Promoting the development of sustainable energy at the local level: the role of community participation

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Abstract

Local authorities in England and Wales have a duty to produce a Community Strategy to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of their area. This paper will examine how a Community Planning framework, developed to enable the production of these strategies, can facilitate greater uptake of sustainable energy by local communities.

This paper will first examine a series of case studies. These describe how individual local authorities have integrated targets into their Community Strategies for improving the energy efficiency of dwellings occupied by low-income households, as a contributor to the social well-being of their area. Energy efficiency and, more broadly, sustainable energy rarely emerge as priority concerns at a local level despite significant policy focus from national government. Nonetheless the case study local authorities have overcome the barriers this presents, and their experience offers pointers to how this situation can be changed.

Having identified how the case study local authorities have been able to integrate relevant aims and targets into their Community Strategies, the paper will then examine how this integration assists the achievement of targets by increasing both community grass-roots and strategic local government engagement with the issue through improved community participation.

Drawing on the case study findings the paper will then consider how the experience gathered in this narrow field can be applied to the wider sustainable energy agenda, and

will explore where Community Planning may therefore fit within the present local (and national) sustainable energy policy framework in the UK.

Introduction

Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and the development of Local Agenda 21, the role of local level commitment, involvement and action has been recognised as essential if sustainable development is to be pursued. In this light, promoting sustainable energy at the local level is key to a more energy efficient and low carbon future.

Translating this rhetoric into achievement necessitates a far greater role for local communities than has occurred in the past. Consequently, community or public participation is becoming a priority within both central and local government. In the UK there are a number of drivers pushing forward community participation and consultation. As well as being central to sustainable development, the UK government promotes participation as a central feature in areas such as modernising government, well-being, social exclusion, best value and community planning.

The Local Government Act 2000 made it a legal requirement for local authorities in England and Wales to produce a Community Strategy to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of their area and thus the community planning framework represents a significant and necessary opportunity for local authorities to promote sustainable energy at the local level.

This paper will use the example of domestic energy efficiency improvements targeting fuel poverty to demonstrate how the community planning framework can provide a driv-

er for increased sustainable energy investment and commitment at the local level. From this, the paper will broaden to draw preliminary conclusions on how this example may be applicable to other elements of sustainable energy and on what role community participation has in this.

LOCAL AUTHORITY POWERS AND LOCAL ACTION

In parallel with the development of Local Agenda 21 and the opinion that local action is required to tackle global problems, the UK began to devolve important policy setting and implementation powers to local authorities. However, there has been criticism that over the last 10 years governance and services at the local level have become fragmented (LGA, 2000), aggravated by the privatisation of public services and the fact that many services are increasingly provided by a number of organisations and agencies. Individual agencies are not however, in a position to respond to many of the issues facing local communities and, according to the Local Government Association, there is an urgent need for integration. Local authorities are in an ideal situation to take the lead on this.

“Councils are the organisations best placed to take a comprehensive overview of the needs and priorities of their local areas and communities and lead the work to meet those needs and priorities on the ground” (DETR, 1998).

Consequently, devolution and regionalisation in the UK is intended, in part, to increase and improve citizens’ access to information and participation in decision making. It is argued that by moving toward more inclusive forms of decision making at regional and local levels, where trade unions, minority groups, charities and community organisations are involved in local government, local authorities can close the gap between themselves and those groups that are particularly affected by the decisions they make (Humphrey and Tomaney, 2001).

The policy context

FUEL POVERTY

The main cause of fuel poverty in the UK is a combination of poor energy efficiency in homes and low household incomes. Other factors include the size of some properties in relation to the number of people living in them, and the cost of fuel. Fuel poverty damages people’s quality of life and imposes wider costs on the community. The most direct effects are in relation to the health of people living in cold homes.

