

**10 questions to ask if you are scrutinising climate change**

investment **mandate** action **solution**  
**strategy** identify **ambition** social  
adaptation impact **mandate** principle  
**10 questions to ask if you are  
scrutinising climate change**  
**sustainability** scrutiny **measures** inform  
**structure systems** support **education**  
environmental challenge approach

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# Contents

This publication is part of the Centre for Public Scrutiny's "10 questions" series, which lays out key issues on which local scrutineers (councillors sitting on scrutiny committees and the officers who support them) can pose questions to those with decision-making responsibility. Each main question is presented alongside supplementary questions which scrutineers can ask to delve further into the subject at hand.

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# Introduction

## Key points

- The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report stated that at the current rate the world is on track to reach a global temperature rise of 3 degrees celsius by the end of the century;
- The general consensus is that significant impacts on humans and the biosphere will be apparent with 1.5 degrees of warming;
- Limiting warming to this level may still be possible, if concerted action is taken;
- The Climate Change Act 2008 mandates some of this action – in particular reduction in emissions by at least 80 per cent on 1990 levels by 2050, alongside legally binding carbon budgets and regular reporting of climate risks

Climate change is a critical global problem that will impact environments everywhere and individuals across all levels of society. Tackling climate change is a shared responsibility. It is deeply connected to other policy issues, there are no clearly defined solutions - certainly not at a local level - and new consequences are emerging. Currently, there is a great deal of uncertainty over who should respond to climate change and how this can be achieved. An effective response to climate change is not simply an issue that can be dealt with at the global scale; some form of local action is necessary for lasting environmental, social and institutional change.

Within the local government sector, councils are leading the response and the LGA Climate Change Sector Led Improvement offer is supporting this – full details of the sector-wide approach to this issue can be found at <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/climate-change>

Councils across the UK have recognised a duty to act. Some are already acting on climate change – often by using their convening power to agree solutions across a whole area, rather than just focusing on the council as an institution. Now, with many having declared a ‘climate emergency’, there is a growing understanding that response to the challenge needs to be holistic; but even here, there is some uncertainty about what such declarations actually commit councils to in practice. Councils that have made this bold statement now need to show how they will prioritise and embed climate action in all policy areas.

The challenge has been thrown into sharper relief by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. At first glance it may seem that the impact of the pandemic will be positive for climate change. Globally, lockdown measures substantially reduced emissions, and in the UK measures by highways authorities have seen roadways reprioritised to focus on the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. But in the medium and long term, the position is more uncertain:

- Lessened use of public transport might make service levels unsustainable, leading to more people using cars and putting further public transport investment in danger – compounding the impact of pollution from private vehicles.

- More worryingly, councils' overall plans on climate change – written in the pre-COVID world and underpinned by assumptions about economic growth and personal behaviour – could now become undeliverable unless they are substantially redrafted.
- Finally, councils' financial situation focuses attention on immediate, in-year life and limb issues. Even before COVID, money to take action on long term issues was tight – the situation is now critical.

Both COVID-19 and the continuing threat of climate change demonstrate the needs for places and communities to become more resilient. Central to this is effective partnership working. Councils have a uniquely important role in using their buying power and resources to push forward action on climate change. They also have convening power in the local area – the ability to bring together a range of individuals and organisations and to work with them to develop a coherent and consistent approach to the issue. An approach to climate change which limits councils to thinking and acting only on their conventional duties and responsibilities will not take advantage of these opportunities – and is likely to be ineffective.

Scrutiny has a critical role to play in these cross-cutting issues. Councils' scrutiny functions can:

- Play an active role in stress-testing and querying assumptions in the development of climate action plans, particularly in light of the pandemic;
- Secure wider political buy-in for long-term action, in the context of significant financial pressures which make such buy-in critical;
- Play a formal accountability role as councils come to make public commitments on climate action – in particular, the declaration of climate emergencies;
- Support local people to engage with the council on these complex and long-term issues;
- Support the council to engage with partners and others in the locality, to better understand and align priorities.

This document sets out ten key questions – with follow ups – that scrutineers can use to better understand and seek oversight on climate action in their localities. It starts with a summary of the key issues and the questions which we think ought to be asked, before going on to delve into those issues in more detail.

These questions relate to issues on which task and finish working can be built; some of them are exploratory, and may be deployed by scrutineers as they decide which matters to put on a work programme. More detail on ways of working that scrutiny can adopt in carrying out its work can be found in “The good scrutiny guide” (CfPS, 2019), available at <https://www.cfps.org.uk/?publication=the-good-scrutiny-guide>

## Key terms

### **“Zero carbon” or “carbon neutral”?**

Some organisations assert that they are aiming for a “zero carbon” future; others plan to be “carbon neutral”. The phrases do not mean the same thing.

