

## A blueprint for local climate leadership



In just one year since the first UK local authority (Bristol) declared a climate emergency, two-thirds of all local authorities have followed suit<sup>1</sup>. But how, in practice, do declarations of climate emergency translate into practical action? In 2019 we worked with two councils to drill down into specific areas where they can act. We are now sharing our high-level learning from that process to stimulate discussion and help councils move from declaration to action.

The work on which this paper is based relied heavily on face-to-face engagement supported by detailed background research. We sought to identify policies, services and actions that already contribute to reducing climate impact or could do so with small adjustments. We enabled officers and Members to take a holistic view, codifying existing climate reduction activity, and identifying new opportunities with precision over what could be achieved and by whom. To provide additional clarity we segmented the local authority role down into its constituent parts:

- Community leader
- Anchor institution
- Strategic and regulatory body
- Commissioner, service provider, and landlord
- Investor and developer
- Owner and operator of buildings, vehicles and other assets

By the end of the process we had identified seven areas of action, direct influence, and leadership:

- Reducing the climate impact of housing as a social landlord, developer and planning authority;
- Using influence to create a sustainable and innovation-focused economy;
- Working with statutory partners so transport infrastructure contributes to climate goals;
- Leveraging urban environments and heritage as levers for climate goals;
- Seeking synergy between healthy living initiatives and sustainability goals;
- Reducing the climate impact of councils' direct service provision;
- Accelerating waste minimisation and re-use.

This short paper sets out our learning as a series of questions, under each of these areas, which can help councils move from declaration to action.

If you would like to talk to us about our work helping councils put climate leadership into practice - just give us a call on 020 7756 7600 or email [leon.osbourne@sharedintelligence.net](mailto:leon.osbourne@sharedintelligence.net)

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<sup>1</sup> [ClimateEmergency](#) reported as of October 2019, 265/408 UK local authorities had declared a climate emergency



## Housing

Greenhouse emissions from residential sources accounted for 15% of all UK emissions in 2017<sup>2</sup>. The location, design and energy efficiency of homes are all important factors in relation to action to secure environmental sustainability and address climate change. Not only is housing a major contributor to greenhouse emissions and climate change, it is also an area where local authorities can deliver change and set ambitious examples for others to follow.

Questions to ask:

What can you do as a landlord of housing stock?

Are you currently acting as a developer and can you ensure energy efficiency and environmentally sustainable design are key features?

As planning authority, what levers can you use to encourage high design and energy standards or electric vehicle charging points?

How can you leverage your community leadership role to encourage or support local residents to improve domestic energy and water efficiency of existing homes?

## Sustainable economies

Councils act in many ways to influence their local economies through their economic development roles, regeneration programmes, and through their influence in sub-regional economic partnerships. Reducing climate impact goes hand-in-hand with innovation. Councils can use capital investment, skills and employment programmes,

promotion to investors, and planning functions to steer local economies towards greater innovation. They can also shape the economy by influencing the skills and employment base through education and training and place-promotion to attract new residents and employers.

Questions to ask:

Are you using all your strategies as mechanisms to support and reinforce innovation and its links to climate impact reduction?

Are you collaborating with local champions of sustainable business practices?

Is skills investment being targeted at programmes which help people build skills to support innovation and climate change reduction?

Do infrastructure plans encourage sustainable and local supply chains?

Is infrastructure investment showcasing low carbon technology?

Are business support organisations leveraging small changes at scale (e.g. heating, lighting).



## Smart travel and mobility

Transport accounts for the largest share of UK greenhouse emissions at 27 per cent of the total.<sup>3</sup> The role councils can play varies by geography and tier. However, through their place-shaping and planning roles, and land ownership, councils have significant opportunities to create transport infrastructure which contributes positively. Some actions will take long-term planning but some are

<sup>2</sup> [2017 UK greenhouse gas emissions \(BEIS/ONS, 2019\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [2017 UK greenhouse gas emissions \(BEIS/ONS, 2019\)](#)

remarkably simple and quick e.g., installing charging points in council-operated car parks.

Questions to ask:

Are you influencing new development to minimise powered travel and encourage other modes?

Are you supporting electric vehicle adoption through car park charging points?

Do HR policies support your own staff to adopt low-carbon transport modes?

Are town centre and business partnerships being used to reduce the climate impact of transport?

## Urban environment and heritage

The quality of the built environment and built heritage are the most visible environmental features of many localities. The opportunities to reduce climate impact and protect biodiversity in built up areas are often over-looked. A holistic approach to the built environment can integrate multiple sustainability themes.

Questions to ask:

Does parks and open space maintenance showcase climate adaptation and mitigation?

Are design codes, design panels and planning guidance being used to enshrine action and technology which tackles climate change?

Do heritage assets present opportunities to showcase sustainable materials and techniques?

Can smart infrastructure and data be used to promote energy reduction and green travel?

## Healthy lives and green infrastructure

There is a direct correlation between poor environmental quality and poor health. It was estimated that in 2012 poor air quality cost the UK economy £2.7 billion through productivity loss<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Public Health England - <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2018/11/14/health-matters-air-pollution-sources-impacts-and-actions/>

Natural England data suggests people with good access to greenspace are 24% more likely to be physically active than those without and greenspace access is also correlated with fewer mental health-related hospitalisations<sup>5</sup>. Councils can also link action to tackle climate change with action to tackle the wider determinants of health.

Questions to ask:

Will infrastructure plans enable and encourage residents to be more physically active?

Are your planning and development strategies helping increase access to greenspace?

Does your parks and open space management mitigate climate change impacts on biodiversity?

Is your public realm strategy focused on reducing the stress on resources (saving water, carbon fixing) for example, by tree-planting and greening.



## Environmentally responsible public service providers

Councils are major employers, own buildings and other assets and operate vehicle fleets. This creates opportunities to apply environmental best practice in relation to the operation, management and maintenance of buildings, vehicles and other assets. Councils also work closely with other public service providers and their democratic

<sup>5</sup> Natural England, Health and Natural Environments, p. 4 (March 2012)

underpinning gives them a natural leadership role over large areas of local public service activity.

Questions to ask:

Is climate change mitigation and adaptation built into the use, maintenance and management of assets?

Do you have a structured approach or programme to encouraging partner organisations to follow your example?

Are your staff being encouraged to take action to address climate change at work and at home?

## Waste minimisation and re-use

The new national strategy for resources and waste, has begun a step change in waste minimisation, with the aim of eliminating food waste to landfill in the next ten years, and eliminating all avoidable waste by 2050.

This is a huge challenge for local authorities. Total emissions from waste actually increased by 5% to 19.9 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e in the year to 2016<sup>6</sup> and domestic waste still accounts for roughly 4% of national Greenhouse Gas emissions<sup>7</sup>.

Questions to ask:

Are you using local influence and/or industry-led national initiatives to reduce packaging and food waste within the local grocery and retail sectors?

Have you committed to the national goal of 'zero waste economy' alongside declaring a climate emergency?

Are you providing leadership of the elimination of single use plastics locally?

Do your waste management arrangements help households and businesses reduce waste, encourage reuse, and increase recycling and composting?

Are new residential developments being used to maximise recycling and introduce community composting?



Image: Alan Levine on Flickr

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<sup>6</sup> Committee on Climate Change 2018 Progress Report to Parliament - <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/CCC-2018-Progress-Report-to-Parliament.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Committee on Climate Change - <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/5CB-Infographic-FINAL-.pdf> (2014)