

One Planet Standard – time to step up

Back in 2007, after the Welsh General Election in May, I was given the post of Cabinet Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing in Wales. It was a huge brief with responsibility for all aspects of nature and the environment, as well as climate change, energy, planning, marine and buildings.

Although I'd lobbied hard for such a portfolio to be created, I had no notion it would be given to me. In many ways it seemed like a double responsibility – ministerial and personal. How could I be a minister with the responsibility for tackling climate change in Wales without also being a minister who demonstrated in my daily life a reduction in emissions?

Being given this brief led directly to a transformation of my own lifestyle. We had discussed it previously as a family, and had already started to make decisions: not flying for holidays, increasing our use of public transport, eating less meat, driving more fuel-efficient cars, growing more fruit and vegetables (organically, to avoid pesticides), but had no plans to do anything beyond that.

But politics is personal; I cannot advocate something I am not prepared to do myself. So we decided to adopt a plan to do 'one big green thing' every year. When I left government, we moved to a 300-year-old barn with a ten-acre smallholding. In the ten years we have lived here, we have done everything we can to make our home energy-efficient through massively insulating our walls, double-glazing windows, installing solar panels for energy and hot water and, last year, a ground source heat pump. And there's the electric car (fuelled by a renewable energy company) and growing as much of our own food as we can. All of this means we have actively reduced our emissions in the four main contributors to climate emissions: energy, transport, buildings and food.

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Part of the reason that our journey took so long was because being relatively early adopters of such technologies is expensive.

Now they are available at much lower costs and at much higher efficiency. What would have been tremendously helpful to us and other early adopters would have been a metric to clearly understand which would be the most effective choices we could make in our circumstances. But there was no such support and most of the advice we had was conflicting. My epiphany in acting on climate science came after being given responsibility for climate action. When I talk to businesses, as I do regularly, I'm heartened by the dramatic increase in numbers who want to bring down their climate emissions, not least because they have seen so many recent examples of extreme floods, droughts, wildfires, Arctic ice-melt – all of which are a wake-up call to humanity and add substantial additional costs to annual insurance risk.

The fact that the UK will be chairing COP26, the most significant climate conference in our lifetimes, in Glasgow next month is potentially galvanising. Never before have so many organisations called for so much help. And yet the problem I had 15 years ago about where to get support still exists.

This is why I support the new One Planet Standard, which was grown in Wales, launched by the Good Governance Institute last month, and will be featuring at the UN COP26 conference in Glasgow with a special event to celebrate the standard on 10 November.

The One Planet Standard incentivises organisations to commit to reducing their ecological footprint by helping them create a roadmap towards net zero, with the necessary targets and metrics to keep them on their journey.

The Standard will help them develop a culture of continuous improvement, moving through bronze, silver and gold levels as they reach their targets with a Plan > Do > Check > Act virtuous circle loop.

Organisations set a timeline with milestones to reach a one planet footprint using measurement and verification tools. They can set goals related to greater efficiency, reducing raw materials use, tackling the lifecycle ecological footprint, cutting energy use and pollution, and reversing the damage to nature. Social and ecological value can be captured by adding relevant criteria to the National Social Value Portal tool for procurement contracts and linking them to the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the UN sustainability goals.

Understanding the requirements of the One Planet Standard will help senior leaders shape strategic direction; help leaders and managers implement change; help staff shift the corporate culture; help customers, suppliers and service contractors manage product and service life cycles; and contribute to partnership working.

The goal is for all expenditure to improve the future security of humanity and the natural environment, as well as achieving its primary business aim. In other words, using economic power to do only good.

Uniquely, the Standard is bespoke to each organisation. The self-assessment tool is available, and organisations can receive support and opt to use toolkits, training and capacity-building from The One Planet Centre.

External assessments are conducted by Assessment Services, an international independent assessment centre with over 30 years of experience in assessment and accreditation, committed to ensuring an assessment process that adds value to organisations being accredited.

Despite the Standard having only been launched a few days ago, there is already a clamour of interest for it and a number of organisations have started to pilot its approach – the outcomes of which will be featured in Glasgow next month.

So, if you want to take a measured journey to reducing your organisation's carbon and ecological footprint, please get in touch with the key players. As John Rawls, the American philosopher, says so powerfully: 'Do unto future generations what you would have had past generations do unto you'. Let's act as if we mean it by committing to a path away from greenwash to measuring what matters.

If you have any questions about, or would like help with anything covered in this briefing, please call us on 07732 681120 or email advice@good-governance.org.uk