

Adapting to climate change – local authority case study

Devon County Council – Integrated Impacts Assessment Tool



Overview:

Following the Weather Impacts Assessment of Devon County Council's (DCC) services, it was realised that a mechanism was required to ensure that DCC's future activities consider their vulnerability to extreme weather and future climate change.

DCC's existing project management framework and decision-making committee report templates included a prompt to officers to perform a broad risk assessment of proposals and a mandatory Equality Impact Needs Assessment. But these did not effectively address extreme weather and climate vulnerability. It seemed appropriate to build on these existing processes to create a robust impact assessment methodology.

A team of officers representing economic, health, equality and environmental issues was created to prepare an Integrated Impact Assessment Tool (which meets the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010) that will be used to assess the actual or potential impacts arising from DCC proposals (including new practices, policies, plans, strategies and decisions) on communities, local economic conditions, individuals, vulnerable groups and the environment in one exercise. 'Climate Change Vulnerability' has been included in the tool.

Adaptation measures:

The Integrated Impact Assessment Tool is split into three sections; Environment, Economy and Society. Each section comprises a list of prompt questions which an officer should consider whilst developing a proposal, For example: *Will the proposal create a demand for existing local skills?* Each section of the tool is accompanied by a guidance document that assists the officer to undertake the assessment.

Within the Environment section of the tool is the question *Will the proposal be vulnerable to the future effects of climate change (warmer, wetter winters; drier, hotter summers; more intense storms and extreme weather; and rising sea level)?* The guidance that accompanies this question is divided into three parts.

The first part helps an officer determine whether their proposal is sensitive to weather or climate. It does this by highlighting recent effects of extreme weather and encouraging the officer to think

about how these might impact their proposal when they inevitably recur. It also highlights types of proposals that are likely to be particularly sensitive to weather and climate change.

Should an officer decide that their proposal is vulnerable to weather and climate change, they proceed to the second part of the guidance. This provides a customised Climate Change Impacts Appraisal Tool, based loosely on the UK Climate Impact Programme (UKCIP)'s Business Areas Climate Impact Assessment Tool (BACLIAT). The tool prompts the officer to consider the broad assumptions of future climatic changes (i.e. hotter, drier summers etc.) against various elements of their proposal, such as logistics, people and finance. The tool does not expect an officer to use UK Climate Projections 2009 (UKCP09) data, but a summary of regional projections is included in the tool should an officer desire them.

The third part of the guidance provides a template that helps an officer identify adaptive measures for the potential impacts that have been identified in part two. The Environmental Policy Team's contact details are provided should further assistance be required.

A summary of the Integrated Impact Assessment, including a description of the improvements and changes that have been made to the proposal and sources of any evidence used to complete the assessment, is signed off by the officer's manager. The summary is attached to decision-making committee reports for perusal by those sitting on the committee.

Challenges:

The Weather Impacts Assessment was able to demonstrate that DCC was vulnerable in certain business areas to weather and climate change. This helped the authority understand that climate change adaptation is not an activity that should be left to the future. This led to a desire by decision makers to ensure that future proposals consider their vulnerability to weather and climate.

Once climate change is understood to be an additional operational risk to a local authority, rather than a 'green' issue, it is easier to engage key colleagues.

Further thoughts:

Embedding climate change adaptation into an existing process is much more likely to be accepted by colleagues, and therefore be more effective, than setting up a unique process.

Working with colleagues responsible for equality assessment at DCC has been valuable. This has enabled climate change adaptation to be included in a mandatory assessment process due to the legal requirements surrounding Equality Impact and Needs Assessment (EINA).

The Integrated Impact Assessment Tool underwent a pilot phase with small selection of business units between December 2010 and April 2011. The tool has been updated and improved in response to the comments received from officers using it during this period to ensure that it's useful and effective.

As a result, the Climate Change Impacts Appraisal Tool has been re-drafted into a Word document rather than its original spreadsheet guise. The UKCP09 outputs that were initially included within an appendix of the tool for officers' reference have been removed as these were found to add an unnecessary level of complication.

The tool will continue to be updated and developed as its use becomes more widespread within the council.

Benefits:

It is vital that DCC considers the possible impacts of a proposal carefully before making important decisions. This can be complex. Using 'prompt questions' to open up discussion helps to uncover the consequences of a proposal and balance conflicting needs and issues.

An Integrated Impact Assessment helps to assess the actual or potential impacts on communities, local economic conditions, individuals, vulnerable groups and the environment in one exercise. It also ensures that DCC delivers better value for money, by focusing on the issues that are important to people in Devon and making sure that what DCC provide is sustainable, effective and accessible from the outset.

The assessment gives the opportunity to do things better, by:

- Taking advantage of positive impacts to improve the services provided.
- Avoiding negative impacts by making small changes earlier in the process, and flagging up issues that would be very expensive to fix later.
- Increasing public trust by showing how decisions are made.
- Finding the best way of making an improvement.

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