

Somerset County Council



Photo: Porlock Marsh 1994
Courtesy of Somerset County Council



Photo: Porlock Marsh 2004, following a programme of managed realignment to alleviate flood risk in the area and provide gains to biodiversity through wetland habitat creation.
Courtesy of Somerset County Council

Overview

As an upper tier local authority, Somerset County Council is responsible for delivering a number of services to the community, all of which will be influenced by the impacts of climate change.

The Council has selected National Indicator 188: Preparing to Adapt to Climate Change (NI188) as one of their 35 nationally designated indicators and are implementing a programme to ensure that the impacts of climate change are considered within all council service areas and activities.

Climate Change adaptation actions

- Signed the Nottingham Declaration on climate change – a Local Authority pledge to systematically address the causes of climate change and to prepare the community for its impacts.
- Adopted a Climate Change Strategy, 'Responding to Climate Change in Somerset' in February 2008 (Available to download at: www.somerset.gov.uk/somerset/ete/countryside/climatechange/index.cfm?override=publications&pubid=2845). The strategy includes commitments to :
 - provide strong strategic leadership to prepare the County for the effects of Climate Change
 - engage with local communities, key stakeholders, government agencies and the business community to ensure success in dealing with climate change
 - an annual assessment of the potential impacts of climate change on all service areas across the Authority
 - publication of an annual Climate Change Action Plan, detailing actions and targets for each of its service areas to deal with the causes and effects of climate change.
- Somerset County Council is working to develop 'climate-resilient' water systems in Somerset as a partner in the European WAVE Project (Water Adaptation is Valuable for Everyone). WAVE aims to:
 - identify, using predictive modeling, the local effects of climate change in Somerset
 - manage risks by the sustainable management of excess water - working with natural processes to make more space for water in the environment
 - reduce flood risks, for example by planting trees, to alleviate the severity of flooding from soil run off
 - raise awareness, so that landowners and wider local communities are better informed on how they can, and will need to, adapt to a changing climate
- The first Somerset County Council Adaptation Action Plan is currently in final draft and is being circulated for internal comment prior to publication.

Benefits of adapting

- Development of a skills base in climate change adaptation within the Authority and with local strategic partners
- Coherent application to strategic development
- Increased resilience to the impacts of climate change, with particular regard to the vulnerability of Somerset to an increased risk of flooding
- Development of community cohesion and resilience in response to the challenges of climate change

Challenges

The development of service level action plans required each group manager to consider how climate change might affect service delivery. A number of managers regarded this as a diversion of valuable staff time from their priority tasks.

The Strategy commitment, backed by support at corporate level, was key to resolving this issue:

- Adaptation workshops were held for each of the 4 Directorates
- A guidance note for group managers, with adaptation action plan template was prepared and circulated
- Climate change staff provided individual support meetings with group managers where needed

Recommendations

- Agreement at a corporate level of the need for service level adaptation planning is essential
- Dissemination of clear information to all sectors of directorates is necessary to gain a common understanding of County level climate change impacts and priorities
- Make use of the SWCCIP 'Warming to the Idea' document (www.oursouthwest.com/climate/scopingstudy.htm) and UKCIP publications to develop an information framework accessible to all
- The Nottingham Declaration action pack – see link on Energy Saving Trust website: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/nottingham
- The UKCIP website includes many informative publications for public and business sectors: www.ukcip.org.uk Using and working through the UKCIP BACLIAT tool was really helpful in assisting service areas in developing understanding of the issues and how to tackle them
- Emphasis must be placed on working together with strategic partnerships, local communities and all tiers of local and regional government to achieve the optimum outcome in terms of resilience to climate change

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Relevant links:

www.somerset.gov.uk/climatechange