



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Council Subscription to Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change
<b>Date:</b>	9 October 2009
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Mr William Francey, Director of Health and Environmental Services (ext. 3260)
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Alastair Curran, Sustainable Development Manager (ext. 3309)

### Relevant Background Information

In July 2009, government published the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan, which describes how the UK can fulfil its climate change obligations, secure its energy supply and achieve economic growth by moving towards a low carbon economy. The plan identifies a number of priority action areas including changing how we generate our energy, how we use energy in workplaces, in our homes and in our communities and how we use energy for transportation.

In developing the national plan, government has recognised that actions to address energy and climate change need to take place in all regions of the UK. The plan highlights therefore that the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly have consented to extension of the Climate Change Act 2008 to Northern Ireland and have agreed to contribute towards UK carbon budgets and targets. In addressing these obligations, the Executive has committed initially to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% on 1990 baseline levels by 2025 through the Programme for Government 2008-2011.

The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan also highlights the important convening and leadership role that local government has to play in achieving greenhouse gas reduction targets. Government has stated that people should be able increasingly to look to their local authority to co-ordinate, tailor and drive the development of a low carbon economy in a way that addresses local priorities whilst deriving maximum benefit.

Within Northern Ireland, carbon dioxide accounts for around 75% of all greenhouse gas emissions. A carbon dioxide sectoral analysis indicates that around 34% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions come from energy generation, a further 33% from transportation, 18% from residential sources and the remainder from the commercial, public and agricultural sectors. If the Council chose to lead the transition towards a low carbon economy within Belfast therefore, it would have to foster partner working with government departments, including the Department for Regional Development, the Department for Finance and Personnel and the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the general public, within a recognised climate change performance management framework.

One such performance framework is provided by the Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change, launched in October 2008. Eurocities was founded in 1986 and is the network of major European cities. The network presently brings together local governments of more than 140 large cities in over 30 European countries by providing a platform for member cities to share knowledge and address pressing European and global issues. The Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change was developed with support and input from a range of member cities including Belfast and has already been subscribed to by around 62 cities.

Within the 2008-2011 Corporate Plan under Strategic Theme 3 - Better care for Belfast's environment - a clean, green city now and for the future, Council has already committed to reducing the city's impact on climate change and improving air quality. Moreover, a primary key performance indicator of '% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from council premises' has also been adopted.

## **Key Issues**

### **Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change principal commitments.**

The Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change commits signatories to tackle climate change by adapting global and national objectives to a regional level, developing and implementing a climate change plan and by regularly measuring and reporting advances in greenhouse gas emission reductions.

### **Working on urban planning and the quality of cities.**

Specific Declaration commitments to be addressed in relation to improving urban planning and the quality of our cities include limiting urban sprawl, constructing energy efficient buildings, supporting the adaptation of existing buildings and planting trees to develop an urban canopy.

The Review of Public Administration (RPA) has recommended that local development plan functions and development control and enforcement should be returned to local authorities from 2011, which will enable these Declaration objectives to be addressed directly. In the intervening time however, it is considered that the Council is already meeting many of the Declaration obligations via the implementation of its Belfast City Masterplan. This development framework advances the concept of the compact city and commits the Council to raising the quality of the built environment by co-ordinating and monitoring the quality of urban design and architecture and by promoting building conservation.

Building Control is responsible for enforcing the Building Regulations, which prescribe how buildings are constructed. Part F technical booklets explain how premises can be constructed in order to minimise carbon dioxide emissions. Moreover, Building Control is also charged with the statutory enforcement of Display Energy Certificates for larger public buildings, which promote greater energy efficiency and reduced carbon dioxide emissions.

Finally, in relation to developing an urban canopy, Belfast City Council already has an extensive planting programme across its various parks and premises but it is also responsible for maintaining 11,000 trees in urban streetscape locations. These functions are also in accordance with the Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change commitments.

### **Working on transport and urban mobility.**

With regard to Declaration commitments to work on transportation and urban mobility, signatories are required to develop soft mobility modes including walking and cycling, to link public transport networks together, to encourage the use of new types of vehicles and fuels and to support the use of ICT to reduce the need for travel.

Although responsibility for transport planning is scheduled to remain with the Department for Regional Development post RPA, the Council has nonetheless recently adopted a new Transport Policy, which establishes its transportation vision for the City until 2015. The key message of the new policy is to support and promote the development of a modern, safe, accessible and integrated transportation system to enhance the connectivity for Belfast and its wider regions, which benefits the environment, supports sustainable development; and enhances the quality of life of all those who live, work, visit and do business in the City. It is anticipated that the Council will employ its Transport Policy to lobby and engage with the Department for Regional Development and Translink in order to secure the most sustainable transportation system for the City. Additionally, the Council will also continue to promote walking, cycling and other sustainable transport modes amongst its own employees and other organisations within the city.

In terms of encouraging the use of new types of vehicles and fuels, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee recently adopted a recommendation that Council undertake research to enable the development of a carbon abatement strategy for its vehicle fleet. The opportunity to introduce new types of vehicles and low carbon fuels will be considered during the development of the strategy.

It is considered therefore, that the Council is already well placed to address many of the mobility components of the Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change.

### **Working on renewable energy and diversifying energy production.**

In terms of developing renewable energy and diversifying energy production, as previously highlighted, local development plan functions and development control and enforcement is scheduled to be returned to local authorities from 2011. The opportunity to formulate development plans and planning policy for Belfast will provide the Council with the opportunity to incentivise the uptake of renewable energy as part of a wider community-planning obligation.

