

RES-e in Local Authorities

The Current Situation



A publication for the RES-e project

Summary

This report is compiled as part of the RES-e (Renewable Energy Sources - Electricity) regions project. The project aims to increase the amount of renewable electricity generated across nine European regions, with the Mid Wales Energy Agency (MWEA) running the project in Wales.

It is based on the results of interviews with 11 members of staff in different local authorities (LAs) across Wales. The interviews took place during June 2005, and the members of staff were usually energy/building managers, or sustainable development officers. The LAs represent a wide range of areas, from large urban cities, to sparsely-populated rural areas.

In all, eighteen local authorities were sent questionnaires about renewable energy, out of a total of 22. The four not receiving a questionnaire did not respond to inquiries about a suitable person with whom to correspond.

Questions and Answers

1. What is your personal opinion about generating electricity from renewable energy sources?

The answer to this question was invariably positive. All respondents thought it was important to increase the amount of renewable electricity generated in general and also specifically by local authorities. There were some comments which are widely mirrored across the board, namely that despite the large benefits of using renewable energy there were some major stumbling blocks which needed to be addressed. These were generally related to public awareness and finance.

2. Should the share of RES-e (Renewable Energy Sources-Electricity) be increased in the coming year in your local authority region, and across Wales as a whole?

There was widespread agreement from respondents that the share of renewable electricity across Wales and in individual LAs should be increased. The majority of interviewees felt that it would be extremely difficult to set and reach targets for LA-owned renewable generation, generally due to lack of budget, expertise and awareness among the authority at large. This was contrasted by several authorities which have already set targets for production of renewable energy.

Procurement of electricity is another way to stimulate demand for renewable generation, and almost all local authorities were involved in green electricity procurement in one scale or other. The North Wales Energy Procurement Group already obtains 75% green electricity for its sites which use less than 100kW. Many councils use green electricity for streetlighting, bus stops and other remote applications. Some of these are grid-connected, others are solar installations which are frequently cheaper to install and maintain in remote areas. The interviewees who saw the largest challenges with setting targets for LA energy production saw the setting of targets for procurement as far more straightforward to implement.

3. Is your local authority interested in renewable energy?

Almost all respondents replied in the affirmative, one replied that there were only pockets of interest. However, despite this apparent interest, the disparity between most proactive and least is significant. Several authorities are actively interested and vigorously pursuing installations of renewable electricity and heat. In this type of authority awareness of sustainability is widespread, and lifetime energy costs are beginning to be included in planning and design. There is also good support for the energy/HECA/sustainability officers. The majority of local authorities fall into the category of starting to make positive changes. This includes some willingness to make changes in policy and strategy, and some thought given to renewable installations. A minority of authorities appear to be doing the amount required by statutory agreement (6% reduction in CO₂ emissions by 2008) and little more.

4. Have you made any assessment of the energy situation and the potential for RES-e?

Most of the answers to this question were negative. Some had made some kind of assessment, but it seems that all LAs would appreciate assistance with determining the potential for renewable electricity installation.

5. Do you have any local energy plan or strategy?

If yes, do you have any specific target for renewable energy, or renewable electricity?

There is a 50% split between those authorities with an energy strategy and those without. Several of those without are in the process of drawing up such strategies and presenting them to the appropriate committees or individuals within the LA.

Several of those authorities with energy strategies include specific targets for use of renewable energy, although the case of electricity generation by the authority itself is rarely targeted.

6. What is the opinion of your local authority about the following renewable energy technologies?

Wind

Often viewed as the only economically viable technology, but with problems of public perception. Some idea about small-scale wind for schools or community buildings.

PV

Viewed very positively, although the general consensus is that it is unattractive from an economic perspective. Some installations have already been carried out, but these are almost exclusively heavily grant-assisted. Although PV systems are generally uncompetitive with other renewable sources, a comment was that they deliver a highly visible 'statement of intent' from the local authority. Off-grid applications, for example in bus shelters and street lighting, are viewed favourably and are often, particularly in rural areas, the cheapest way of providing lighting.

Biomass CHP/Wood Fuel

No plans for CHP installation. Limited but growing awareness of electricity generation. Although outside the remit of the RES-e project, wood fuel as a heat source has a much greater visibility, and is actively being pursued by a number of LAs.

Small Hydro

Limited interest, probably reflecting the low level of additional available sites for installation.

7. Are there any RES-e installations in your local authorities?

A small number of respondents indicated that their LAs had installed renewable energy generation, usually PV arrays. Again, although RES-th (thermal renewable energy) is outside the remit of this project, it is worth noting that installed capacity in pellet and chip boilers far exceeds that of renewable electricity generation.

What opinion do people have about these installations?

They are generally seen to be good examples.

If there are currently no RES-e installations, why do you think is the case?

Reasons for lack of current RES-e installations were generally related to finance, although there was also a call for more awareness and support.

8. Does your local authority have any concrete plans for future RES-e installations?

The answer to this was split with roughly half the authorities having definite plans for installations. Some authorities were considering renewable heat installations but not renewable electricity. Wind and PV were the two most common types of installation under consideration.

9. Does your local authority purchase green electricity for any of its buildings, or any intention of doing so?

This was an area of renewable electricity where it appears that local authorities are already having a major impact. Many LAs are members of the North Wales procurement group, which sources 75% of its electricity from green production for small users (<100kW). Almost all authorities use green electricity for some proportion of their total use, and the response to the interviews suggests that the figure will continue to increase. Many respondents considered that the setting of targets for use of electricity, rather than generation, was more attainable for large and diverse users.

10. Do you think the opinion of people living in your area is broadly supportive, negative or indifferent to renewable energy?

Many respondents said that they didn't know. A broad analysis of the answers suggests that wind is potentially the least popular, with PV being regarded as relatively uncontroversial.

11. What is the biggest obstacle of the following to the development of RES-e by your local authority: Financial; Administrative; Grid access; Public opinion; Something else?

The biggest obstacle overall is finance. This is almost always with regard to capital grant availability, but also with respect to other issues. These include staffing levels and lack of knowledge or awareness about the potential for renewable energy use. Other issues were seen as secondary.

12. If you could obtain support from the RES-e project, what form would you like it to take?

The support requested covered a wide range, including:

Training events for energy managers, planners and councillors, awareness raising, technical expertise, literature about specific technologies including pay-back times, studies of potential for RE installations across the local authority and additional sources of funding for local authorities.

13. Would you be happy to participate in a short (½) day training course for representatives of local authorities? If so, what topics would be particularly helpful?

All respondents said they would be happy to attend such an event, subject to time pressures.

14. Would you consider a printed guide for local authorities useful, and what content would you like to see included?

A high level of interest was expressed in such a publication. Topics suggested included some of the suggestions from Question 12, and also information about companies involved in RE installations in Wales, a “ready reckoner” of payback times and examples of best practice from across different LAs.

15. Are you interested in receiving advice about RES-e projects in your local authority?
Unanimously affirmative.

16. Are you interested in participating in a league table of RES-e production for local authorities, or a “most improved” competition? There was some resistance to the idea of a competition for the best-performing local authority, but a far higher level of support for inclusion in a league table, or in a “most-improved” competition. There was broad agreement that such a league table could be used effectively to encourage decision-makers to regard renewable electricity production as a higher priority.



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