

Adaptation to Address Inequalities Research Partnership Newcastle City Council and Northumbria University

1. SUMMARY

Newcastle City Council jointly funded a PhD with Northumbria University to explore whether it was possible to adapt to climate change whilst also reducing inequalities, as those affected by climate change are usually least able to prepare, respond and recover. A key council priority is 'Tackling Inequalities' and so the Council wanted to gain an insight into how to embed this into its operations and activities, including the types of approach needed to most effectively address inequality during adaptation, and where the Council may need to develop new capacity to address this.

Despite the Climate Change Act 2008, the UK faces major challenges in adapting to climate change, which include but are not limited to:

- The roll back of the state juxtaposed with the expectation that the 'big society' will innovatively contribute to and ultimately deliver many public services – including adaptation to climate change.
- Category 1 responders¹ have legal responsibilities to prevent harm, but this has recently been placed in the context of 'statutory gaps' in terms of legal obligations to drive action to adapt to climate change – for example this places local authorities in a relatively weak position to demand adaptation through local planning frameworks; and staff may not have the capacity/discretionary time within their roles to address issues that are non-mandatory.
- A systemic lack of capacity to deal with long term uncertainty and local variation – for example how national scale actions and priorities can account for significant local variation in climate change impacts and capacities to respond.

The objective of the PhD research was to assess how it is possible for the city of Newcastle upon Tyne to adapt to climate change in a way that does not exacerbate existing socio-economic disparities. This has been approached from the perspective of how the vulnerability of people in the city may vary in relation to climate variability and change. It will help inform policy makers, academics, and anyone interested in adaptation to climate change.

2. ACTIVITIES

The Council and the University worked with the student to guide and develop her work, and address barriers/challenges through regular meetings. The PhD itself used semi-structured interviews, participant observation (including walking around the city with participants), and 'day in the life' diaries. Situational analysis was used to develop themes within the data. The work involved interviewing council officers from a range of departments, a range of third and public sector organisations, and individual residents.

A number of types of interviews and evidence were produced, including transcribed interviews, interview notes, memos, completed day in the life diaries, a peer reviewed journal article (submitted as evidence to CCRA 2017), and the student's PhD thesis and final report. The Council also presented emerging findings to DEFRA's Local Adaptation Advisory Panel.

People were approached through a range of methods, including face to face canvassing in the street and leisure facilities, direct approach to organisations and council officers, snowballing, using organisations as gatekeepers, and through networking at local events.

The PhD Studentship is for 3 years, running from 2011 to 2014. The work was funded through the Council's Climate Change budget alongside the University's internal finance. The business case hinged upon the PhD being the right avenue to explore such a complex issue, and the good value for money provided by the approach.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/preparation-and-planning-for-emergencies-responsibilities-of-responder-agencies-and-others>

3. OUTCOMES

The outputs from the work have been used in various ways. At a national level, an interim article on the research findings was submitted to the National Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017 Call for Evidence. At the local level, the work was used to inform the Council's adaptation work programme, and the guiding principles will be used to inform all adaptation work. Some of the emerging findings are that:

- There is a lack of capacity to mainstream issues of vulnerability and inequalities within local government.
- Some of the most vulnerable in society, such as the homeless or refugees, can be overlooked and have a much reduced opportunity to participate in activities. This points to the need for changes to how local engagement is carried out so as not to further disadvantage particular groups.
- There is a disconnection between national local bodies which impact on the capacity and effectiveness of action.

The work will also inform debate and discussion on reforms to a number of Government policies, as well as contributing to the knowledge of capacities needed by all organisations to properly consider adaptive responses which reduce inequality.

4. BARRIERS

The main barrier experienced internally within the Council was challenge on the contribution of £9k from Council resources. It was argued in some quarters that this was not a good use of resources. However, this was overcome by making a case to more senior officers on the merits outlined on the business case.

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ✓ Be clear on the objectives and outcomes from the start. Partnership working is crucial to support the development of shared objectives and to ensure that research delivers on the requirements for all parties involved.
- ✓ Recognise that not all relevant partners will be aware of the relevance of their participation at the outset or have equal capacity to be involved.
- ✓ Allow enough time for all participants to become familiar with the study and underpinning ideas.
- ✓ Don't underestimate the time required to produce outputs. Supporting a PhD is a long-term commitment, but the outputs are invaluable.

6. LINKS

- The final outputs will be made available at www.thebiggreenpledge.org.uk/adaptation-research-and-resources/
- The interim article published in Urban Climate is available here: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212095513000515>

7. CONTACTS

Kit England
Policy and Information Officer,
Newcastle City Council
kit.England@newcastle.gov.uk

Dr. Geof O'Brien
Senior Lecturer
Northumbria University
geof.obrien@northumbria.ac.uk