



**December 2015**

**UNISON North West Submission to the 'Greater Manchester Climate Change and Low Emission Strategies' Consultation**

*About UNISON*

UNISON has 200,000 members in the North West and we represent members who work in a wide variety of roles. We have members working for employers including local authorities, the NHS, the energy sector, the Environment Agency, Manchester Airport and the fire service. Issues around climate change are of importance to UNISON members as workers and citizens.

The union is internationalist in its outlook. We are concerned about the impact of climate change around the world, particularly on the most vulnerable members of society.

UNISON has an energy policy which states that the precautionary principle should be in place with regard to fracking activities and the focus should be on providing the means to provide a viable pathway to decarbonise our energy supply without further investment in unabated fossil fuels and shale gas fracking. We work with groups including the Climate Coalition, Campaign Against Climate Change, and the One Million Climate Jobs Campaign. We have supported community-led anti-fracking campaigns regionally, including at Barton Moss.

We bring a distinctive perspective to the question of Greater Manchester's role in combating climate change. Our perspective is shaped by concerns about the need for accessible high quality employment across Greater Manchester and the need for high quality, well-funded public services.

*The Format of our Consultation Response*

We welcome the opportunity to be involved in this consultation process. As a large, democratic organisation it is though difficult for us to respond collectively to the questions posed on Survey Monkey. Instead, we offer here a number of comments on some of the issues raised in the consultation document and give some thoughts about countering climate change on a Greater Manchester scale. We will be considering how best to contribute to future GMCA consultations so as to play a useful part in the process and to reflect the views of UNISON members.

*Climate Change and Employment in Greater Manchester*

High travel-to-work times cause working people stress and cost, as well as impacting on carbon emissions and air pollution. We need workplaces to be easily accessible by affordable public transport, cycling and on foot. We are supportive of investment in our public transport infrastructure generally and the use of greener methods of powering transport (e.g. electric trams, electric cars). We also believe it is important to minimise the need for people to spend time and money travelling to work. The travel times of workers and service users should be considered when changes to public service provision are under consideration.

UNISON members are investors in energy companies through the Greater Manchester Pension Fund (GMPF) – the Fund’s top two equity holdings are in Shell and BP respectively. The GMPF “does not actively invest in nor divest from companies solely or largely for social or ethical or environmental reasons” (Report and Accounts 2015, p. 119). The Scheme is managed “in the best financial interests of the Scheme members and beneficiaries”. We of course share a primary concern with the security of the retirement incomes of our members. We have though raised concerns that investing in carbon-intensive energy companies may not be in our members’ best interests overall due to the environmental impact. Moreover, we also question whether these are sound investments in narrow financial terms given the fears that oil shares are overvalued. It would be appropriate for the Climate Change Strategy for Greater Manchester to include consideration of what people in the city-region can do through their investments and savings to reduce carbon-emitting activity around the world. This consideration should not be limited to the GMPF.

Union workplace environmental reps can play an important role in identifying and implementing changes in all workplaces to reduce carbon emissions, as would a more comprehensive roll-out of a carbon literacy programme. We would like to see the role and number of environmental reps expand across workplaces in Greater Manchester.

We are supportive of efforts to increase the number of secure and skilled ‘climate jobs’ – that is, jobs that reduce carbon emissions. Greater Manchester is well-placed in terms of a workforce ready to be skilled up, its geographical setting, and climate related academic excellence. The Government’s cuts to the renewable energy sector should be reversed and Greater Manchester needs to be part of a national One Million Climate Jobs programme.

*Climate Change, Public Services and Better Social Outcomes*

Investment in public services is necessary both to reduce our carbon emissions and to prepare for the possible impact of climate change. We need public funds to be available for investment in better recycling levels, and in assisting with reducing energy consumption.

The impact of Storm Desmond in December 2015 serves to make the realities of climate change ever clearer. Accordingly, emergency services should not be cut, and flood defences should be properly funded and constructed by a securely employed and properly trained workforce. We need to build, not reduce, our capacity to cope with climate change-related events through investing in our infrastructure, the Environment Agency and the Fire Service.

The consultation document makes reference to the possibility of the creation of a municipal green energy company for Greater Manchester. This sounds like a positive development that could help achieve a number of policy objectives including an increase in local low-carbon energy production (various options should be explored and members have suggested possibilities including solar, wind, hydro-electricity, clean double burning and sustainable tree planting) and reduced energy costs – especially for those in fuel poverty. We are though concerned that this is being envisaged as being ‘private sector led’. We believe that to achieve the positive potential social outcomes of this initiative, the new entity would need to be democratically-accountable and provide high-quality jobs – and as such it would need to be led by the public sector.

#### *Some Points about the Consultation Paper Text*

There is some reference to the Atlantic Gateway: we are particularly cautious of the associated possible future energy mix that may contain substantial components that are not properly sustainable, particularly fracking. It would be particularly useful to more closely define the term ‘sustainable’, or to use different terminology which is appropriate to a finite-resourced world. Recent Government policies that have undermined aspects of the renewables energy sector should not be ignored.

We feel that greater reference should be given to the world-leading climate research undertaken by the Tyndall Centre at the University of Manchester. As well as advising on the true climatic impacts of regional and global economies, locally-based academics have offered knowledge sharing and support to trade union climate campaigners.

We feel that the reference to air travel is muddled, needs clarification for our members employed in the sector and others, and ignores the true climate impacts of international free trade. Against which carbon budget, producer’s, importer’s or end user’s, are the embedded carbon emissions tabulated?

#### *Concluding Comments*

We would welcome the opportunity to be involved in further consultations of this nature. It is apparent that the involvement of working people and trade unions is important for the successful achievement of many of the goals of the GMCA, including the shared ambitions around climate change and emissions.