

## RUNNING A LOCAL JOBS PETITION: THE SHEFFIELD STORY

### Introduction

The following notes are intended to assist local groups looking to set up local climate jobs petitions, drawing on our experience in Sheffield.

We formed a Sheffield Climate Alliance in spring 2011, centred on an established group (Sheffield against Climate Change). Having been inspired by the Million Climate Jobs Campaign and the campaign's report<sup>1</sup> we thought that running a petition around the issue of local climate jobs was a good way to publicise the new Alliance. Here are the details:

#### Sheffield Climate Alliance

#### Petition for 10,000 Climate Jobs for Sheffield

**We are local people who care about climate change and understand that it is an economic and social issue.**

**We call on Sheffield City Council to implement a plan for 10,000 new climate jobs in Sheffield, to address the economic and environmental crisis, through:**

- Making new and existing buildings energy efficient
- Expanding and integrating low-fare public transport
- Creating research and manufacturing for energy generation from renewable sources
- Enabling a switch to local, ecological food production
- Offering free programmes of training in Green Skills

We decided that our petition should be presented to Sheffield City Council at one of their meetings. Getting over 5000 signatures triggers a 40 minute debate. There are various, lesser actions taken on smaller petitions depending how many people have signed them. Check on your Council's website to see what the rules are in your area. It was decided to call for 10,000 local jobs, based on Sheffield having around 1% of the country's population and comparing this with the national million jobs call.

### Wording and Collecting Signatures

A petition is a good way to engage people that may not normally consider the issues raised. They can show a degree of support by signing, without much effort. So a few prominent words should say what it is about, in case this is all that they read. Ours is headed "Sheffield Climate Alliance: Petition for 10,000 Climate Jobs in Sheffield". We followed with a few bullet-points describing how climate change is also an economic and social issue, followed by an explanation of what climate jobs are. A separate sheet with more detailed information is kept on hand for those that want to know more. In practice, we have developed a "sales patter", often telling people what it is about, rather than them having to read it. We are often asked how the Council can provide this many jobs and we have to accept they cannot do this directly- but they can act to move us towards this target.

You need to identify where to collect the signatures. Think about where people gather and are not rushed. We started our petition in time for the summer festivals. Shopping centres, other public events and places of worship are all good places.

We are also ran a complementary e-petition. This allows us to collect signatures from people on our e-mailing list. Organisations in the new Sheffield Climate Alliance can easily forward the petition to their e-mailing lists as well. It is important to have someone with the technical expertise to set up the petition links etc if this is to work properly.

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<sup>1</sup> See *One Million Climate Jobs Now* at <http://www.climate-change-jobs.org/>

## Spreading the Word

If you have the time and enthusiasm to do more, a public meeting is worthwhile, perhaps including a showing of the One Million Climate Jobs Now! "DVD (10 or 30 minute versions). Book appointments to see local councillors. If they are supportive, explore what action they can take within the local Council. And finally of course, use the skills and contacts of campaigners within your group to generate more ideas.

## Contact the local media

A press release serves as a starter. Here is an extract from the one we did.

### **PRESS RELEASE**

The Sheffield Climate Alliance will be presenting our first petition that has an estimated 2000 signatures to the Sheffield City Council meeting on 7 December. There are currently international climate talks in Durban but what can we do on a practical basis locally?

The petition calls on Sheffield City Council to implement a plan for 10,000 new climate jobs in Sheffield, to address the economic and environmental crises together. The measures we propose are jobs in; home energy efficiency, integrated public transport, renewable energy generation, ecological agriculture and providing training and skills development in climate jobs locally.

To sign the petition on-line see: <http://www.sheffieldclimatealliance.net> Sheffield Climate Alliance is an alliance of local organisations that are pressing for effective local action to tackle climate change. It was initiated by Sheffield Campaign Against Climate Change in 2010 to give a voice to the broad base of local people who want to express their concerns about the need for continuing action and courageous leadership to tackle climate change.

This got us a slot on the Radio Sheffield morning news on the day of the council meeting which the lead councillor had actually heard and mentioned.

## Forcing a discussion on the Council

In Sheffield we never managed to obtain the 5,000 signatures. Nevertheless we presented the 2 587 signature petition to a Full SCC Meeting in December. This meant that one of our campaigners gave a 3 minute intro plus we asked questions from public gallery. In most councils members of the public who live within the area can put a question to the council, they don't need a petition, but one that is backed by a petition carries a lot more weight and is more likely to obtain press coverage.

We discovered that having 2,500 signatures may be better than 5000 as your petition is automatically referred to Scrutiny. This is part of the new Localism Bill. Our petition went to the Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Board Scrutiny. We were asked to provide a paper and make a formal presentation which is followed by debate among the Officers and Councillors. This went down very well and created 2 hours of positive consensual discussion. The councillors really liked the examples from other places. The councillors asked the officers to undertake more research and we had a session with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), particularly the low carbon subgroup.

They also went to a meeting with representatives from the Local Enterprise Partnership designed to lead to an input into the Sheffield Economic Masterplan. As discussions continued with the Council, specific areas did start to be identified, such as the council generating renewable energy locally. We also started to make links with some of the local employers who are members of the low carbon subgroup. A consensus is starting to form across the council and the LEP that a low carbon economy should be the main policy not a subgroup item. How this translates into action we need to follow up robustly.

*By Chris Broome on behalf of Sheffield Climate Alliance*