A “zero carbon” approach is one that aims to remove the use of carbon, and associated emissions, from the business entirely. A “carbon neutral” approach describes the acceptance that aspects of your work will still involve some emissions being produced, but that you are offsetting those emissions through some other means. “Net zero” is a term which is usually taken as meaning “carbon neutral”, the use of the word “net” implying the presence of offsetting arrangements accounting for an overall zero figure.

In the short term, “carbon neutral” is an easier task than “zero carbon”, and is likely to act as a staging post on the road to that endpoint.

### **“Climate emergency”**

The rising environmental urgency and public profile of climate change has pushed it up local agendas.

Since Bristol City Council became the first to declare a ‘climate emergency’ in November 2018, the LGA and 65% of all councils across the UK have also declared climate emergencies, pledging to reduce their carbon emissions. These motions generally depend on cross-party support and set a precedent for local action.

A full list of councils that have declared a climate emergency, and their action plans, can be found here - <https://www.climateemergency.uk/>

## Where and how to ask the questions

Our ten questions are not just ones that you will want to ask in a formal committee environment. By and large they are designed to be asked as you prepare to carry out work – either preparing for a set-piece session in committee where you might want to hold the relevant cabinet member, or the Leader, to account, or in preparation for the scoping of a more in-depth piece of scrutiny work, for example a task and finish group.

The questions are therefore largely exploratory in nature. They are designed to invite further supplementary questions which will depend on local circumstances. This means, as ever, that members and the officers supporting them will have to deploy “active listening” skills to pick up on and explore matters revealed by these questions. The sections below set out how some of this exploration might be carried out.

The questions will be particularly useful for:

- Scoping reviews to ensure focus in the context of a subject of significant potential breadth and depth. Preparation for reviews may involve the questions being asked to explore where scrutiny could add most value;
- Planning the involvement of the local community, including local activist groups. Where addressed to officers in the council, answers to the questions can give scrutiny a clearer sense of how it can best engage the public to understand their likely aspirations;
- Planning the involvement of local businesses, partners and employers to understand the local growth context (by, similarly to the above, posing questions to council officers that allow for such engagement to be more focused);
- Tackling political and personal disagreement over the scale and nature of the crisis, and of the scale and nature of the mitigations and adaptations necessary. The science on climate change is settled – however, there may be disagreement over the scale of the challenge and the nature of the response that councils need to make. Having answers to some of the central questions means that such debate and discussion at scrutiny (and elsewhere) can happen in a way that is couched on a common understanding of the evidence, and the nature of ongoing local activity;
- Developing realistic, meaningful recommendations that engage both with the global challenge and the need for local action. The answers to the questions will provide a basis on which to construct evidence-based recommendations that accurately reflect current plans, good practice and activity.

Most importantly, the questions will help you to maintain general oversight on the issue – even if you do not carry out formal work, informal questioning may help to reassure you that action is being undertaken. This can be used to support your scrutiny work programming processes and can help you to build an understanding of climate change and its impacts into your wider work.

Developing an understanding of local action is best supported by having a sense of what others are doing on the same issue. Professionals working on climate change will have carried out their own reviews of notable practice from elsewhere, and it makes sense that scrutiny practitioners should also be aware of these examples to be able to add most value. The LGA has produced a case study hub for action on climate change which you can access at <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/climate-change/climate-change-case-studies>

## The 10 questions

If you are reading this document electronically, you can click on the hyperlinks in each of the questions below and be taken to the relevant point in the text.

### **1. How well does the council understand the need to take action locally?**

- Has the council carried out research to understand what it can do, and what it needs to do?
- Has the council declared a climate emergency?
- How does the council propose to act immediately on the declaration of a climate emergency (if relevant)?
- What commitments is the council making by such a declaration?
- How, if at all, have these commitments been recast as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Does the council have a carbon neutral or zero carbon target?
- Does a carbon neutral or zero carbon target cover council activities only or is it broader?
- Has there been a climate risk assessment in the local area?
- What is the council's structure for gathering and analysing the existing research and expertise?
- How can the council establish a benchmark for this data so evaluation of the effectiveness of climate action is possible?
- How will information gathered (including public views and partners' opinions and priorities) pre-COVID be subjected to analysis to ensure its continued relevance?