**Key issues contd.**

A further obligation under the renewable energy and diversifying energy production theme involves reducing waste at source through sorting and recycling. Waste Management and Cleansing Services already provide wide-ranging education programmes and recycling services to both the domestic and commercial sectors across the city. Moreover, Waste Management has recently completed a survey of the commercial sector in order to identify barriers to addressing the contributors to climate change and achieving sustainability. It is considered therefore, that the Council is already addressing the Declaration commitments in relation to waste reduction, reuse and recycling. Its community planning obligations post RPA will enable it to incentivise preferentially energy diversification and the uptake of renewable energy.

**Implementing adaptation measures.**

In terms of adaptation, the Eurocities Climate Change Declaration requires that signatories regulate their urban climates via enhancement of green and wooded zones, build housing adaptable to climate change, prevent flooding via the use of permeable surfaces, alert inhabitants to the dangers of climate change and prepare for climate driven health impacts on human and animal populations.

In relation to enhancing green and wooded zones, the Council's Open Space Strategy has already identified the economic, health and wellbeing, heritage, educational and community development benefits of open space within the urban environment. Accordingly, the strategy commits the Council to provide parks that offer areas for informal recreation and community events and that provide semi-natural habitats. The strategy also includes provisions for playing fields and play areas, allotments, greenways and civic and amenity areas.

In terms of building housing that will be adaptable to the climate in the future, the transfer of local development plan functions will provide the Council with the opportunity to influence how domestic properties are constructed as part of a wider community planning obligation.

In relation to preventing flooding via the use of permeable surfaces, the Council has participated in the development of a Strategy for Promoting the Use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) within Northern Ireland which proposes that Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are established as the preferred approach for managing storm water discharges from developed land. Permeable surfaces that slow the velocity of runoff thereby allowing storage, filtering, evaporation and infiltration before discharge are classified as a sustainable drainage technique.

In terms of alerting inhabitants to the potential danger of extreme climate change and preparing for the health impacts on human and animal populations, UK Climate Projections indicate that Northern Ireland is likely to experience hotter drier summers and warmer wetter winters, coupled with increased frequency of extreme weather occurrences such as heatwaves, dry spells, heavy rain and flooding. It is considered that the Council will have an increasing opportunity to promote climate change mitigation and adaptation as a component of its forthcoming development control and community planning obligations.

**Establishing long-term policies and strengthening international action.**

Finally, the Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change also requires that signatories commit to partnership working with cities and territories of developing nations in order to help limit their greenhouse gas emissions, to refining public policies related to greenhouse gas emissions in order to achieve the best outcome and to supporting climate change initiatives with appropriate human and financial resources. The Council's participation in the Eurocities network already provides a mechanism for knowledge dissemination and partnership working with cities and territories of developing nations.

**Subscribing to the Eurocities Climate Change Declaration.**

Since its launch in October 2008, the Eurocities Climate Change Declaration has been signed by the political leaders of over 60 major European cities. Moreover, Eurocities has stated that as well as taking direct action to combat climate change, those subscribing to the Declaration are signifying the need for prompt action by national governments at events such as the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2009 where a successor to the Kyoto Protocol is scheduled to be agreed. It is considered that subscription to the Eurocities Climate Change Declaration will enable Council to demonstrate formal civic and political leadership in addressing climate change for the city.

The next formal opportunity to subscribe to the Declaration will be at the Eurocities Urban Challenges, Sustainable Solutions Conference to be held in Stockholm from 25 – 28 November 2009. The Declaration could be signed by the nominated political representative, usually the city mayor, in

person at this conference or, alternatively, by returning a signed certificate to the Eurocities office. Members may wish to note that the Development Committee, in considering council representation at the November Eurocities Conference decided, having regard to cost considerations, to limit Development Committee representation to one of its Members and two officers.

### **Resource Implications.**

#### Financial.

There are no immediate financial implications associated with subscribing to the Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change however, as articulated within the Declaration text, signatories are required to support climate change initiatives with appropriate human and financial resources. Where specific projects are identified as a component of the Declaration commitments, proposals detailing financial, human resource and asset resource requirements will be presented to Elected Members for approval prior to inception.

If attendance of the Lord Mayor at the November Conference to sign the Declaration in person were to be authorised this would involve a cost of approximately £840.

#### Human Resources.

It is proposed that the Council's Sustainable Development Steering Group and Sustainable Development Manager will lead implementation of the Climate Change Declaration for the Council. All Departments will, however, need to identify how they can individually contribute towards Declaration commitments through their everyday business activities.

#### Asset and Other Implications.

N/A

### **Recommendations.**

The Committee is requested to note the implications to the Council of subscribing to the Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change and to agree that the Council should subscribe to the Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change as a first step towards addressing climate change for the city and in order to promote the development of a low carbon economy.

The Committee is also requested to authorise the Lord Mayor, or other Council Member as appropriate, to sign the Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change on behalf of the city and to decide whether the decision is to be implemented by return of a signed certificate or through attendance at the Eurocities Urban Challenges, Sustainable Solutions Conference in Stockholm on 27 November 2009.

If the attendance of the Lord Mayor is to be authorised the Committee is also requested to approve all associated costs as estimated above.

### **Key to Abbreviations.**

ICT	-	Information and communication technologies.
RPA	-	Review of Public Administration.
SuDS	-	Sustainable Drainage Systems.

### **Documents Attached.**

Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change.