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your hands

Local Government Elections
May 2012
Manifesto



cyfeillion y ddaear cymru
friends of the earth cymru

Introduction

Local Authorities across Wales are feeling the impact of public sector spending cuts, with grant funding from the Welsh Government flatlining at £5.2bn from 2012-13 to 2014-15¹.

The challenge for councils is not to manage the budgetary squeeze by reducing capacity through knee-jerk reactions, but to use this time of financial constraint as an opportunity to deliver excellent services in more imaginative and efficient ways.

Local government is a big player in Wales' environmental performance. Aside from direct emissions, local authority policies on waste, transport and education have a substantial impact on greenhouse gas emissions. The Sustainable Development Bill is likely to require local authorities to make sustainable development their central organising principle.

This will herald big changes to service delivery for most local authorities, and those forging ahead early will reap the benefits of green jobs, cost savings and reduced emissions.

This manifesto sets out areas where Friends of the Earth Cymru believes local authorities should prioritise action that will reduce the environmental impact of their operations as well as, frequently, making financial savings. Taking these steps will also improve the wellbeing of residents – and will make the most ambitious councils places where people want to work and live.



Image courtesy of Jelle Drok

1. Welsh Government, November 2011, Final budget

Local authorities leading the way

Strong Cabinet and staff commitment:

A staff complement with a good awareness of why high environmental performance is important is a prerequisite to most of the recommendations that follow. This means leadership from every elected member of every local authority in Wales. But most importantly, it requires Council Leaders and Cabinets to be resolute in promoting exemplary environmental performance in their role as stewards of our planet for future generations.

An Environment Strategy:

Each local authority should prepare and publish an environment strategy that incorporates targets that can be measured and against which they can be held to account. Leicestershire County Council provides a good example².

Reducing emissions:

Local authorities should set targets to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2020, and should form a plan to deliver these cuts. Cardiff Council has already set a target of reducing emissions by 60% by 2018³, while both Wrexham⁴ and Flintshire⁵ have targets to reduce emissions from public buildings by 5% per year. Local authorities should also set targets for overall emissions reduction across their own geographical area and consider setting 'carbon budgets' in line with recommendations of the UK Climate Change Committee.

Good Environment Management Systems:

These are an excellent way of ensuring continuous environmental improvement, and every local authority in Wales should be signed up to one. The Green Dragon scheme⁶ is a good example. Powys County Council, along with Directorates of Bridgend, Swansea and the Vale of Glamorgan, have all reached the highest level of this scheme. Emissions from commuting should be formally included in every local authority's environment management systems.

Greening procurement:

Local authorities have considerable purchasing power. They should use this to beneficial effect by working with suppliers to bring down the environmental impact of goods and services. Examples might be implementing a commitment to use only Forestry Stewardship Council certified wood products, using locally sourced food for schools and canteens, and changing electricity supplier to a fully renewable tariff. London's Green Procurement Code⁷ has useful information and links to other websites about green procurement.

Shifting from petrol and diesel:

We are in the decade of peak oil⁸. The use of petroleum for transport will therefore become increasingly expensive over time. Local authorities in Wales should rationalise their operations to reduce both the size and mileage of their fleets. Local authorities should also invest in alternatively fuelled vehicles (including electric, hydrogen and LPG) as and when they become commercially available in order to reduce their vulnerability to oil price shocks.

2. Leicestershire County Council, Environment Strategy 2011-2021

3. Cardiff Council, June 2007, Cardiff commits to 60% cut in carbon emissions

4. Welsh Government, Wrexham outcome agreement summary

5. Welsh Government, Flintshire outcome agreement summary

6. Groundwork Wales, Green Dragon environmental standard

7. Mayor of London, Green procurement code

8. National Assembly for Wales, July 2008, Peak oil

Energy

Major investment in energy efficiency:

Local authority buildings, including schools, should be paragons of energy efficiency. That means a focus on very high standards for:

- insulation (loft and cavity wall, and solid wall for older properties)
- double glazing
- solar shielding for south-facing windows.

Most council headquarters will be large enough to require Display Energy Certificates, so good performance is important for reputation as well as the environment.

Support for energy efficiency in homes:

Local authorities should use their bulk procurement powers to good effect through arranging for the mass installation of energy efficiency measures (principally insulation). This will also have a substantial impact on reducing fuel poverty.