## **2. How does the council's leadership champion and direct action on climate change?**

- Does the council understand the shift in mindset and culture involved in acting on climate change?
- Is there an outline for how cross-party working will be organised and how it will feed into the process, in order to make action on climate long term and be sustainable?
- Does the council have a Cabinet Lead or committed governance process driving your authority's response to climate change? How else will responsibility and accountability for action be managed?
- Is there a clear plan on how staff from all departments are involved in helping the council reach its climate action goals?
- Does the scrutiny function consider the impact of climate change and the environment when reviewing council policies and strategies?

## **3. How is the council adopting a clear and detailed strategic plan, and how is it mainstreaming climate change mitigation and adaptation?**

- How is the council ensuring that all strategic decisions, budgets and approaches to planning decisions are in line with a shift to carbon neutral/zero carbon?
- How will the council look to incorporate its climate change ambitions into existing policy?
- Do all council reports (especially those supporting executive decisions) include a section about how a project or decision will help the council reach its climate action goals?
- How is the council embedding climate action goals into staff and councillor training?
- What is the strategy for developing detailed and technical plans for each department?
- What is the system for monitoring and evaluating progress? Are all stakeholders bought into this?
- Who "owns" action in key areas? How is ownership spread between other partners in the area?
- What information will help better decision-making, or to communicate the case more effectively to potential funders?
- Are there regular updates on climate action progress to full Council and/or Cabinet?
- How are external stakeholders involved in developing departmental plans?

#### **4. Has the council reviewed its investment strategy, supply chains and procurement models to give due consideration to climate change impacts?**

- How does the council financially invest in initiatives that reduce net emissions?
- Does the council report on the level of investment in the fossil fuel industry that the pensions plan and other investments have?
- What freedom to act does the council have on, for example, divesting from investment in fossil fuels?
- Does each procurement consider the impact on the environment?

#### **5. How is the council integrating sustainability and resilience into its transport and energy plans?**

- Which modes of transport do people use to get to work, school and to the shops, and how far do people travel? How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed this? How will this change in the next few decades?
- Is there a choice of different modes of transport, or does everyone depend on access to a private car? Have changes to travel patterns during the pandemic become embedded or have behaviours returned to how they were previously?
- Is there a plan to implement more walking and cycling in your local area (recognising that the focus of those plans is likely to have shifted significantly as a response to COVID-19)? How do plans link into school/education transport policies?
- How is the council rethinking its overall energy use (both corporately, and in property managed by others – such as housing, schools and leisure facilities in light of its objectives)?
- Is the council taking action on a commercial, retail energy proposition? How might such a proposition link into climate objectives?
- How does the council manage its property portfolio so as to deliver its climate and carbon targets?
- How does the council act as a responsible custodian of the natural environment that it both owns, and has an influence over – trees, parks, open spaces and larger tracts of land? How does it work with its partners to promote climate action in these areas?

#### **6. How is the council planning to understand and act on the need to adapt existing properties and estates to address the impacts of climate change – and to plan for new housing stock which is resilient to these impacts?**

- How is the council building an understanding of the need for adaptation into housing and planning policy?

- How well does the council understand the opportunities to retrofit your existing property and housing stock?
- How has the council reviewed, or how does it plan to review, the Local Plan (and other Local Development Framework documents) in light of climate change?
- How will new development and regeneration present a challenge/provide an opportunity for sustainable development?
- How has the council set out policies encouraging high levels of energy efficiency and sustainability in new buildings? If these policies exist, are they sufficiently ambitious, and how do they tie into national incentives where relevant?

### **7. How is the council promoting climate education, diversifying the labour market and focusing on sectors that are sustainable?**

- Does the council understand where the greatest economic risks around climate change lie for the council, as an institution and as a place?
- How is the council developing local industrial strategies (and economic recovery plans, post-COVID) to be in line with carbon targets?
- How will the council work with Local Enterprise Partnerships to revise and implement local industrial strategies?
- How is the council supporting local businesses and employers to understand some of the adaptive activities in which they might need to engage to be sustainable?
- What are the skills implications of a decarbonising economy at a local level?
- What is the council doing to engage with local residents surrounding climate awareness?
- How can the council work with schools to enhance the quality of climate education?

### **8. What measures are being taken to ensure that health and social care systems will be resilient with the extra pressures they will come under due to climate change?**

- Are there short-term public health measures (around, for example, air pollution) that the council can take?
- How will the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the resilience of local care systems be taken into account in climate change planning?
- How will demographic change impact on the sustainability of your existing health and social care activity, in the light of climate change?

- How will changes to local housing, transport and infrastructure arrangements impact on the health service?
- How will the council measure the impact of improvements in health and social care on climate change efforts?

