

## Local Government Association response to the Communication from the European Commission: an Energy Policy for Europe

February 2007

*The Local Government Association (LGA) represents the interests of all councils in England and Wales.*

*The LGA works to secure a better deal for tax payers, to promote efficiency, and to transform local public services.*

### Overview

This is a defining moment in the development of the EU's climate change and energy policies. Decisions that will be taken at the Spring Council in March 2007 on energy liberalisation, security and climate change will be highly significant at the local level.

Enhancing the role of local authorities in tackling climate change has long been a priority for the LGA. As part of this, the encouragement and development of renewable energy and the promotion of energy efficiency is at the top of the LGA's agenda. We are committed to ensuring a clear, supportive framework at local, national, EU and international level for local authorities to take steps towards the prevention and mitigation of and adaptation to the effects of climate change.

### Local government's key messages for the Spring Council

- Proposals must be challenging given the urgency with which action is needed. We urge the Spring Council not to water down any of the plans or targets in a way which would make the plan weaker. However, we would warn that targets that are too prescriptive or inflexible can prevent locally effective responses to developing renewables.
- Local authorities are key to delivering a secure, competitive and sustainable European energy policy. They play a vital role in tackling climate change through reducing emissions from their own buildings and fleet, through service delivery and through work with the local community. The motto "think globally, act locally" is particularly relevant in the sector of energy.
- We support actions to assure the safe, secure and competitive supply of energy. But, in line with the energy hierarchy, reducing demand for energy and the promotion of energy efficiency must be a priority in policies to tackle climate change.
- We are pleased that the Commission recognises the 'significant contribution' that local authorities can make towards increasing the role of renewable energies.

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## **LGA response to the proposals set out by the Commission on 10 January in the 'Energy Policy for Europe' and associated communications**

### **1. Increasing the level of renewable energy in the EU's overall mix to 20% by 2020** (*'An Energy Policy for Europe', section 3.5*)

The LGA supports the diversification of energy supply away from a reliance on fossil fuels. However, reducing demand for energy must take priority, with meeting demand through renewables next in the hierarchy. Targets for specific types of technology that are too prescriptive can also lead to an overly-centralised approach that inhibits locally effective solutions. Local areas need to be able to adopt the most effective technologies for the circumstances.

### **2. Completing the reform of the internal market for electricity and gas and unbundling** (*Prospects for the internal gas and electricity market*)

We welcome renewed efforts to reform the market for electricity and gas. This must be an urgent priority of the EU. Citizens, business and public sector organisations need affordable, stable supplies of energy and all have suffered with price rises partly because current EU legislation has been ineffective. Liberalisation helps create a level playing field and drives innovation, including the supply of green energy.

### **3. Dramatically increasing the amount of local, low emission energy that we produce and use** (*'An Energy Policy for Europe,' section 3*)

Microgeneration and generation of energy at the local level need to be a central component of national energy supply mixes. Decentralised energy supply operates at far higher efficiencies as little energy is lost during its passage through transmission and distribution processes. Decentralised energy using renewable technologies, particularly combined heat and power, will deliver the greenest energy with the lowest emissions. Local authorities in the UK have led the way on setting local policies to promote such schemes.

### **4. Local authorities have to make a 'significant contribution' towards increasing the use of renewables, but planning processes need to be improved and simplified and renewable energies need to be incorporated into local plans** (*'Renewable Energy Road Map: Renewable energies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: building a more sustainable future, section 3.5*)

We welcome the recognition of the role of planning policies in promoting such technologies. The LGA recognises the need to streamline processes so that the maximum potential for renewable technologies is exploited. Although progress has been made, the planning process still often stands in the way of encouraging renewables (eg planning permission for wind farms). Councils increasingly do build renewable energies and specific targets into local plans, moving ahead of national requirements in many cases. It is helpful for national planning policies to embed minimum standards but we also need to retain flexibility for local councils to drive up standards in new development both through requiring increased local renewable energy generation and through setting locally appropriate and challenging levels on energy efficiency.

### **5. Energy poverty and smart metering** (*'Prospects for the internal gas and electricity market', sections 2.6.2 & 2.6.3*)

We welcome the commitment to tackle fuel poverty and special measures to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable citizens. Clear, relevant data is also necessary before people can change the way that they consume energy, so the extension of 'smart metering' will also be helpful. Local authorities need access to real time energy usage at six figure postcode level to allow them to target their work most effectively.

## How local government is already making a difference on energy and climate change

Local authorities are leading the way in taking steps to tackle climate change and influence people to lead 'greener' lifestyles. Councils are taking decisions and making investments now for future energy supply well into the middle of the century.

- Over 200 councils have signed up to the "Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change" which commits their authorities to take action.
- The LGA has announced that it will launch a Climate Change Commission that will highlight local government's role in responding to climate change. Findings will be produced in mid 2007 for communication to local, national and EU governments to promote more efficient frameworks within which councils can act.
- For case studies of good current local government practice in incorporating sustainability into planning policy please see the LGA Publication 'Planning Policies for Sustainable Building'  
<http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Publication/planning%20policies%20complete.pdf>
- For case studies of good current local government practice in delivering energy efficiency planning please see the Energy Savings Trust / LGA Publication 'Leading the Way'  
<http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Publication/leadingtheway.pdf>
- The LGA is working with local authorities, and policy makers towards a vision of low carbon, energy efficient communities. The vision of Anytown 2025 can directly contribute to the EU's future Action Plan and provide a basis on which communities can take decisions and invest resources.  
[http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Briefing/Our\\_Work/Environment/Anytown2025.pdf](http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Briefing/Our_Work/Environment/Anytown2025.pdf)

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### LGA European and International Unit

The Local Government Association has a new European and International Unit, which is responsible for all the work previously carried out by the Local Government International Bureau (LGIB).

The integration strengthens lobbying work, bringing international issues closer to local government.

#### The new LGA European and International Unit:

- lobbies the EU and international institutions to get the best deal for councils;
- keeps councils informed about EU policies that affect them;
- develops international partnerships and co-operation;
- supports locally elected members in European and international institutions; and
- promotes the development of local democracy around the world.

[www.lga.gov.uk/international](http://www.lga.gov.uk/international)