The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy 2001 (DTI, 2001) states that fuel poverty should be eradicated in vulnerable households, as far as reasonably practicable by 2010. For the purposes of this paper, fuel poverty is defined as it is in the Strategy, “a fuel poor household, one that needs to spend in excess of 10% of household income on all fuel use in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime”.

In 2004 there were estimated to be at least 2.1 million fuel poor households in the UK (DTI, 2004) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has now published, ‘Fuel Poverty in England: The Government’s Plan for Action’, building upon the Fuel Poverty Strategy. This

outlines the challenges of eradicating fuel poverty in England and the steps that are being taken to tackle them.

Action to alleviate fuel poverty tends to focus on improving the energy efficiency of people’s homes. Not only is this a more long-term solution to reducing fuel poverty, in comparison to, say, increasing benefit payments, but improving energy efficiency is a critical part of a sustainable energy approach. Indeed, the energy hierarchy has energy efficiency in conjunction with reducing the need for energy, as the critical base for promoting sustainable energy. Thus, fuel poverty programmes are contributing to the wider sustainable energy agenda including energy efficiency and carbon reduction targets.

THE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND COMMUNITY PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The core aim of a Community Strategy is to promote sustainable development and increase the well-being of local communities. This provides a powerful argument for the inclusion of fuel poverty as well as wider sustainable energy concerns, indeed sustainable energy has great potential to link many of the other aspects of sustainable development. Despite this, neither sustainable energy nor fuel poverty may emerge as a priority concern amongst the plethora of other issues during community consultation exercises. This therefore presents a challenge to local authority officers and Members to push for the integration of robust environmental and sustainability strategies within the Community Strategy.

The Community Strategy should not just be viewed as an important document in its own right. The process of developing the Strategy, community planning, is equally important and should involve full community participation. Community participation is more important than a pro-forma exercise; indeed its value is greatly enhanced as involvement becomes more comprehensive. Community planning is therefore the vehicle through which councils can better define and take forward their leadership role, integrate and develop existing initiatives and approaches, and develop a shared vision for the future of the area.

THE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AGENDA

The notion of involving communities in local government activity is now embedded in government policy at many levels. Whilst at an international level Local Agenda 21 was one of the key drivers of more inclusive decision making and greater public participation, in the UK one of the most influential drivers of national government initiatives on community participation is that of the Local Government Modernization Agenda 1998-2001. This was developed to address the following key themes: efficiency; transparency and accountability. Community participation is integral to this process and the 2001 Local Government White Paper, ‘Strong local leadership – quality public services’ (ODPM, 2001) emphasises that ongoing participation is vital to enhancing local accountability and improving service delivery. The community planning framework represents one way in which the modernization agenda has been translated into real action.

The value of community participation has also infiltrated the development of sustainable energy strategies and envi-

ronmental policy and is reflected in the current reform of the UK planning system.

Since the publication of the Energy White Paper in 2001 (DTI, 2001a), energy policy has emphasised the importance of both local authority leadership and local level action in promoting sustainable energy. The Fuel Poverty Action Plan (DEFRA, 2004) calls for greater community involvement and awareness, especially in relation to energy efficiency advice and the wider climate change agenda. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) sets out government policy for ensuring that land-use planning in the UK is founded on the aspirations of the community (Tenant, 2004). The updated Planning Policy Statement series also emphasise the central role of community participation. Planning Policy Statement 22 on renewable energy and the companion guide published in 2004 include guidance for local authorities on facilitating community participation. Each local authority is also required to produce a Statement of Community Involvement indicating how the council intends to consult and involve local communities in matters relating to renewable energy, and these will be key mechanisms to ensure community involvement in the preparation of local plans.

Each Community Strategy in England is coordinated or overseen by a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The LSP comprises a range of local stakeholders including the local authority, health authorities, the emergency services, community and voluntary groups, charities and local businesses. The LSP can not only lead to more innovative partnership working and the recognition of the mutual economic, social and environmental benefits sustainable energy can bring, but more opportunity for securing funding to develop local sustainable energy initiatives.

