

Recognising local authorities as key partners in the Net Zero Strategy

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ADEPT

Association of Directors of
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Ashden
Climate Solutions in Action

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Climate Change and the Environment
An Institute of Imperial College London

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About us

As a group of local government, environmental and research organisations, we have come together to set out a blueprint for how the government can accelerate climate action and a green recovery from coronavirus at the local level. We believe that local authorities are an indispensable partner in reaching the UK's national net zero target by 2050 and the milestones we will need to achieve along the way.¹

The upcoming Net Zero Strategy will set the direction and agenda for delivering the UK's statutory targets. It must embed the role of local authorities in delivering carbon reductions, as well as in tackling the nature crisis and health inequalities, and building resilience to the impacts of climate change. This must be supported by a commitment to a national framework which provides support for local authorities to deliver.

Introduction

The UK has seen significant reductions in carbon emissions from the power sector over the last two decades. Action now needs to be targeted at sectors, such as transport and housing, which have experienced negligible decreases in emissions and are some of the hardest to decarbonise.

More than half of the emissions cuts needed rely on people and businesses taking up low-carbon solutions.² Many sectors which need to decarbonise have strong local and behavioural dimensions and depend on having capable infrastructure and systems in place, for example traffic reduction and the transformation of heating. For these sectors, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. It will also fail to reap the economic and social benefits of coordinating climate delivery with other local strategies which can deliver more jobs, improve public health and reduce inequality.

By working with a wide variety of partners within their areas, including local people, businesses, and community and voluntary groups, we believe local authorities could reach net zero ahead of 2050. Many of them are already developing plans to address the climate and ecological crises but they urgently need the powers and resources to scale up action at pace. The response to Covid-19 has demonstrated that local authorities are resilient and can respond effectively to a short-term crisis, targeting support to those who need it most.

Empowering local authorities is not a 'nice to have', it is essential to delivering long-term, sustainable emissions reductions for local places. National government now has a chance to embed local authorities into the Net Zero Strategy as delivery partners through a commitment to a mutually agreed central framework, to address climate change and rebuild local economies which are fit for the future.

Below we set out why it is essential that local authorities play a central part in the government's Net Zero Strategy and how, through a commitment to a centrally agreed framework, national government can start to work with local authorities to make this a reality.

Local authorities are a sustainable delivery route to implement climate policies

Local authorities have an unparalleled understanding of the local history and context due to their long standing statutory and leadership roles. They can shape long-term solutions by making best use of local strengths and help to avoid top-down policies becoming ineffective in the local context. Support from central government for local authorities to deliver on climate and nature policies will offer a significant return on investment due to:

Control of critical functions and infrastructure needed for long-term action: local authorities have control over the public realm, transport planning, waste management, economic regeneration, land use planning and regulation of energy efficiency standards. They also have huge influence over emissions through their procurement. Local government third party spend in 2019 to 2020 was at least £63 billion, and 70 to 80 percent of a local authority's total carbon footprint is procured goods and services.^{3,4}

A place-based approach will deliver co-benefits: local authorities are able to collaborate across all local authority functions, including public health, planning, housing delivery and air quality, to ensure decarbonisation policies result in wider benefits. A place-based approach will build towards other national government priorities including reducing inequality, levelling up and a green economic recovery.⁵

High levels of trust amongst local stakeholders: local authorities are highly trusted organisations, with unique relationships with the public, private and third sectors. A recent survey found that over 70 percent of residents trusted local authorities most to make decisions about services in their area, compared to under 20 percent for central government.⁶ This enables them to deliver change in a way that can garner local support and convene partnerships to drive forward private sector and community decarbonisation.

Cross-local authority learning and best practice sharing: there are established peer learning networks amongst local authorities, which will enable them to share best practice with local authorities with similar local conditions and benefit from the wide variety of potential approaches.

Case studies

London Borough of Waltham Forest

The London Borough of Waltham Forest has invested in the area to dramatically improve air quality, increase active travel and protect public health. 24km of segregated cycle routes have been built, 15,000 people have received cycle training, and residents are walking and cycling for an extra 41 minutes each week. The council has also reported improved life expectancies for children born since the work started.⁷

Nottingham City Council

Nottingham's introduction of a Workplace Parking Levy in 2011 has set an example of how to integrate sustainable transport and parking, to tackle air pollution and congestion. The city has seen significant changes in behaviour, resulting in over one million miles being travelled by electric bus, 60 million public transport journeys made in 2016 alone, and £9 million raised to fund new tram routes, electric buses, cycling and public transport smart cards.

Local authorities will accelerate a just transition

Due to their close relationship with communities, individuals and businesses, local authorities are able to target decarbonisation policies towards groups and businesses which will benefit the most from shifting to low carbon technologies and lifestyles. This is particularly significant in the aftermath of Coronavirus, where reskilling the workforce for the low carbon economy will have the added benefit of reducing unemployment, particularly in areas hardest hit by the pandemic.

They can identify households and groups at risk of being left behind in the transition to a low carbon economy and can target policies and funding towards those who need the most support. For example, fuel poor households, and those most at risk of impacts of climate change, will benefit significantly more from energy efficiency improvements and upgrades to their homes, having the added benefit of tackling poverty and improving health. Local authorities already have a direct relationship with these groups and can provide trusted support.

They can support businesses in shifting to a low carbon economy through their unique relationship with workforces. Local authorities can identify local industries and businesses in carbon intensive industries and support them to transition to greener practices, while growing the low carbon jobs market and reducing inequality and poverty. They can also help national government in funnelling funding and policies towards these workforces.