Gwynedd Council's "Here to Help" scheme⁹ has provided insulation for lofts, cavity walls and hot water tanks in more than 10,000 private properties since 2004. Its partnership with British Gas has reduced the cost, providing good value for taxpayers. Local authorities should integrate home refurbishment initiatives with other funding streams, engaging with energy companies and acting as delivery agents or partners on the Green Deal¹⁰.

Local authorities should also investigate the potential of working with Welsh Government schemes such as Arbed and using local government borrowing power to make energy efficiency projects happen.

Investing in renewable energy:

Local authorities should commit to installing renewable energy in every school and each council building or landholding where practical. Most schools will have south-facing roofs that would be suitable for solar PV cells, while some will be in areas of good wind resource that could benefit from a wind turbine.

Ysgol y Traeth¹¹ in Barmouth has both forms of renewables. This has the double benefit of educating schoolchildren about renewable energy and providing carbon-free electricity. Local authorities can take advantage of the feed in tariff scheme (FiTs) which provides payment for generating renewable electricity. Biomass heating systems can be a cost-effective and sustainable option – particularly for rural areas with a good local biomass supply. Llanwddyn in Powys provides just such an example¹².

Planning for renewable energy:

In their Local Development Plans (LDPs), local authorities should promote proactive policies and targets on medium- and large-scale renewables with a general presumption in favour of renewables unless there are overwhelming negative social or environmental impacts. The LDPs should promote decentralised heating, cooling and power networks (linked to the creation of ESCOs – see below).

Establishing Energy Service Companies:

Local authorities are large purchasers of energy services. Those authorities that service urban areas should look to form Energy Service Companies (ESCOs) which could supply district heating, combined heat and power, or energy from wind farms in order to provide low-carbon energy for householders and businesses. Good examples include:

9. Gwynedd Council, April 2011, Gwynedd Council discusses fuel poverty

10. DECC, Local authorities

11. BBC News, May 2009, Wind and sun runs school canteen

12. Energy Saving Trust, 2004, Rural biomass community heating case study

- Southampton Geothermal Heating Company¹³
- Thameswey Energy¹⁴, started by Woking Borough Council
- The WorksDevelopment in Ebbw Vale, which is intended to be serviced by a 'centralised energy hub'¹⁵.

Reducing the cost of street lighting:

A mid-sized local authority might spend about £1 million per year¹⁶ on street lighting. While LED bulbs will start to have an impact on energy consumption as they replace less efficient alternatives, there are other ways of reducing the street lighting bill – and the associated environmental impacts.

Nottinghamshire County Council has plans¹⁷ to reduce its £5 million lighting bill by a quarter by:

- Switching off some lights when they are considered unnecessary
- Dimming of some lights on main roads between 10pm and 7am when this will not impact road safety
- In consultation with local communities, switching off lights between midnight and 5.30am in some residential areas



13. Southampton City Council, Geothermal and CHP scheme

14. Thameswey, Who we are

15. The Works, The greener future

16. Wales Online, December 2010, Bridgend Council considers switching off street lights to cut costs

17. Nottinghamshire County Council, 2011, Street lighting energy saving

Waste

Sorted collections of recycling:

Local Authorities have made great strides over the past 10 years in collecting dry recyclables and food waste, with the average rate across Wales rising from 9% to nearly 50%. Friends of the Earth Cymru is concerned that a number of local authorities¹⁸ in Wales have recently switched from household sorted collections of recycling to 'all in one bag' co-mingled collections.

Recyclable waste is a resource, the best use of which will preserve materials and create lots of jobs in Welsh communities. Crushing it up together is not a good way to preserve that resource¹⁹. The value of co-mingled recycling is considerably lower than that of sorted recyclate because there is a high degree of contamination. And the costs of co-mingling are higher²⁰. Co-mingling is currently under legal challenge²¹ as it is seen to not comply with European Directives, and the Welsh Government will be bringing forward new Regulations in the summer to require separate collection at kerbside.

Given the weight of evidence against co-mingled collection, those councils that currently collect co-mingled recyclate should move to kerbside collection of separated waste. In the long run this approach will improve recycling rates above the current statutory 70% target, and towards the Welsh Government's ambition of a zero waste Wales.

The move to MBT:

Incinerating black-bag waste means that resources that could be re-used or recycled are removed from the resource value chain, which goes against principles of sustainability. It also generates greenhouse gases and toxic ash. In addition, incineration infrastructure is very capital-intensive and is exposed to high financial risk, relying on a steady and regular supply of waste to burn. Mechanical-biological treatment (MBT) is a preferable alternative that is already operational at a large scale and which typically operates at a much lower up-front cost and uses contracts far shorter than those for incinerators²².