THE VALUE OF INTEGRATING SUSTAINABLE ENERGY AND COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

Whilst the research focused on the value of integrating fuel poverty and Community Strategies, Community Strategies can promote and prioritise the broader considerations of energy efficiency and sustainable energy within the council and local community. The process of community planning is a new way of working for local authorities in the UK but has the potential to reinvigorate local democracy and successfully deliver improvements in the local economy, community and environment. Community Strategies are therefore in an ideal position to take forward many areas of local sustainability including sustainable energy.

Community Strategies are high level strategic documents and local authorities will be obliged to commit to those targets included within them. The incorporation of sustainable energy targets is essential to ensure that the issue is addressed as a priority. Without inclusion in the Community Strategy and the accompanying credence, funding is more difficult to draw in. The Strategy also provides a mechanism for monitoring targets and focusing on delivery.

Community planning and comprehensive public participation can help to fire the enthusiasm and imagination of the council, partners and the local community in developing a shared vision for their area. Sustainable energy can play an important role in this vision.

Methodology

ADDRESSING FUEL POVERTY THROUGH COMMUNITY PLANNING

Community planning is still a relatively new concept in the UK and a new requirement for local authorities, bringing new opportunities and new challenges in terms of sustainable energy and community participation. The research from which this paper is drawn and from which experience can be broadened to apply to the wider sustainable energy picture, was carried out between November 2003 and May 2004 (Marock and Mathie, 2004). The primary aim was to investigate how the community planning framework can be used to address fuel poverty, focusing on the development of community participation and the role of effective partnerships.

One of the purposes of the research was to respond to a need identified by UK central government. The Local Government Act 2000 had called for full consultation and participation by communities and partnership organisations in the development of the Community Strategy. Yet, according to research commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM, 2003), there are significant capacity gaps preventing local authorities from fulfilling the Act's requirements. These gaps are in community engagement and partnership working.

The research focused on the fuel poverty agenda in response to the growing attention fuel poverty is beginning to receive within local authority policy, in the advent of fuel poverty and affordable warmth strategies. The aim was therefore to evaluate how this can be successfully linked to the community planning process in order to maximise the alleviation of fuel poverty, the extent of which in the UK has already been highlighted.

Involving communities and forming partnerships is critical in developing strategies that are sustainable, respond to local needs and are practical to implement. But it took the advent of the community planning framework to bring these capacity gaps to the fore in local government. Also, through support programmes such as Practical help and the Local Authority Support Programme, provided for local authorities by the Energy Saving Trust (EST), the need for support for local authorities to respond to these new challenges became more apparent.

At a wider level there are a number of policy routes by which sustainable energy at a local level can be pursued, such as the Sustainable Communities agenda or Urban Regeneration. Community participation has an important role in each of these but this paper will focus on the community planning framework because of its potential to act as an overarching framework which can take sustainable energy to a position on the political and public agenda where it can influence the myriad of other policies and initiatives.

Below is a brief overview of the methodological approach taken in the original research.

DESK RESEARCH AND CASE STUDY SELECTION

The initial stages of the project required research into the duties and targets of the community planning system and the motivation and drivers for community participation and

partnership working in local government. There was also liaison with a steering group brought together specifically for this project, comprising representatives from Defra, the Scottish Executive, the Local Government Association, National Energy Action (NEA), the EST and a local authority. The first stage of research enabled sufficient baseline information to be collected to establish the extent to which local authorities in the UK were developing Community Strategies with fuel poverty targets, and which local authorities were being successful in translating these targets into action on the ground.

A shortlist of potential case studies was drawn up and preliminary discussions held with each of the local authorities involved to understand the different approaches taken in each. At this stage it was important to elicit the extent of community participation that had occurred during the development of the Community Strategy and whether fuel poverty or energy efficiency had emerged as a concern amongst the local community. The role of partnerships in the development of the Community Strategy was also considered, especially partnerships between the local authority, local communities and community groups.

