

Compare renewables resource

Purpose

LG Group has developed an online resource and complementary publication for councillors and senior officers on renewable energy. The resource is designed to help councils and community groups understand which low and zero carbon energy opportunities might be right for their area.

Summary

This paper provides an overview of the resource and the work that has been done to promote it with member authorities. LGA members were involved in the development of the resource.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the launch of this resource and wherever possible to assist in promoting it to member authorities.

Action

Officers to progress as appropriate.

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Background

1. In August 2010 Secretary of State, Chris Huhne MP, announced that the Government would overturn the ban on local authorities selling renewable electricity. Local authorities can now take full advantage of financial incentives such as the feed-in tariffs and the upcoming renewable heat incentive. The move to Zero Carbon development also opens opportunities for local authorities to fund energy schemes. Local authorities are exploring opportunities and starting energy generation projects across the UK. This resource helps them understand their opportunities and how to achieve them by providing examples of good practice across England.

The resource

2. *Compare renewables* provides an overview of eight low and zero carbon energy technologies. It gives high level information on cost, timescales, and available funding to enable authorities to compare energy opportunities. There are 25 local authority and community group case studies to highlight good practice. *Compare renewables* currently sits on the LG Improvement and Development site at www.idea.gov.uk/environment.
3. A complementary publication *Sustainable energy options: How do you choose the right solutions for your area?* (appended to this paper) provides councillors and senior officers with an introduction to energy projects. It includes quotations from councillors in member authorities that are leading on renewable energy projects to highlight the wider benefits of energy projects such as: generating income, job creation, tackling fuel poverty, securing an energy supply and cutting carbon emissions.

Development

4. Research was undertaken through member authority groups, events and a literature review to identify the main challenges to local authorities and communities in unlocking opportunities for energy projects. These include:
 - 4.1 lack of available funding and resources to apply for grants or lever in funding;
 - 4.2 the cost of equipment and infrastructure;
 - 4.3 lack of skills to identify potential energy projects and develop business plans;
 - 4.4 uncertainty of financial incentives in the short and long-term, such as the feed-in tariffs and renewable heat incentive;
 - 4.5 lack of public buy-in and acceptance from businesses, tenants and householders;
 - 4.6 concern and distrust over some technologies and their visual impact;
 - 4.7 the potential to lock people into an energy supply, thereby reducing choice.
5. The resource gives information to overcome these challenges. The case studies show that local authorities can lead in this area. They draw out the barriers and how they

Item 5

were overcome, particularly about the business case and funding. They also show that beyond generating revenue, energy schemes have other local benefits.

6. The online resource was developed over a six month period, with periodic user-testing sessions. Councillor and officers peers were invited to attend half-day sessions to review the resource and give critical feedback. This process helps ensure that the resource provides the most relevant information for our member authority audience.
7. Officers across the LG Group contributed to the development of this resource. It links to existing resources such as the EU funding tracker, the Planning Advisory Services and LG Regulation resources on biomass and air quality. Consultants with expertise in renewable energy and planning were procured to provide technical information.

Promotion and events

8. The main launch of *Compare renewables* is at an LG Group event on 14th March. At this one-day event delegates will hear from councils that are leading on energy generation. Sector experts will explain the opportunities and how councils can fund and deliver energy projects. Interactive workshops will explore these opportunities in greater detail.
9. The resource has been promoted at a variety of internal and external events on energy, planning and carbon reduction. Online newsletters, communities of practice, First magazine and press releases have also been used to publicise this resource. Early monitoring of usage on the website suggests that the resource has been well received.

Conclusions and next steps

10. Officers will continue to promote this resource through events and online. Members are asked to assist in promoting it to member authorities wherever possible. Depending on the LG Group's wider work programme in the future financial year, this resource has the potential to continue to grow. It could be complimented with further sub-regional events or workshops in local authorities.

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