



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Consultation response to the DETI Bioenergy Action Plan for Northern Ireland 2009 - 2014.
Date:	23 rd October 2009
Reporting Officer:	Mr. William Francey, Director Health and Environmental Services (ext. 3260).
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Relevant Background Information

Within Northern Ireland, the government Department with principal responsibility for energy generation is the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). Commensurate with its renewable energy policies, DETI has established a range of generating targets including 12% of Northern Ireland electricity to be generated from indigenous renewable sources by 2012. DETI has indicated that this target can be met by Northern Ireland's developing onshore wind sector but has recommended also that other forms of renewable energy should be encouraged to develop in parallel. Consequently, DETI has published a Bioenergy Action Plan for Northern Ireland covering the period 2009-2014 for consultation, which draws upon contributions from a range of government Departments. The Bioenergy Action Plan is also underpinned by findings and recommendations of an AEA Energy and Environment study into the current and future potential of bioenergy within Northern Ireland.

Key Issues.

DETI has indicated that the overall aim of the five-year action plan is to increase the deployment of bioenergy, with particular emphasis on heat and electricity, which will help to secure Northern Ireland's energy supply, deliver carbon emission reductions, generate economic and environmental benefits and contribute to our renewable energy targets. Accordingly, the plan proposes four strategic objectives:-

- to raise awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities of bioenergy.
- to create a policy and regulatory framework to support bioenergy development
- to encourage investment in the bioenergy supply chain, and
- to continue to undertake research into bioenergy.

Air Quality.

DETI's recognition that biomass fuels can have a detrimental impact upon air quality and in particular, ambient concentrations of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter (PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}) in urban locations is an important issue for Council. DETI has suggested that since much of Northern Ireland can be regarded as rural or semi-rural, this will not be a significant problem. Nonetheless, DETI has indicated that it will take account of DEFRA research, which shows that impacts of biomass on air quality can be reduced to a manageable level to avoid breaches of European and national air quality legislation. DETI has also indicated that in collaboration with DoENI, it may seek to amend the Clean Air Order to provide greater consistency between current air quality objectives and biomass combustion in order to move towards an approvals system, which removes the need for individual testing of boilers.

It is considered that DETI comments regarding the potential impact of biomass installations do not adequately differentiate between the potential cumulative impact of numerous small-scale biomass installations and larger plants that may be subject to control under the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, and whose air quality emissions are consequently easier to control. It is suggested therefore, that larger and cleaner installations should represent the preferred approach to biomass energy in urban locations or where Air Quality Management Areas have been declared.

In relation to Air Quality Management Areas, Part III of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 places a statutory duty upon local authorities to assess periodically air quality within their districts against a series of national and European health-based standards. Where a local authority determines that an air quality standard is likely to be exceeded in the compliance year, then the authority must designate an Air Quality Management Area and develop an action plan in collaboration with other relevant authorities.

Key Issues Contd.

In 2006, Belfast City Council designated four regions of the city as Air Quality Management Areas for a combination of NO₂ and PM₁₀, principally associated with road transport. The Council subsequently developed an Air Quality Action Plan in collaboration with the Department for Regional Development Roads Service and Translink. It is considered that an increase in particulate or nitrogen dioxide emissions from biomass installations could materially impact upon implementation of this Action Plan and the city's ability to achieve the nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter air quality standards. Moreover, the wide scale deployment of biomass, as proposed via the DETI Bioenergy Action Plan, would have to be carefully managed within Belfast to avoid the need to declare further Air Quality Management Areas.

Resource Implications

Financial

N/A

Human Resources

N/A

Asset and Other Implications

N/A

Recommendations

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is invited to endorse the attached consultation response in respect of the draft DETI Bioenergy Action Plan for Northern Ireland 2009 – 2014 and to recommend that it be submitted to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment by 30th October 2009. At the time of submission, DETI will be advised that comments are subject to Council ratification at its meeting of 2nd November 2009.

Key to Abbreviations

DEFRA -	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
DETI -	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.
DoENI -	Department of Environment.
PM ₁₀ -	particles with an aerodynamic diameter smaller than or equal to 10 micrometers.
PM _{2.5} -	particles with an aerodynamic diameter smaller than or equal to 2.5 micrometers

Documents Attached

Appendix A - Belfast City Council response to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment consultation on the Bioenergy Action Plan for Northern Ireland 2009 - 2014.