WORKSHOPS WITH CASE STUDY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

From the initial shortlist five local authorities were selected on the basis of which best fit a set of criteria. The criteria were:

- Does the authority have a Community Strategy or Plan?
- Does the Strategy or Plan contain clear fuel poverty targets?
- What methods of consultation have been employed in involving the local community and stakeholders? (We were aiming to investigate a range of these.)
- Has the local authority developed other fuel poverty/affordable warmth strategies and do these support or feed in to the Community Strategy or Plan?

The five authorities demonstrated that the integration of Fuel Poverty or Affordable Warmth Strategies and Community Strategies was not only possible, but also desirable. All five had also engaged in extensive consultation processes and developed effective partnerships to take forward the development and implementation of policies set out in the strategies. The case studies selected were: Brighton and Hove City Council; Cornwall County Council; Fife Council; North East Derbyshire District Council and Stockton Borough Council.

Workshops were held with each of these local authorities and appropriate representatives from partner organisations and community groups that had been involved in: the development of the Community Strategy; the Fuel Poverty or Affordable Warmth Strategy; running consultation processes and events, and setting up and running key partnerships relating to the development and implementation of both strategies. The workshops aimed to establish how each local authority incorporated fuel poverty targets within their Community Strategy and the drivers for doing so, together with the respective roles of community participation and partnerships in achieving this. The benefits of setting these

targets and the action that has occurred as a result were also examined.

DEVELOPING A TOOLKIT

The main outcome of the research was to develop a toolkit to be used at a strategic level by policy makers and at an operational level by fuel poverty and Community Strategy practitioners, to help promote the inclusion of energy efficiency targets and, specifically, fuel poverty targets into Community Strategies. Within the toolkit a step-by-step guide to community participation was developed based on discussions with the case studies and previous research on participation best practice, such as that by David Wilcox on the Ladder of Participation (1994). A guide to setting up partnerships was also developed to help promote both internal and external partnerships that have the potential to promote sustainable energy at the local level.

Case studies

There are a wide range of drivers and motivating factors for incorporating fuel poverty into Community Strategies, depending on local circumstance, council and agency capabilities and previous work and experience.

This section will examine three of the five case studies selected in the research to expand on how each local authority integrated fuel poverty targets within its Community Strategy and how this integration assisted the achievement of the aims and targets set. The benefits of community participation and effective partnerships, in terms of achieving greater take-up of wider sustainable energy options, will also be evaluated.

CORNWALL COUNTY COUNCIL

Cornwall is a rural and maritime county in the south west of England, with an area of 3 549 km² and, in 1999, a population of 492 600. It is the second largest county in England but has the lowest population density. Poverty, deprivation and social exclusion are closely linked and many people in Cornwall suffer from these problems as a result of a number of contributory factors, including: the nature of employment in the county; low wages, and low levels of service provision in the sparsely populated areas.

Fuel poverty and the Community Strategy

There were a number of motivating drivers for incorporating the issue of fuel poverty into Cornwall's Community Strategy (Cornwall County Council, 2003). The overriding factor was the need to address high levels of deprivation and low incomes in Cornwall, but also to combat the significant health problems associated with poor housing condition and cold.

The Community Strategy includes fuel poverty targets in two of the Strategy's themes, illustrating the importance of recognising fuel poverty as a cross cutting issue. In the theme 'Individual Well-Being – Social Exclusion: Reduce Poverty' the Council set a target to improve energy efficiency in 3 000 households in deprived neighbourhoods. An important feature of this target is that it was also made a Local Public Service Agreement (PSA) target. By including fuel poverty as a PSA target, Cornwall demonstrates full corpo-

it was much easier to engage communities in a particular area on a project specific basis, than at a county wide, strategic level. Therefore, in relation to different CSEP fuel poverty projects, community consultation was carried out in the form of workshops, community out-reach and project meetings. By working with Cornwall County Council and the six District Councils, the CSEP has helped to ensure that partnership working is prioritised at a regional and local level.

