



Learning Brief One: Summer 2007 Communicating Climate Change

Introduction

The Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) exists to support information sharing and delivery of sustainable development across local authorities in Scotland¹.

This learning point has been developed on the back of SSN's June Quarterly Network Meeting, which focused on Communicating Climate Change.

Who is the audience for this learning point?

The priority audience for this resource is SSN members and their local authority colleagues. It will also be of relevance to anyone working in a large public sector organisation, and for whom communicating climate change is a concern.

What is the purpose of this learning point?

- To collate information generated and ideas established at SSN quarterly meetings.
- To reinforce the learning of participants.
- To provide a resource for members that can be distributed amongst their colleagues.
- To provide a baseline of information from which we can move forward in future network discussions.

SSN's experience shows that

Leadership – Legislation - Culture Change – Programmes for Action – Scrutiny and Accountability – Resources are all vital to local authorities' delivery of sustainable development. This Learning Brief on climate change communications should assist SSN members to build climate change awareness and action into the culture of their organizations.

What did we know prior to the event?

Interest in climate change has never been higher. Politically, we are seeing clear demonstrations of commitment. Centrally, UK & Scottish Climate Change Bills are in motion; locally, all 32 Scottish local authorities have signalled their commitment to act by signing Scotland's Climate Change Declaration. At a corporate level, too, we are seeing broad engagement with the reality of climate change. No longer is criticism of the scientific, moral and political arguments for climate change acceptable in the business sphere: even previous dissenters such as Exxon Mobil are making public their mitigation activities.

Public cynicism and confusion is rife, however. Defra research² undertaken in 2005 indicates that while 94% of people believe that the UK's climate is changing, and 79% are concerned about this, only 7% think that they personally can have a large impact. A recent Mori-IPSOS report into attitudes to climate change³ describes a 'mixed and confused' understanding of the implications of climate

¹ For more information on the members, work and priorities of the Sustainable Scotland Network, please visit www.sustainable-scotland.net

² http://www.climatechallenge.gov.uk/communicate/what_do_people_think.html

³ Tipping Point Or Turning Point? Social Marketing & Climate Change: 2007. Available to download at <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/publications/srireports/climatechange.shtml>

change. Local authorities are in a position of responsibility here, having unrivalled access to communities, public bodies and local businesses in order to clarify, communicate and inspire behaviour change on climate change. Effective and consistent external communications campaigns are key to the work that local authorities can undertake to address this widely reported public confusion.

Within local authorities, awareness of and action on climate change needs cross-service commitment and strategic prioritisation commensurate with the scale of the problem. Internal communications are key to ensuring concerted political and corporate action.

The following principles outline the priority issues that should be considered in the development of effective internal and external communications campaigns. The principles draw on theories related to motivating behaviour change / sustainable lifestyle choices and the experience of other campaigns and practitioners. **Core learning statements are highlighted in bold blue text.**

What principles were established as a result of the discussions?

One of the most successful efforts to communicate climate change in recent years is Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth movie and supporting slideshow (which is now being delivered by over 1400 trained presenters across Europe and the USA). The elements of this film that made it successful in communicating climate change are instructive for those planning campaigns themselves:

- it uses powerful images to support words and ideas;
- it ensures a consistent message is portrayed through a variety of media;
- it is technically accurate and well referenced;
- it personalises the issue of climate change;
- it finishes with a positive note and reassures people that they can make a difference.

Criticism has been levelled at An Inconvenient Truth, however, for failing to suggest solutions that are commensurate with the problem. It's important **not to overestimate the impact of climate-friendly actions** (energy efficient lightbulbs aren't going to save us!). What is important in communicating the value of small actions, though, is **connecting small individual actions to collective impact** (eg EST advert zooming out from one apartment, to an apartment block, to a town).

Another proven communications technique is to **localise the issue** of climate change (for example, through GIS mapping of climate scenarios onto locally-significant sites). Climate change is a big idea to comprehend – both in terms of the timescales and global stretch of ecological and social impacts: **relate these big ideas to everyday life** and endeavour to **connect small localised actions to local concerns and identities**.

Effective campaigns rely on **clarity of message and simplicity of message**. Keep your slogans to ten words or less for maximum impact.

