



‘FUTURE WATER’: THE GOVERNMENT’S WATER STRATEGY FOR ENGLAND A RESPONSE BY THE ASSOCIATION OF NORTH EAST COUNCILS

North East Local Government’s Commitment to Climate Change

1. The Association of North East Councils (ANEC) is the political voice for local government in the North East, representing all 25 local authorities in the region, throughout Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and the Tees Valley. It is a cross-Party organisation with all of its Members being democratically elected and accountable politicians.
2. The local government sector in the North East has a key role to play in the region’s economic, social and environmental well-being. As the evidence on climate change continues to grow, so too does the imperative that we all must do something about it.
3. Councils in the North East have the potential to make a significant contribution to tackling the challenge of climate change. As Government recognises, ‘local government has a critical role to play in ensuring that local communities and infrastructure are able to cope with the impact of climate change, not only the effects which are felt today, but those that can be anticipated in the future’.
4. As the political voice for local government, the Association of North East Councils has placed the protection and promotion of the environment at the heart of its vision for change. We have pledged to work collaboratively as a local government sector, as well as with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors, to tackle the causes of climate change and to adapt to and mitigate its impacts. The Local Government White Paper, ‘*Strong and Prosperous Communities*’ underlines ‘*local government’s pivotal role in achieving sustainable development and mitigating and adapting to climate change*’. The White Paper gives local government new opportunities to drive local action on climate change mitigation and adaptation, leading by example and through its own practices and the services it delivers, as well as placing the environment as a core theme in the third generation of Local Area Agreements. From 2009, Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA), against which local authorities’ performance will be assessed, will include climate change as one of the 198 national indicators.

5. In addition, 'Planning Policy Statement 25: Development and Flood Risk' also states: '*Where climate change is expected to increase flood risk so that some existing development may not be sustainable in the long term, Local Planning Authorities should take this into account in the preparation of Local Development Documents, as there may be opportunities to relocate development to more sustainable locations*'.
6. Whilst this broad policy framework sets out what is expected by Government, the local government sector in the North East is also being proactive about how it can make a positive and significant contribution to tackling climate change, through adopting a strong leadership role, setting examples of good practice, the successful implementation of policies and responsibilities and the enforcement of regulations. Local authority Leaders also have a key role to play in 'winning the hearts and minds' of citizens and communities throughout the North East, through effective communications, engagement and education.
7. All 25 councils in the North East have signed the Nottingham Declaration and the region is the first in the country to have signed a North East Declaration on Climate Change, drawing in partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Through the Association, a Member-led Climate Change Task and Finish Group has also produced a report outlining how local government in the North East can collaborate on taking 45 action focused recommendations to tackle the challenge of climate change (attached).
8. The issues in relation to flood risk are well rehearsed: the three months from May to July 2007 were the wettest since records began. The resulting floods claimed 13 lives and damaged 48,000 homes and 7,000 businesses. Power and water supplies were lost; railway lines, eight motorways and many other roads were closed and large parts of five counties and four cities were brought to a standstill. The flooding triggered a series of emergencies which stretched local resources to the limit. Whilst the worst of this weather missed the North East, there were still consequences for the region. The impacts of climate change will result in heavy levels of intense rainfall becoming more common with potentially major effects of this on the environment and people's lives, particularly in urban areas unless action is taken.
9. The Association welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government's Water Strategy: *Future Water*, and the broad thrust of its approach and principles, also taking into account the recommendations of the Pitt Review.
10. The recognition by Government in *Future Water* that adaptation measures are now imperative is welcomed by the Association. There has been a tendency to focus activity on mitigation measures, with adaptation often seen as a 'poor relation'. We need to redress the balance between mitigation and adaptation measures. The Association recognises that adaptation is fundamentally about protecting people and property from adverse impacts, on which local authorities have a significant role to play to ensure the well-being of their communities. Councils across the North East work with partner organisations to ensure that emergency planning covers every aspect of citizens' well-being, including their health. This means embedding climate change into health strategies and sustainable community strategies to ensure that the necessary

adaptation measures and emergency planning services are identified and appropriate partner arrangements to implement these, can be put in place.

11. An adaptation study commissioned by the North East Climate Change Partnership, which has had the involvement of a number of councils in the region, was published on 30 April in response to the threat of the changing climate on the region's communities, economy, infrastructure and natural resources. The North East is the only region in the world known to have produced such a study using detailed analytical techniques. In addition to assessing the likely impact of climate change across the region up to 2050, the study also identifies what should be done to adapt to potential changes, and recommends the actions that need to be taken now for the future. Recommendations for a number of regional adaptation strategies include greater information sharing, effective emergency and long term planning, co-ordinated communications, and risk and asset management. The Association is involved in hosting an event for elected Members on 3 June to provide an opportunity for debate with a view to taking forward actions for the future.