Main lessons

The main lessons to emerge from Cornwall's approach are, firstly, the value of existing partnerships such as the CSEP. This enabled existing networks at both a strategic and operational level to be utilised. Also, engagement of local communities at a project level, rather than a policy level was, in part, enabled by the CSEP.

In addition, including fuel poverty as a PSA target was very influential in prioritising fuel poverty. Similarly, any way in which sustainable energy can be linked with existing policy frameworks or to other mechanisms of prioritisation can help to raise awareness of the cross-cutting issues integral to sustainable energy, and like in the case of the PSA framework, can help to draw down funding.

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

The borough of Stockton-on-Tees in County Durham in the north east of England has a population of around 179 000, in an area of 204 km². Situated about 60 kilometres south of the city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Stockton is a relatively rural area.

Fuel poverty and the Community Strategy

The Stockton on Tees Affordable Warmth Strategy was launched in 2001 and subsequently Stockton secured one of the Warm Zone Pilot schemes². As such fuel poverty was already recognised as an important issue in the region when the Community Strategy was developed for the period 2003-2006.

The target established in the Community Strategy is to:

“Improve the quality and conditions of public and private sector housing – to reduce fuel poverty across all tenures by increasing the average SAP³ rating of local authority properties to 50.4 and in the most deprived wards to 53.1 by 2003-2004.”

By linking the fuel poverty targets established in the Community Strategy to existing affordable warmth policy, there was a more robust framework in place for carrying through the aims in the Community Strategy and translating them into action that could be monitored and measured. Not only were targets more easily incorporated but Cabinet level support and prioritisation was already in place. Partnership and assistance from external organisations such as NEA, which had played an important role in developing the Affordable Warmth Strategy, also helped to further raise the

profile of fuel poverty and harness credibility. As in Cornwall, the fuel poverty target was linked to a PSA.

Community participation and partnership

In order to prevent duplication of consultation and avoid exacerbating problems of consultation fatigue, Stockton Borough Council built upon existing consultation events during the development of the Community Strategy. This included the Council's Best Value review, which involved questionnaires and focus groups. These covered a variety of topics but included discussion on energy efficiency, HECA⁴ performance and fuel poverty.

A series of Warm Zone stakeholder events had also occurred prior to the launch of the Warm Zone pilot, which set the foundations for a robust partnership framework and strong working relationships based upon mutual benefit within Stockton Warm Zone. This also provided the opportunity for continuous consultation and feedback between partners.

The LSP in Stockton comprises eight thematic partnerships. Three of these, Housing and Neighbourhood, Health and Social Care and the Environment, have all played a role in forwarding the fuel poverty agenda through the inclusion of fuel poverty targets, thereby successfully demonstrating the cross-cutting nature of the problems of fuel poverty. The LSP acts as an umbrella partnership or a forum for bringing together and coordinating a number of different plans and partnerships. The Warm Zone Partnership is represented on the Affordable Warmth Steering Group, which is represented on the LSP, again demonstrating the linkages between partnerships and consultation processes.

Main lessons

The existence of an Affordable Warmth Strategy and the Warm Zone in Stockton certainly helped to facilitate the inclusion of fuel poverty targets in the Community Strategy, emphasising the importance of securing corporate commitment and awareness raising, even prior to strategy development. The Council also took a comprehensive approach to consultation and built upon existing participation activities, thus helping to minimise the effect of 'consultation fatigue'.

NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

The District of North East Derbyshire in northern England lies on the edge of the Peak District National Park, where the foothills of the Pennines meet the Midland plain. Covering 259 km², the District is home for almost 100 000 people. The region includes a number of old industrial towns and villages; the nearest cities are Sheffield and Derby.

