



Commissioning a DPD Climate Change Evidence Base Study

The notes below have been prepared from the perspective of advising local planning authorities in the capacity of a technical advisor, and as a consultant responding to tenders for evidence base studies.

A successful study starts with the brief. Get this wrong, and the study will not meet your requirements.

1. **Getting started** – research other relevant studies carried out and take time to read the study brief as well as the report. Try to ensure these are recent as they have developed rapidly in response to emerging national policy.
2. **Be focused** - Identify key issues that you want to examine and stick to these. Do not be tempted to simply copy and paste from other briefs including every additional requirement, plus a number of your own. This is likely to result in an ‘everything including the kitchen sink’ list of requirements, and tender prices will reflect this. Remember: consultants will do (almost!) anything you ask - but at a cost - resulting in either excessively long studies of superfluous detailed information that mask the key points or, (if price sensitive), an evidence base that too short on detail on the key issues. Either way, the outcome is likely to be an evidence base that adds little to your ability to write effective policies.
3. **Critically review the draft of the brief** – Once you have set out the list of requirements in a draft brief, review it by asking the question: *What will this tell me that will help to meet our policy objectives?* If you’re not sure of the answer, be prepared to strike out some of the requirements.
4. **Be flexible** – Include a contingency sum (e.g. 10%). That way, if something is identified during the study that requires further work, you can instruct it without having to secure additional budget or commission the work separately. Remember – it’s better to add something to a succinct list of requirements once the study is under way than to have an excessively long list of requirements from the outset.
5. **Use the study to test hypotheses** – You will have some understanding of your vision for an area. Use the study to test whether the aims of this vision are realistic, likely to be deliverable, and how they may impact on other strategic objectives. Remember - an evidence base study is not the vehicle for defining a vision, it’s a way of demonstrating how the vision can be implemented.
6. **Peer review** - Make sure someone else critically reviews the brief for you. This is a good way to test the precision and relevance of the study requirements. If it’s not clear to the reviewer what you are asking the consultants to do (or why you are asking them to do it), you may need to tighten the brief.
7. **Spend time assembling background information and data** - A consultant’s time is ‘your’ money, so time spent by consultants sourcing information held by an authority or its partners can be more effectively used in its analysis. Ensure colleagues from other services within the authority are aware of the study and able to assist in providing information. However, don’t overload it –



there is no point in just providing a large unsorted amount of information, as time (and money) will be wasted reviewing this.

Joint procurement: Cost efficiencies can be achieved through joint procurement of studies at sub-regional level. However, there are a number of pros and cons to be considered, and it does not always follow that joint studies are best.

Potential advantages	Potential disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower costs • Shared procurement and management costs for study • Pooled expertise, shared tasks • Studies can operate at broader scale (e.g. biomass resource analysis) • Routes for post study-collaborative work (e.g. SPDs, establishing cross-border delivery partners) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer delivery time • Difficult to align a study to coincide with a number of local authority plans at different stages • May be problems with harmonisation of data systems (e.g. GIS) • May not meet detailed requirements of an individual authority • May result in an over-long study brief, especially if requirements are included that are specific to one partner

Project steering: Consider appointing a technical advisor to assist at key points such as-

- preparation of the brief
- evaluation of tenders and appointment of consultants
- review of study outputs

A technical advisor can help by testing and challenging the assumptions used in a study and its conclusions. This relationship should be established early in a study and the role of the technical advisor made clear to establish trust and a positive working relationship between client and consultant.

Stakeholder engagement: be specific about the requirements for engagement within a study brief, especially if you require consultants to take a lead role. Remember: you will know your stakeholders better than consultants and it may be worth alerting them to stakeholders that may seek to lobby or influence the outcome of a study for reasons that are not evident to the consultants.

Process and outcome: do not confuse process and outcome. The process (such as data modelling and heat mapping) is a means to an end, and you should be clear about how the outputs will be used.

Maintaining the currency of a study: ensure elements that will need to be kept up to date and the process by which they are to be updated, and their implications for the study's recommendations are identified from the outset in order that you can demonstrate the evidence continues to be relevant. Some things will not change (e.g. average wind speeds) but other factors (such as the introduction of Feed in Tariff) will impact on the wind speed threshold for commercial viability. It will be more cost effective to carry out a limited/partial review of these elements than update the entire study.