

# Re-designing local public services for a low-carbon future

## Concept

Though we know that low carbon living is essential, we don't know what low carbon communities will be like. There is plenty we do know, however, so we can make predictions (for example, carbon constraints make it inevitable that people will spend more time in their locality and less time commuting, etc). And we should be able to build visions of how low carbon communities will look and feel.

Without new thinking on what local public services need to achieve in a low-carbon world, and on how this might be done, the most likely approach to making local services low carbon will be to seek to achieve tomorrow the same outcomes as today, using less carbon. This approach could lead to a great deal of innovation, however:

- it would maintain essentially the same organisational pattern of delivery that has been in place for 50 years, when a new pattern might be more effective. For example, prioritising and organising services around the utility that they offer - so what we currently think of as a parks service might be better considered in terms of urban shade, health resources and bio-diversity. Examples of other possible utilities of the local state could include resource loops and local energy.
- failing to take into account the behaviour and lifestyle changes that a carbon-constrained world will inspire, which will surely lead to a need for different outcomes from future public services. For example, spending more time locally is likely to lead to better social capital in many communities. This, in turn, would have implications for, for example, how social care is understood and delivered.

It would be useful to develop our understanding of how public services could be configured in a carbon-constrained world, before the 'today's outcomes, only with less carbon' approach takes hold.

## Project

The objective of a project would be to demonstrate that it is possible to re-design local public services for a carbon-constrained world in a way that takes into account the likely lifestyles and behaviours in low-carbon communities. As such, it needs to have a range of service experts and decision-makers involved at different stages. This could be an ad hoc grouping, or people drawn from a handful of participating authorities.

Ideally, a project would move through several stages:

1. futures work exploring lifestyles and behaviours in a low-carbon world, developing a number of 'low carbon community' scenarios
2. choose the scenario to work with
3. develop desired outcomes from public services within the scenario
4. outline (utility based?) low carbon 'service blocks', mapped onto desired outcomes
5. in, say, two service blocks, detailed work to map delivery.

A shorter project with a similar objective would introduce some additional risk (particularly at stage 4) but would be possible.