Case studies

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

The first low-energy home has been retrofitted in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London, as an example of the level of deep retrofit which will be delivered across all homes on the Lancaster West Estate; this is part of the council's wider commitment to ensure all council homes are carbon-neutral by 2030. The homes were co-designed with the local residents and aim to improve energy efficiency while significantly reducing energy bills for residents.

Holtdale estate, Leeds City Council

Leeds City Council is looking to improve the energy efficiency of its housing stock, to improve lives whilst tackling the climate emergency. Its renovation of the Holtdale estate will reduce fuel poverty, improve health and wellbeing, and expects to reduce bills by 70 percent per home by improving their EPC rating to a C or above.

Local authorities are crucial in building green skills and jobs

Local authorities have an unrivalled capacity to create thriving and resilient local economies which are fit for a net zero future and can support training and upskilling so workers in sectors most at risk will not be left behind. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, over 500,000 young people are out of work, even before the government's furlough scheme closes. Green apprenticeships are key to addressing this.⁸

Develop training and skills particularly in areas such as low carbon transport, housing retrofits and nature restoration. Local authorities can plug the gap in the current employment market by directing support to their areas and creating local, stable and low carbon jobs. For example, creating jobs in nature restoration could fill labour gaps in areas which are currently facing some of the most severe employment challenges. Two thirds of the land most suitable for new woodland is in areas with the most challenging labour market. With the right support from central government, local authorities could support investment in natural capital to deliver strategies that reflect their dynamic local environments.⁹

Work with local colleges and schools: local authorities have a unique relationship with local training providers, colleges and schools and are able to support green skills development from an early age, plugging the current skills gap.

Local connections between local authorities and businesses: through pre-existing and ongoing relationships, as well as through the Local Enterprise Partnerships, local authorities are well-placed to work closely with local workforces to identify those most at risk from the transition and help businesses to adapt to a low carbon economy.

Case studies:

Green Skills Academy, West London Alliance

The West London Alliance¹⁰ is aiming to position the sub-region as a location of choice for the green skills economy by setting up a Green Skills Academy. The Academy will aim to 'help Londoners into Good Work'¹¹ while also developing jobs which will support residents who are unemployed, or at risk of unemployment, to reskill and train into green jobs.

Green Skills Academy, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

The Lancaster West Neighbourhood Team in Kensington and Chelsea, London, has developed a Green Skills Academy to help achieve the Council's climate emergency commitments and become carbon neutral by 2030, while also supporting the green supply chain and delivery of skills. Training opportunities are available for Council staff as well as local residents, and are also offered to contractors working on the net zero refurbishment of the Lancaster West Estate. Staff have also been supported to complete Retrofit Coordinator training, with sessions planned around all elements of retrofit with the ambition to develop a comprehensive multilingual training hub.

What is needed in the Net Zero Strategy

- 1. A clear commitment to a mutually agreed central framework to embed local authorities as delivery partners in decarbonisation policies.** Developed jointly between central government and local leaders, a framework would set out expectations for local authorities to decarbonise, and provide sufficient support for them to be able to do so. This support should include long-term, stable funding streams not dependent on repeated applications to competitions, realistic timeframes to deliver projects and sufficient support to deliver at both pace and scale.¹²
- 2. A clear message that a place-based solution is the best approach for several sectors.** While national government policies and support will be vital in meeting the 2050 net zero target, a place-based approach will be needed to ensure that local infrastructure, behaviour and partnership activities are aligned to net zero. National policies will only be delivered when supported by local decision making and behavioural changes.
- 3. A cross-departmental approach to working with local authorities.** The current siloed approach is a continuous struggle for local authorities and without a collaborative approach, there is a risk that national net zero goals will not be met. The Net Zero Strategy must ensure that action across all government departments and their agencies is aligned and removes any contradictions in policies and funding programmes.¹³ Collaboration across departments could have the added benefit of creating streamlined, cost-effective funding pots, saving money for the Exchequer while simplifying the process for local authorities.
- 4. Acknowledgement of the wider co-benefits of delivering on decarbonisation policies,** in particular how local authorities can support the delivery of these policies in a way which will also deliver better public health, reduce inequalities, restore nature and build thriving local economies.

The Blueprint Coalition makes a wider set of recommendations discussing how central government can support local authorities to decarbonise and invest in natural capital.

www.adeptnet.org.uk/documents/blueprint-accelerating-climate-action-and-green-recovery-local-level

References

¹ ADEPT, Ashden, Friends of the Earth, Grantham Institute, Green Alliance, Greenpeace, LEDNET, PCAN, Solace, January 2021. *A blueprint for accelerating climate action and a green recovery at the local level.*

² Climate Change Committee, December 2020. *The Sixth Carbon Budget: The UK's path to Net Zero.*

³ EY, December 2020. 'How local authorities across England spent their money last year.'

⁴ Climate Change Committee, December 2020. *Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget.*

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Local Government Association, February 2021. *Polling on resident satisfaction with local authorities: Round 28.*

⁷ Ashden, 2019. 'London Borough of Waltham Forest: Streets worth celebrating.'

⁸ Friends of the Earth, March 2021. *An emergency plan on green jobs for young people.*

⁹ Green Alliance, May 2021. *Jobs for a green recovery: Levelling up through nature.*

¹⁰ The West London Alliance is a sub-regional partnership comprising of seven West London boroughs.

¹¹ Mayor of London, 2021. 'Helping Londoners into Good Work.'

¹² Wider recommendations on funding can be found in: *Blueprint for a green recovery.*

¹³ For example, the current proposals to planning system reforms has a heavy focus on the number of houses being built. This will make it extremely challenging for local authorities to deliver on net zero.