It's vital not to base your campaigns on generating fear – especially without giving people a sense of agency, a sense that they have the power to impact the issue. If you're going to include information in your campaign that describes potential impacts of climate change to shock people into action, make sure that give them **specific advice** on actions that can be taken to avert this (five household tips, for example). And don't fall into the trap of thinking that providing a web address empowers people to act!

It's important to persuade people that taking action in itself has a value, irrespective of the motivation. **Focus on outcomes rather than altering mindsets**. Research demonstrates that personal actions are more likely to change people's long-held opinions than persuasion from outside. Make sure you have a sense of the **specific outcomes** your campaign is seeking to achieve.

New habits are needed as much as new technologies – **emphasise to people that their actions are the solution to the problem**. This approach also has the benefit of empowering individuals and reinforcing to them that their behaviours and actions have a vital role to play.

Targeting people's motivation

Motivate people with the message that most people are already bought into the message – **join the movement!**

Link climate change to positive ideas, such as linking it to home improvement. People are drawn to enhance the amount of pleasure and leisure they experience, so emphasise to them how climate-friendly actions can achieve this (The Sun newspaper's climate change campaigns have focused on encouraging people to share baths and dine by candlelight! The messages may be light, but they show an understanding of The Sun's audience).

In planning your campaign it's vital to **assess what people think about climate change now**⁴. Consider this specifically in relation to your **target audience**. Be focussed!

Vitaly, you also need to **consider what motivates people to act** more generally. This is less about socioeconomic status or demographics, and more about psychological need. Excellent resources that simplify this body of thought can be found at <http://www.campaignstrategy.org/resources.html>. The resources (shared by experienced campaigner Chris Rose) include explanations of climate change communications in relation to motivational psychological values, values-based social marketing and tips for using this in common communications exercises such as public meetings.

Attention to values-based communication should help you **think about who influences people (specifically your target audience) to act**. For most people, this is unlikely to be their local authority! Defra's campaigns on climate change have avoided heavy government branding and have used innovative routes to communicating the need for action on climate change (including indirect campaigning through support for high-profile business campaigns and funding for community-based campaigns).

What did we learn from practitioners' experience?

SSN members cannot do it alone – make use of resources, audiences and channels in other departments.

Communications campaigns do not need to be resource intensive. **It is vital that you connect climate change issues to service-specific priorities** and concerns in order to inspire action.

Investing time in **identifying allies** is an effective exercise here: you can then **piggyback on colleagues communications**, embedding your climate change message within campaigns on transport, home improvement, public health etc.

You do not need to go back to basics with every campaign: **use messages and images that have proved successful elsewhere**⁵. Make use of post-campaign evaluations that other local authorities have conducted. Invest your energy, time and money in assessing your audience's motivations and the impact of your campaigns instead.

⁴ For data on public attitudes to climate change, go to http://www.climatechallenge.gov.uk/communicate/what_do_people_think.html

⁵ The Sustainable Scotland Network has established a climate change communications portal to meet this need. Visit www.sustainable-scotland.net/climatechange to benefit from your colleagues' experience, and send examples of your campaigns materials and evaluations through to ssn@ksbscotland.org.uk.

For maximum effectiveness, keep an eye on forthcoming national / international political statements or public campaigns (such as the UNFCCC post-Kyoto discussions in Bali in November 2007, or the Live Earth concerts that took place in July 2007), and **link your campaigns** to them.

You do not need complete grasp of climate science to communicate the issue. What's more important is explaining the science and related solutions that you are aware of in a coherent and accurate way.

Awards work – creating champions and heroes within staff teams and community groups.

Regular feedback is crucial – people need to see that the changes they are making as a response to your campaigns are making a difference. The Scottish Executive approached this by updating people regularly on the collective carbon footprint of Victoria Quay.

Looking at what your audience is already doing (e.g. buying energy efficient lightbulbs) **and building on this** (e.g. switching lights and electrical gadgets off) is most likely to engage people. Do not agonise over comparative carbon savings of actions in order to direct behaviour change. People want to know that their actions will have an impact, but they are more influenced by incentives.

You don't need to demonstrate complete mastery of climate change friendly action before encouraging others to act. Research on climate change (MorilPSOS:2007) shows that people need to see cross-sector action to encourage their behaviour change. It is important to communicate your Council's action to your local communities. The strategy here is to play the working together card: we're committed to this work but we need you to participate.