Surface Water Management Plans

12. The Association considers that Surface Water Management Plans (SWMP) could provide a strong co-ordinating mechanism for managing the increased levels of rainfall expected, as a consequence of climate change.
13. Within the North East, as observed during last summer's heavy rainfall, there are relatively few areas which are at immediate risk of flooding. Specifically within this context, the Association does not feel able to comment on whether in high-risk areas the implementation of surface water management plans should be mandatory. Within this region, however, the key concern regarding flooding is within urban areas, and the expansion of hard surfaces which make it difficult for rain water to soak through the surface. Local authorities are aware of the risks associated through this and therefore support the development of Surface Water Management Plans to adapt to the changes brought about by heavier periods of rainfall.
14. In the North East, local government has developed strong working relationships with the region's water company, Northumbrian Water, as well as the Environment Agency and has already recognised the need to undertake work to tackle many of the issues identified in *Future Water*, particularly in relation to the management of flooding, drainage and sewage issues.
15. The Defra sponsored *Making Space for Water* pilots in Hartlepool between Hartlepool Borough Council and Northumbrian Water, as well as between the Environment Agency, Jeremy Benn Associates (with assistance from Northumbrian Water) and Newcastle City Council in Ouseburn and North Gosforth demonstrate that local government is successfully collaborating on expertise and resources.
16. The development of SWMP's will, in addition to reducing the risk of flooding, also improve the quality of water, as much of the rainwater will not be mixed within the sewerage system. This is a positive move, as it enables the promotion of safer, cleaner drinking water and also because it reduces the flow into sewerage systems, a major contributor to last year's flooding. Furthermore, the movement of water does, of course, have an impact on

energy resources, as does treating surface water, so alternatives to manage water on the surface through natural methods that reduce energy consumption is welcomed.

17. There are recommendations within *Future Water* that Local Authorities take the lead in SWMPs, particularly with regard to their current responsibilities relating to land use planning, ordinary watercourses, highway drainage, open spaces, local sustainability and emergency planning. However, local authorities in the region recognise, as do our strategic partners that a great deal of work and support is needed in taking this forward. Even pooling our collective knowledge and data it is apparent that a great deal of specialised, detailed modelling work will need to be done to be able to accurately determine likely surface water flows, a key component of any management plan.
18. An estimate given by one of the region's largest local authorities for the preparation of a SWMP is approximately £100,000, of which some 75% would be funded by the lead authority. Whilst local authorities recognise that within *Future Water*, it is suggested that Government would fund additional cost burdens, authorities would also need to develop the skills and capacity for this new role and responsibility. The Association would emphasise that, if local authorities do take the leading role in co-ordinating SWMP's, then they will require support, in terms of building both the capacity and expertise within current budgets, in order to ensure that whilst taking on this additional responsibility, their impact on delivering high-quality services is not diminished.
19. *Future Water* proposes that local authorities could adopt a scrutiny role in overseeing flood risk management and resilience plans in local areas, perhaps reporting to Committees on an annual basis. Local authorities have a strong role, through their power of well-being to ensure that external bodies which have an impact on the lives of their community, and it is important that local authorities retain some ability to question and consider the development of Surface Water Management Plans, particularly if they are to take on a leading role. Local authority scrutiny functions could provide an excellent opportunity to bring stakeholders and local communities together to discuss plans, to highlight issues, consult and make resolutions for action. Furthermore, national policy regarding Scrutiny is leading towards a broader scrutiny function across all public sector and partner organisations in an area. As such, the ability to scrutinise flood risk management would fit within present plans.
20. We acknowledge, however, that it is essential that local authorities do not duplicate work that is already taking place. Within this region, the strong working relationship with Northumbrian Water and the Environment Agency should be built upon. Any scrutiny function performed by local government should work alongside existing forums such as the Local Resilience Forums, drawing on the expertise available in these processes.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS)

21. With regard to surface water management plans and drainage to the public sewerage system, the Association welcomes the development of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS).

22. Specifically in relation to SUDS and their potential development as a viable alternative to connecting surface water into sewers, the Association notes the proposals for local authorities to adopt and manage SUDS. As a viable alternative to giving developers and property owners the automatic right to connect surface water drains into sewers, this move is one that would protect the environment, along with ensuring that communities are not affected by flooding due to greater levels of intense rainfall.
23. However, whilst we feel that local authorities are the most appropriate organisations to adopt and manage highway drainage SUDS, as this would mean that local government had the responsibility of highway drainage to its outfall, we believe that it would not be appropriate for local authorities to manage other types of SUDS. If local authorities took on such a role, it would have the consequence of local authorities managing the SUDS and sewerage companies managing the sewers on either side of the SUDS. Sewerage undertakers taking on this responsibility would provide greater clarity for members of the public, as they would be responsible for managing the full drainage system including SUDS and sewers.
24. The use of natural drainage processes such as permeable paving, green roofs and balancing ponds, to control the flows at their source is a positive step which protects the environment and the well-being of local communities. Furthermore, managing water on the surface can free up capacity for drainage in the below-ground system, which will be particularly important for managing the greater levels of rainwater that climate change will potentially bring.
25. The Association acknowledges that local authorities have a key role in many of the issues that will be related to SUDS, such as land use planning, managing open spaces, being responsible as the highways authority, as well as wider local sustainability issues. In addition, local government plays an integral role in regeneration issues and the supply of new homes.

Drainage of Surface Water to the Public Sewerage System – Review of Section 106 of the Water Industry Act 1991

26. In light of its close relationship to the development of SUDS, and its potential benefits both to the environment and local communities in preventing flooding through sustainable means, the Association supports the proposal to end the automatic right of developers to connect surface water drains to the public sewerage system. As previously highlighted, with heavier spells of rainfall, the importance of sustainable systems of drainage will grow and consequently, consideration of a wider range of drainage systems should be welcomed, both for future development and in relation to upgrading existing systems.

In Summary

27. Local government in the North East is committed to working collaboratively and in partners to address the effects of climate change, through exercising a strong leadership role.
28. With their core responsibilities for local planning matters, local authorities need to play a key strategic role in limiting the effects of increased flooding. Therefore, we welcome the key role Government envisages for local

government in the measures proposed within *Future Water*. Going forward, local authorities will continue to work with Government, the Environment Agency, Northumbrian Water, and others to ensure that appropriate structures, resources and partnership arrangements are in place.