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To: Chief Executives of all Councils in England

Robin Mortimer
Director, Climate Change
Adaptation, Air Quality,
Landscape and Rural
Affairs

11th November 2010

Dear Chief Executives

ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

I am writing to you about the recent report of the independent Adaptation Sub-Committee on climate change ("How well prepared is the UK for climate change?") and following the announcement that central Government performance monitoring through Local Area Agreements and the National Indicator Set is to end.

The report confirms that local authorities have an essential role to play in planning ahead and taking adaptation action. The report sets out the good progress that has been made in driving forward adaptation at the local level, as well as where further consideration of adaptation is needed on delivering land use planning, providing local infrastructure, implementing building control, managing green space and coordinating emergency planning. These are areas where, without additional timely action, it may be too late effectively to manage the local impacts from a more challenging future climate.

The Sub-Committee has stressed that more immediate and thorough action is needed across the public sector – including by local authorities, as well as businesses and individuals, to ensure that the UK is preparing adequately for a changing climate. All organisations need to move up an "adaptation ladder" of key activities – progressing from building understanding and capacity, to incorporating the impacts of climate change into key decisions, and ultimately taking tangible action to reduce the risks. The Sub-Committee also highlights the strong economic case for early action – timely adaptation measures "may reduce damages from climate change by roughly half for moderate amounts of warming".

The latest set of self assessment matrices and level scores provided under National Indicator 188 – Planning to Adapt to Climate Change (NI188), show that many authorities are moving forwards, but few are at the stage of fully implementing adaptation plans. I attach a summary of data that authorities have provided, highlighting both this improvement and the need for further action at the local authority, area and administrative region levels.

Following the recent announcement to end central performance monitoring via Local Area Agreements and the National Indicator Set, Defra has been reviewing the value of continuing to report NI 188 data to central Government. We have concluded that whilst local authorities may wish to continue to collect the self assessment data for their own adaptation purposes, they should no longer be required to report the data to central Government. We will not, therefore, require authorities to submit Year 3 self-assessment matrices at the end of this financial year; but we would be happy to hear about the further progress you are making on adaptation.

Going forwards, the way that central and local government work together must reflect the new approaches introduced by localism, decentralisation and the Big Society, and the challenge of reducing the deficit. The cross-government Adapting to Climate Change Programme is already working closely with DCLG and the Local Government Group to consider how we can continue to concentrate on adaptation against this backdrop.

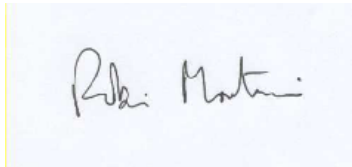
And we are also taking more immediate steps to:-

- Refocus the existing Local and Regional Adaptation Partnership Board (LRAP) as a more efficient vehicle for local government to shape national policy-making.
- Work with Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) to embed adaptation into their programmes under the Climate Change Skills Fund.
- Ensure that there is clear local level involvement in developing the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment – through workshops led by the Regional Climate Change Partnerships (RCCPs) later this year.
- Consult with local government on the best ways to provide well-targeted evidence and information that is practically useful on the ground – both through the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) under our existing contract and any new delivery arrangements post-September 2011.
- Ensure that we are working closely with Natural England and the Environment Agency, so that our engagement with local authorities on adaptation is consistent and responds to your needs.
- Use the Natural Environment and Water White Papers as vehicles for practical action and engagement with local government and others to manage natural resources sustainably as the climate changes.

Further, we have recently agreed to provide an additional funding contribution to the RCCPs from April to September 2011. The RCCPs are already working with local authorities (and in many cases representatives of local government are major players within the Partnerships) to assess the local impacts, challenges and opportunities of climate change, and develop practical adaptation responses.

The Adaptation Sub-Committee believes that the new policy and delivery landscape offers both opportunities, and possible risks, for enabling adaptation – both at national and local level. There is much good progress to build on, but also further scope for working together and examining the next set of priorities for early action. Through organisations such as LRAP, UKCIP and the independent RCCPs we are keen to have that discussion and to hear your views and perspectives – including on barriers to effective adaptation that individual authorities are facing.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue background. The signature reads "Robin Mortimer" in a cursive style.

Robin Mortimer

Director
Climate Change Adaptation,
Air Quality, Landscape and Rural Affairs