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Local Energy Policy and Managing Low Carbon Transition: The Case of Leicester

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This research has been carried out to better determine whether the UK national policy agenda is reaching down to the local level. It is framed around a case study of one urban centre: the City of Leicester, England which has been selected due to its record in sustainability, energy efficiency and climate change mitigation.

Our analysis of Leicester's local energy landscape indicates that the city council (LCC) does indeed hold a central role among the players concerned with energy related activities. LCC has a facilitative role in a wide range of energy activities.
In the context of an ambitious local carbon emissions target (50% of by 2025-26 on 2008-09 levels) our analysis points to the difficulty of local energy policy having an aggregate impact on overall figures for electricity and gas consumption or for carbon emissions. While Leicester has lower per capita electricity consumption than the English average or for comparator cities, the gap is narrowing and there is no difference for gas consumption and direct council energy and emissions contributions only form a small percentage of the local total. Other public sector buildings such as hospitals, universities and the prison represent larger contributions but the energy policies of the institutions responsible for these buildings may conflict with those of the Council. Even within the council's own building stock, school level energy policies are decided by boards of governors not the Council. Local

coordination, while easier than national coordination in theory, was in practice very difficult.

We examine two flagship Council policies to reveal how small the savings in energy and emissions currently are. Intelligent metering produced recent examples of savings equivalent to only 0.4% of total council energy consumption (0.02% of Leicester). While the extension of the district heating scheme (DH-CHP) also produces relatively small overall savings equal to around 1% of the carbon emissions of Leicester.

The most significant schemes are local manifestations of national policies rather than Council Initiatives. The Hot Lofts Scheme – which has reached 7,200 homes - is the local incarnation of the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT). The DH-CHP scheme is a long run local innovation, but deeply rooted in national initiatives towards community energy that date back to the early 1980s and revived recently in the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP).

We find that much more does need to be done to marry up local and national data collection initiatives in order to ensure that national statistics are as accurate as possible. The extent to which national government was interested in collecting more detailed data that might be available to local authorities (via intelligent metering) was not obvious, indeed the reverse was also true, in that it was not clear that LCC were aware that detailed statistics which they could have been using to monitor their performance were available.

One significant tangible benefit of Leicester's commitment to a local energy policy has been the development of energy related jobs in Leicester, for example the Mark Group now has 1400 employees worldwide, many of whom are based in Leicester. This clearly provides a rationale for local authority participation in national demonstration projects.

Two significant sets of implications follow from our analysis.

Firstly, it is important to understand just how difficult it is for a local authority to have a statistically meaningful energy policy. Energy policy may produce co-benefits such as a greater sense of local community, the opportunity to enhance a locality's national and international reputation and local employment in energy initiatives (as noted by Mills and Rosenfeld, 1996). However Leicester's experience illustrates that these co-benefits may be easier to achieve than demonstrable significant impact on total local energy consumption or emissions.

Second, national energy policy does not appear to foster significant local initiative in the UK. Even in a local authority which has been significantly favoured by national policy initiatives this has not translated into clear demonstrable support for the achievement of national energy policy goals. Coordination failures remain within the public sector and financially constrained local authorities find it difficult to take significant local initiatives. More careful attention needs to be given to how communities can be facilitated in their desire to take initiatives which support national targets.

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