All local authorities in Wales should agree to a moratorium on incinerating residual waste in Wales and halt current negotiations regarding incinerators.

Monthly black bag collections:

One factor that is known to reduce residual waste arisings and increase recycling is to reduce the frequency of collection of residual waste²³. Many local authorities in Wales have successfully introduced fortnightly residual waste collections, with some authorities considering moving to collections on a three-weekly or monthly basis²⁴. Local authorities should start the move to once-monthly collections²⁵.



18. Including the Vale of Glamorgan (from September 2011), Caerphilly and Monmouthshire

19. The value per tonne of the Vale of Glamorgan's recyclate reduced from £40 to £14.50 following its system change

20. Eunomia January 2011, Kerbside collections options: Wales

21. Campaign for Real Recycling, December 2011, CRR response to adjournment of judicial review

22. The New Earth Solutions MBT plant in Bristol was commissioned on a 9-year contract with 'very significant' cost savings compared to an incinerator. Typical incinerator contracts are for 25 years.

23. The Guardian, 26 April 2007, Fortnightly rubbish collection means more recycling, says government
Also, 19 of the 20 English local authorities with the best recycling rates have fortnightly collections

24. Walesonline, 12 December 2011, Once-a-month bin collections loom in Wales as councils aim to cut costs and up recycling

25. Provided the usual safeguards are in place for more regular collection of sanitary waste

Transport

Sustainable transport:

Local authorities should give high priority to increasing people's use of more sustainable forms of transport - walking, cycling, and travelling by bus and train. There are many examples of good practice throughout Wales that local authorities can learn from, including car share schemes²⁶ and Carmarthenshire's Bwcabus scheme²⁷.

Sustainable transport planning:

A land use planning system that reduces the need to travel to and from new and existing developments would have major benefits for the people living and working within the local authority area. In particular, local authorities should invoke a presumption against new build developments that are not well serviced by public transport or by community facilities, and which therefore become 'trip generators'.

A new presumption in favour of 20mph:

One of the most frequent reasons given for people not wanting to walk and cycle is the fear of collision with a motor vehicle. Since June 1999, local authorities in Wales have had the specific power to permanently designate 20mph zones without reference to the Welsh Government²⁸. Indeed, Welsh Government guidance indicates²⁹:

"Local speed limits of 20mph are encouraged where appropriate, particularly in situations where there is a risk to vulnerable road users... and this is encouraged and supported by the Welsh Assembly Government... 20mph zones have a proven casualty reduction benefit".

Friends of the Earth Cymru would like local authorities to adopt an approach that 20mph is the appropriate speed limit in all urban and village settings unless there is a clear case to the contrary.

A fresh look at road schemes:

Friends of the Earth Cymru believes local authorities should consider the full environmental and economic impacts of schemes to build new roads. There is very little, if any, evidence to indicate that building new roads is a good way of reducing congestion, and plenty of evidence that new roads encourage increased use of motor vehicles and fill up very rapidly³⁰. With increasingly expensive transport fuel, new road-building is in most cases an imprudent use of scarce capital resources.

Electric vehicle charging points:

Local authority buildings attract large numbers of cars. They are therefore ideal locations for charging points for electric vehicles, and these should be put in place in order to make it easier for people to use electric vehicles.

Charging for business parking:

The workplace parking levy was introduced through the Transport Act 2000. It allows local authorities to develop a licensing scheme that charges for the number of workplace parking places at business premises. The purpose of the scheme must be to facilitate the achievement of local transport policies. Nottingham has started charging for its scheme since 1 April 2012³¹, and Bristol has recently started consulting³² on its planned introduction of the scheme.

All local authorities in Wales should consider whether or not workplace parking levies could apply in their areas. In particular, those authorities that cover large urban areas should introduce them in order to facilitate the transition to a more sustainable transport system.

26. Cardiff Council, Cardiff Car Share Scheme

27. Traveline Cymru, What is Bwcabus?

28. Legislation.gov.uk, June 1999, The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (Amendment) Order 1999

29. Welsh Assembly Government, October 2009, Setting local speed limits in Wales

30. Cabinet Office, The fundamental law of traffic

31. My Nottingham, 2011, What is a Workplace Parking Levy?

32. This is Bristol, 10 March 2012, Bristol businesses facing workplace parking levy



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