Recommendations from campaign work

Harness the power of a group's strong identity: 'Don't mess with Texas'; 'Take a Pride in Fife'

If people have confused messages then they will go to their **most trusted source**. Evidence tells us this is **friends and family**. Defra made use of this established fact in planning their climate challenge campaign, devolving communication to communities through funding awards for innovative campaign ideas.

Editorials, radio features and press articles will always be a powerful and authoritative way to communicate your work and your messages. It's advisable to **establish strong contacts with editors / key journalists of newspapers, magazines and local radio stations**.

Pledging is widely used in climate change campaigns. Experience suggests that this **is only useful if individuals (a) make their pledges to specific people** (rather than a piece of paper or a behemoth organisation) or (b) are followed up.

Campaign Examples

Manchester is my planet www.manchesterismyplanet.com/

This campaign exemplifies the use of **collective action** and **local identity** as communications techniques. Manchester is my planet was also managed as an **umbrella campaign, involving a number of different organizations**, and spreading to incorporate a number of nearby towns and cities (Salford is my planet, for example).

Hampshire County Council: 9 Lives <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/ninelives/about9lives.htm>

The use of **personal stories** is a powerful and proven communications technique which this web site demonstrates. **Behaviour change is shown to be achievable and is normalized.**

Lights out London <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/6225108.stm>

The Capital Radio-led Lights out London campaign utilized **local identity and collective action** to make a bold statement on climate change. Instead of formally evaluating participation in the event,

the campaign budgeted for *thank you* bill board posters, which reinforced **a sense of belonging through participation** in the campaign, and rewarded people's involvement.

Where are there gaps in practice and knowledge?

There is a scarcity in both assessment of audiences prior to campaigns, and monitoring / measurement of campaign impact. However pushed you are for resources, this is vital. At the beginning of a campaign (a) **put a lot of effort into assessing what motivates your audience** (people won't always be inspired by a sense of doing good for others) and (b) **put even more effort into thinking about how you will monitor**, measure and reinforce the outcomes of the campaign.

Make use of low-tech evaluation techniques (audience numbers, numbers of enquiries, attendees at events, online evaluation of impact of viewing films) and **share your results with other SSN members via the Climate Change Communications Portal**.

There is disagreement over **how to respond to sceptics**. While it can sometimes be counter-productive to engage in too much detail with such arguments, there is a good bank of material at www.grist.com that responds to the common challenges to climate science and action. It's worthwhile noting that science never produces complete consensus. Al Gore has demonstrated, however, that there's better consensus on the science of climate change than on any issue other than Newton's 2nd law of thermodynamics.

Saying thank you to people for taking climate friendly behaviour changes should become commonplace.

There is a real risk of climate fatigue – people are tired of hearing about the problem. In order to overcome this, **focus on solutions**, possible behaviour changes and **the advantages of climate-friendly actions**.

What next?

The buoyant discussion on that we witnessed at the June Quarterly Meeting certainly doesn't end here! There are plenty of avenues for SSN members to engage with climate change communications, and for us as a Network to think about how we incorporate the ideas into our practice. Some of the channels through which we will continue to support this work are:

The SSN climate change communications portal www.sustainable-scotland.net/climatechange
This portal needs your contributions in order to meet its aspirations – please send examples of your own / other campaign materials, anonymous evaluation results and links to ssn@ksbscotland.org.uk

An Inconvenient Truth presentation for local authorities: Six Scottish civic leaders have been formally trained in and equipped with Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth presentation. Local authorities are a key audience for their message and the group is working with SSN members to arrange opportunities for presentations at key Council meetings.

Scotland's Climate Change Declaration: The messages discussed above are key to sustaining interest and maintaining momentum in SCCD, which is a good communications medium and message in its own right: a demonstration of leadership and collective political unity.

What are the key learning points from the day for the Network? There is a lot of commonality between local authorities' campaign work on climate change. There is a role for the Network in providing centrally-produced and consistent campaign materials / messages and in pooling monitoring and data from LA campaigns

And... SSN's Annual Conference 2007: Local Government & Climate Change: Your How to Guide will provide ample space for further consideration of these pressing issues. November 8-9th 2007, Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh - www.sustainable-scotland.net/conference2007.