Fuel poverty and the Community Strategy

In North East Derbyshire the development of an Affordable Warmth Strategy and the work of the Affordable Warmth Steering Group occurred concurrently with the develop-

2. Warm Zones was established in 2000 as an initiative sponsored by the government, local communities and the private sector. The aim was to test new approaches to eradicating fuel poverty in the UK.

3. The Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) is the Government's recommended system for the home energy rating. The SAP energy cost rating is based on energy costs for space and water heating only.

4. HECA (Home Energy Conservation Act 1995) puts a duty on energy conservation authorities (local authorities with housing responsibilities) to draw up strategies to improve energy efficiency in all housing – both public and private sector – and to report on progress made in implementing them.

ment of the Community Strategy. This helped to raise the profile of fuel poverty and facilitated the incorporation of targets within the Community Strategy, which was produced jointly with Chesterfield Borough Council.

Fuel poverty is included within two sections of the Community Strategy, again recognising that by tackling fuel poverty, other related issues such as housing, health and energy can be addressed. Within the theme of 'Healthy Communities and Well-being: Reduce inequalities', "improving the energy efficiency of houses to reduce fuel poverty" is identified as a primary action. In addition, within the 'Homes and Neighbourhoods' section there is a target to:

"Promote energy conservation and efficiency in existing and new homes to reduce fuel poverty: by encouraging best practice in new buildings; by offering heavily discounted cavity and roof insulation works through a bulk purchase scheme; by entering into a partnership with energy suppliers to take advantage of the Energy Efficiency Commitment⁵ (EEC) scheme funds."

Community participation and partnerships

Prior to the development of the Community Strategy and Affordable Warmth Strategy, community consultation and grass-roots feedback, together with internal consultation and debate had highlighted the need to address fuel poverty at a strategic level. Within the community planning framework it was possible to identify where collaborative working could add value. This occurred through the rationalisation and integration of existing strategies and partnerships, including the Local Agenda 21 Strategy and the existing Regeneration Partnerships, and by building upon other existing partnership and successful projects.

Like in Stockton Borough Council, the LSP in North East Derbyshire illustrates a chain of partnerships from the partnership forum at the strategic level to the smaller grass roots partnerships specifically set up for project delivery. The plethora of action oriented partnerships and steering groups feed into one of seven thematic groups. The Affordable Warmth Steering Group is one such group, which links to the LSP through a thematic partnership. This allows work to be carried out at a more manageable level whilst still benefiting from strategic and corporate level commitment and prioritisation. In this way it is possible to identify those partnerships that are instrumental in setting targets and raising the political profile of fuel poverty, and those that are developed to coordinate specific projects and implement action on the ground.

Main lessons

In North East Derbyshire, the process of identifying and evaluating existing partnerships helped to focus on areas where collaboration working could add value. This is essential for establishing the mutual benefits of partnership working and highlighting the overlapping priorities of different departments and organisations that eradicating fuel poverty

or, more broadly, promoting sustainable energy can help tackle.

Discussion

EXTRAPOLATING THE FINDINGS

Some of the main benefits for the case study local authorities of including fuel poverty targets in their Community Strategies are listed below.

- The local authority is obliged to meet the targets as local authorities are audited on a regular basis on performance against targets set by themselves,
- The profile of fuel poverty is raised up the local government agenda, resulting in increased commitment by the council and community,
- Fuel poverty begins to become part of mainstream action plans in implementing the Strategy, rather than constrained to peripheral policies or projects, and
- Funding is allocated to meet the targets set out in the Strategy.

The above would also hold true for sustainable energy or, more specifically, energy efficiency or renewable energy targets, if they were incorporated within Community Strategies.

Fuel poverty was recognised by the case study authorities as an issue where there are tangible solutions available and where the results of local action can more easily be recognised. This factor is critically important when trying to engage local communities. Whilst climate change can appear a remote consideration for local communities, the benefits of sustainable energy are also recognisable at a local level if schemes are designed and promoted appropriately.

HOW CAN COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION ENCOURAGE LOCAL ACTION ON SUSTAINABLE ENERGY?

