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. Q&A - Interview with a low carbon leader:

- Mark Johnson, London Leader and Operations Director, London Warm Zone



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Mark Johnson was appointed to the London Leaders programme in 2007. This was set up by the London Sustainable Development Commission and brings together 15 sustainability leaders from across London's sectors, from all walks of life, each committing to undertake a project or an action to demonstrate sustainability. The programme aims to inspire, motivate and the vision of London as a world class sustainable city. Mark is also operations director for London Warm Zone, starting work in 2001 and working in partnership with local authorities aiming to meet Government decent home targets for thermal comfort. Mark has recently been elected to the prestigious fellowship of the RSA and was last year invited to the US to speak at Yale University to demonstrate how environmental projects can work in partnership with private and public organisations.

Tell us about what are you working on right now?

"My main job is Operations Director for London Warm Zone, which is widely seen as the UK's best domestic Energy Efficiency programme. The scheme delivers heating and insulation measures to over 15,000 homes in London in partnership with 17 London Boroughs each year, as well as a full income maximization service to help address wider issue of Fuel Poverty.

"I was appointed London Leader for Sustainable Development in October 2007 and currently chair London's Fuel Poverty Task Group."

What are the biggest challenges you face in your role and how do you deal with them?

"London Warm Zone as a project is in high demand as it delivers in full partnership with London Boroughs and is always looking to integrate wider sustainability issues within its model as part of London's aims to be a world class sustainable city.

"My biggest challenge at present is my role as London Leader for which I have made three commitments that go above and beyond my day job.

"These are to: increase London's Energy Efficiency Grant uptake by up to 50% this year - we have had over 12,000 grant applications since November; to establish a Private Sector Housing Sustainability Network for London with over 200 professional members - 72 % of London's Housing stock is in the Private sector it is also London biggest emitter of CO2 so it is key that we don't forgot this sector in favour of new developments or social housing or we will be missing our wider sustainability objectives; and to establish a Social Carbon Offsetting company for London with Dr Ben Croxford at UCL, whereby Carbon is offset in an accountable fashion but also helps vulnerable people by giving the brand new 'A-rated' fridge freezers which will both save money on bills and reduce CO2 use. We have the model, we just need some good CRS partners."

What has been your most successful low carbon initiative and what made it so?

"I would say it was the recent Community Energy Efficiency Fund Scheme (CEEF) we were awarded by DEFRA in London. We only had five months to deliver the scheme after funding was approved on October 2007 however, by the end of the programme on 31 March 2008 we had over 12,000 applications for Energy Efficiency Grants which is incredible and also a huge logistical operation for us and our partners. Currently it is running really well and has received a lot of credit for all involved."

Are current UK Government climate change targets going to be effective?

"In truth I don't know, but I'm glad the UK and specifically London are at least saying the right things. My role is more about making partnerships work and producing schemes that really deliver."

What low carbon technologies trends are emerging?

"I'm all for low carbon technologies of course and install a fair few solar hot water systems to vulnerable homes to offset their costs but my main focus at present is to give vulnerable homes, especially the elderly, good quality heating and insulation, as well as to increase their income through benefits uptake work and prevent them falling in their home. For me, energy efficiency is part of a much wider sustainability ethos."

What advice would you give to someone taking on a role similar to yours?

"Think management. We can all understand the science or debate the policies, but what is really needed in environmental programmes is good management processes and partnerships that deliver."

What's next on your agenda?

"To deliver all my leaders commitment and to really ensure that the London Fuel Poverty task group has a real impact on making and empowering things to happen."

What are your proudest 'green' achievements?

"I have been luckily to be involved in the set up of London Warm Zone since 2001 and the achievements have been incredible both in numbers of grants delivered but also the strength of our partnerships and varied projects we run within the model. In 2007 I was nominated London Leader, Chair of the Fuel Poverty task group and made a fellow of the RSA which made all the hard work over the past 10 years really worth it and has also inspired me to do more."

NOTE: For more on the work of the London Sustainable Development Commission and the London Leaders programme see: www.londonsdc.org.