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Leicester Partnership

Abstract

Leicester Council has a strong track record in tackling climate change. This commitment and experience has influenced the work of the city's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which has put sustainable development high on the agenda.

The Leicester Partnership has been involved with:

- developing a Climate Change Programme Board
- setting up a Carbon Club to pool knowledge and resources on reducing carbon emissions
- developing a 25-year vision for the city's sustainable future

The issue

Leicester City Council was one of the first councils to bring in measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. During the 1990s Leicester was:

- part of the International Cities for Climate Protection network
- part of the Energy Cities Network
- one of 24 local authorities to join the UK Council's for Climate Protection Pilot Programme

Leicester has signed up to the Nottingham Declaration on climate change and the Aalborg Commitments (which provides an action tool for local authorities across Europe to achieve their sustainable development objectives).

On the back of a strong track record in sustainability, Leicester's LSP – the Leicester Partnership – has given sustainable development a high priority.

What Leicester did

One of the roles of the LSP is to 'achieve sustainable regeneration and development for the city'. Creating sustainability and sustainable communities is at the heart of the new Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). The strategy aims for:

'A sustainable city, recognised as a model of excellence internationally, which minimises its impact on the local and global environment, and where no-one suffers from serious economic or social disadvantage.'

The Partnership is in the process of creating a 'Climate Change Programme Board' (CCPB). It is anticipated that the board will bring together individuals who can strongly influence any current issues or planned projects that have an effect on climate change.

The Partnership is also currently working towards setting up a Carbon Club that will bring together key stakeholders from the public and private sector to pool knowledge and develop joint action on climate change. As part of the strategy to reduce carbon emissions, officers have worked towards producing a climate change toolkit: 'What's your plan?' will be distributed to all 35,000 businesses in Leicester.

The Partnership have recently appointed a Head of Environmental Sustainability to drive forward their work on sustainability. This role focuses on three key issues:

- **awareness raising** – of CO2 and Carbon footprint issues
- **climate change mitigation** – which can produce significant cost savings for the council and local businesses
- **climate change adaptation** – or developing support for investment in a low carbon economy

The appointment is indicative of the high priority the Partnership places on sustainable development. The post was initially funded from Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, but has now been moved to core funding. As well as developing the partnership-wide approach to sustainable development, the post involves working with individual partners on their own environmental / sustainable development policies.

Leicester's success has been built on a few key factors:

Leadership and vision

There is evidence of strong political leadership on sustainable development in general and climate change in particular (shown through projects such as the flagship Ashton Green Eco-village). This has shaped a culture of positive engagement and practical action.

Following the elections in May 2007, the new Leicester administration has strengthened the work that went before it and made sustainable development an overarching principle in policy making. It has given very strong backing to the proposed CCPB.

The new Sustainable Community Strategy, 'Leicester 25' vision document is the sustainable community strategy called 'One Leicester'. It has five priorities for action and one of them is to 'reduce our carbon footprint'.

Willingness to adapt

In 2006, the Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA) undertook a corporate peer review at the request of the council. The review stated that 'the council needs a more collaborative style if it is to convince partners to work together effectively.'

The Partnership took this feedback on board. Soon after the new administration came in, the LSP began consulting partners to establish a basis for joint working on climate change. In August 2007 the Climate Change Officer was appointed, followed by the Head of Environmental Sustainability in October 2007.

Skills

In order to develop practical solutions to the issues raised in the SCS, Leicester has brought together key experts from academia, specialist organisations (eg Carbon Trust, Groundwork) and developed partnerships with regeneration organisations (eg English Partnerships, Regen East Midlands). This commitment to networking and coordinating the work of different partners has been critical to Leicester's success.

Structures and tools

The Partnership has devoted considerable resources and attention to ensuring appropriate and robust partnership structures and governance arrangements. Recently, a specialist consultancy was commissioned to conduct a 'Partnership review'. This aimed to develop an evidence base to set out:

- where the Partnership is in terms of its current and potential development needs
- the extent to which different influencers and agenda-setters were engaged with the work of the Partnership

Further, Leicester Council is part of the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), and has been since 1999.

Impact

Leicester now has a strong 'can do' attitude, particular in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation. This is down to:

- a combination of strong and consistent political backing
- extensive networks and partnership development
- an association with a range of 'experts' in the sustainable development field

The Partnership treats climate change as a cross-cutting issue. It avoids 'top-down' solutions in order to bring in the support of partners from across the public, private and voluntary community sectors in the city.

In this way, sustainable development and climate change issues have not been marginalised or used in 'tick-box' exercises. They have come to the fore in most policy areas, including regeneration, economic development area neighbourhood renewal.

The focus on climate change has seen a significant improvement in the willingness of officers from various departments and external partners to collaborate in seeking to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Early successes, such as achieving emissions reductions from a new approach to street lighting, have boosted positive attitudes towards climate change and sustainable development. It is now reported that these issues are becoming a normal part of doing business – in the same way as matters relating to equality.

Lessons

The main barrier identified was how best to address the impacts of climate change whilst ensuring the cost of new sustainable services and buildings were not too high. The current approach to addressing these issues is fractured and the Partnership is looking to overcome the divisions through greater coordination and a process of inclusive assessment.

Further information

<http://www.leicesterpartnership.org.uk/>

Contact

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