Fuel poverty is deeply embedded within some communities across the UK and forming partnerships and involving community groups, volunteer organisations and residents is the best way to ensure the depth and breadth of the problem is understood. Community involvement and wide partnership working also present the opportunity to engage on the wider issues of sustainable energy, including renewable energy, surrounding which there can be associated misconceptions. Enhanced awareness is the foundation for changing behaviour based on greater knowledge and confidence.

Community participation can stimulate the imagination and enthusiasm in developing a vision that a whole group or area can share and work to achieve. Sustainable energy can play a key role in this vision, with the development of all types of renewable energy, energy efficiency improvements of the housing stock and more energy service focused, locally generated electricity and heating systems.

5. The Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) is a statutory obligation on energy suppliers to deliver energy efficiency improvements in housing. EEC 2005 – 2008 requires gas and electricity suppliers to deliver improvements in domestic energy efficiency that will correspond with an overall saving of 130 terawatt hours between 1 April 2005 and 31 March 2008.

Any project that has an impact on a community is inherently more successful if it has community buy-in. This is related to the 'ownership of ideas' (Wilcox, 1994) in that people are most likely to commit if they have a stake in the idea. In practice that means running brainstorming sessions, helping people think through the practicality of ideas and negotiating a result which is acceptable to as many stakeholders as possible. Sustainable decisions that have buy-in from the community are more likely to avoid time delays and the financial costs these can incur. Wide involvement can also create a positive image for a sustainable energy project, programme or policy and can build public credibility and support. Community involvement can actually lead to the development of community partnerships geared towards implementing sustainable energy projects and there are examples of proactive local communities that have set up independent community initiatives with the support of their local authority. This type of local determination helps to foster a sense of responsibility or ownership for the decisions that have been made and the action that has occurred as a result, as well as help to build community capacity.

The Dyfi Eco Valley Partnership (Ecodyfi) in mid-Wales is a locally-controlled organisation that's mission is to foster sustainable community regeneration in the Dyfi valley. Ecodyfi seeks to deliver environmental, economic and social benefits simultaneously and takes a long-term and global perspective in meeting local needs. Partners include local individuals, private companies, voluntary bodies, local authorities, the Snowdonia National Park Authority and the Welsh Development Agency. Ecodyfi is involved in projects relating to all aspects of sustainable development, including sustainable energy. For example, it was instrumental in the process of implementing the first community owned wind turbine in the UK. Ecodyfi illustrates the strength of community partnerships working in conjunction with other local stakeholders, including local government, and their value in promoting locally determined solutions to sustainable energy.

THE VALUE OF THE COMMUNITY PLANNING FRAMEWORK TO PROGRESS SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

Looking beyond the issue of fuel poverty and addressing the wider picture of sustainable energy, we can see how community planning can help to promote and prioritise energy efficiency and renewable energy within local government and the local community and economy.

Targets to ensure action

The Community Strategy could include targets for renewable energy use and installing small scale renewable energy schemes in council buildings, schools, hospitals and other public buildings.

Coordination and longevity

In the case of addressing fuel poverty, the priority was to incorporate Fuel Poverty or Affordable Warmth Strategies into the community planning framework. In terms of sustainable energy, many councils are now developing energy strategies, climate change strategies and air quality strategies. Essentially, this is because each region in the UK is required to produce a regional energy strategy and each local authority

has to fit within the regional framework, working towards their shared goals. The objectives and targets of these complementary strategies should be incorporated into the Community Strategy to ensure that sustainable energy receives strategic commitment and corporate buy-in.

Future policy development can also be integrated into the community planning framework, promoting the longevity of community planning in contrast, for example, to Local Agenda 21 Strategies, which Community Strategies replaced in many local authorities.

Building existing partnerships

The cascade of partnership working stemming from the LSPs, illustrated by the case study local authorities, also demonstrates how important it is to tie existing policy frameworks and partnerships into the community planning process, to ensure that fuel poverty or sustainable energy issues are pushed up the policy ladder to a strategy level. A comprehensive network of partnerships allows the widest possible representation of the community, voluntary, public and business sectors, whilst keeping the overarching partnership a manageable size. Each of the sectors mentioned has a potential role to play in promoting sustainable energy, either at a regional or local level, and more effective partnership working can help these often disparate sectors recognise their areas of overlap and mutual benefit. Partners could be encouraged to adopt targets for reducing energy consumption, improving energy efficiency measures and installing micro renewable energy systems in their buildings.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE COMMUNITY PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Despite all the benefits of community planning which have been discussed and the opportunities it presents for local authorities, community planning does not represent a panacea for sustainable energy.

Even once a framework for community involvement has been developed, engaging communities and sustaining that engagement and enthusiasm is extremely difficult. Some sectors of the community can be particularly problematic to reach and it may well be necessary to establish contact and work more closely with informal community networks in order to reach them. Choosing the most appropriate type and extent of community involvement is also important for encouraging engagement. For example, the Cornwall Sustainable Energy Partnership found it far more effective to engage communities on a project basis than at a strategic level and this helped to sustain commitment, as those involved were able to directly see the impact of their contributions.

Local authorities must have the capacity to act upon the results of community consultation and have mechanisms in place to provide feedback for the communities involved so that they know their views have been taken on board. Only once these mechanisms are working can involvement become more than a passive process of information giving.

Ultimately, the Community Strategy only provides targets and objectives. The real challenge is translating these into action on the ground. This action is often dependent on resources, whether those be financial, or in terms of staff time and expertise. Setting the targets is however, a critical and

important first step and can help build upon existing work that may already be occurring in the local area.

Conclusions

The community planning framework is designed to facilitate involvement that reaches beyond local people's immediate responses and engages them in active debate on governance and the future well-being of their area (LGA, 2000). Community planning is therefore important for establishing ongoing dialogue and a long-term strategy for community involvement, which extends the current opportunities for community participation and the often piecemeal approach taken by local authorities and their partner organisations.

Community planning offers opportunities to understand the synergies between sustainable energy and other council priorities and concerns when developing policies. From the research it is evident that the community planning framework should make it easier for local authorities to focus on cross-cutting issues such as fuel poverty and sustainable energy and fully recognise their benefits, which impact on all areas of quality of life but have previously been seen as the province of one department or another.

In many parts of the UK the problem of fuel poverty has been recognised and the process of raising awareness within councils, their partner organisations and the public has begun. This has helped the issue of fuel poverty to be integrated into Community Strategies. However, for other aspects of sustainable energy, this awareness may not be in place and therefore the community planning framework may not be sufficient. After all, Community Strategies are designed to reflect the concerns and priorities of each community. In these cases the right policy or legal framework is required. For example, the requirement for the UK to produce regional energy strategies includes a stipulation that local authorities work within this framework. Succinctly, the community planning framework cannot work in isolation to promote sustainable energy at the local level and upstream policy frameworks also have a vital role.

Sustainable energy can result in social and economic, as well as environmental, benefits, such as improved health associated with energy efficiency and affordably heated homes, or new economic and employment opportunities associated with renewable energy technologies and home energy inspections. Community planning will not effortlessly lead to the take-up of sustainable energy but including sustainable energy targets in the Community Strategy is critical for it to be addressed as a priority concern. From this point, through community participation and responding to local needs, there is greater opportunity to encourage and facilitate the development of local sustainable energy initiatives and generate the local capacity and commitment to ensure this is sustainable.

Abbreviations

CSEP	Cornwall Sustainable Energy Partnership
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry

EEC	Energy Efficiency Commitment
EST	Energy Saving Trust
HECA	Home Energy Conservation Act
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NEA	National Energy Action
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
PSA	Public Service Agreement
SAP	Standard Assessment Procedure

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