### **9. How does the council identify those who are most at risk from the impacts of climate change, and what is being done to assist the most vulnerable?**

- To what extent has the council subjected council plans on climate change to an equalities impact assessment or assessments?
- How might such assessments now need to be rethought or carried out again, in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Which groups or individuals are likely to be most heavily impacted? What mitigation and adaptation will the council carry out? What lessons about engaging with vulnerable people can be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How will climate impacts be incorporated within the council's general approach to equalities in the future?
- How will the council develop conversations to make informed decisions about climate change, whilst both addressing the needs of the most vulnerable individuals and groups at the same time as delivering climate change objectives?

### **10. How is the council supporting and working with all relevant private and civic actors in the area towards climate change mitigation and adaptation?**

- What lessons around partnership working has the council learned from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which might now be deployed to combat the climate emergency?
- What partners has the council identified who might be able to assist in tackling the climate action agenda? Where are the gaps in existing networks?
- What constraints are placed on the council by national policy, and how can the council work constructively with national actors to address these constraints?
- How is the council working with neighbouring authorities (including combined authorities, where relevant) to implement joint decarbonisation and leverage additional funding?
- How can the council work with its partners to promote public awareness? Is this adequately resourced?

# The overall need for local climate action

## 1. How well does the council understand the need to take action locally?

### Further questions to ask:

- Has the council carried out research to understand what it can do, and what it needs to do?
- Has the council declared a climate emergency?
- How does the council propose to act immediately on the declaration of a climate emergency (if relevant)?
- What commitments is the council making by such a declaration?
- How, if at all, have these commitments been recast as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Does the council have a carbon neutral or zero carbon target?
- Does a carbon neutral or zero carbon target cover council activities only or is it broader?
- Has there been a climate risk assessment in the local area?
- What is the council's structure for gathering and analysing the existing research and expertise?
- How can the council establish a benchmark for this data so evaluation of the effectiveness of climate action is possible?
- How will information gathered (including public views and partners' opinions and priorities) pre-COVID be subjected to analysis to ensure its continued relevance?

The two main components of action on climate change are adaptation and mitigation. Asking these questions will give you the general picture of the council's activities which will help you to focus your approach on more detailed issues.

### Mitigation

A great deal of global and national action is focused on mitigation – trying to limit temperature rise.

Alongside the preparation of a climate change strategy, your council will have developed, or be developing, a thorough understanding of the key sources of carbon emissions in your

local area, and to determine where and how to best reduce these levels. Emissions data at local authority level is published annually by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy<sup>1</sup>. This shows you at a high level where the majority of emissions in your area are coming from. Different local areas will have different carbon emission profiles. A forthcoming LGA tool will also support councils to measure their own carbon emissions.

Councils can draw on a wide range of tools to help identify climate risks and ways to build local resilience – mentioned at the end of this guide – and can bring these elements together with desk research and stakeholder engagement, or develop your own assessment using available data.

Whilst local authorities don't have a statutory duty to reduce emissions in line with the national Climate Change Act, they do need to produce plans that have significant impact on reducing emissions (e.g. transport, local plans, minerals plans, procurement).

It's important to recognise that mitigation – and action on climate change more generally – is not entirely about changing the personal behaviours and choices of local people. Changing behaviours of individuals will have some effect – but the actions of big institutions are likely to deliver bigger changes. This is something we explore in more detail in the questions throughout.

## **Adaptation**

The impact of climate change will vary from place to place, and different local authorities will be more or less resilient (or vulnerable) to these different impacts. Demographic factors may influence this. Some areas may have an ageing population, vulnerable to extremes of temperature for example. In other places, geography will be a factor – the presence of areas particularly prone to flooding, for example.

As such, the way that proposed actions impact on statutory responsibilities will differ from council to council. Understanding how local needs and obligations will change and influence the development of strategies and planning is vital to this effort.

A response to the climate emergency necessitates a consideration of the likely impacts of climate change in your local area. Across mitigation and adaptation, an evidence-based approach will identify risks and challenges, establish opportunities and solutions, and give an overview of your local needs.

Climate change is connected to almost every area of life, so it can be difficult for councils to know where to start and where the most impact can be made. Once early wins are achieved then residents and all involved parties will be more readily convinced that an emergency response on climate action is feasible.

<sup>1</sup> National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory, <https://naei.beis.gov.uk/laco2app/>

## Governance and leadership

### 2. How does the council's leadership champion and direct action on climate change?

#### Further questions to ask:

- Does the council understand the shift in mindset and culture involved in acting on climate change?
- Is there an outline for how cross-party working will be organised and how it will feed into the process, in order to make action on climate long term and be sustainable?
- Does the council have a Cabinet Lead or committed governance process driving your authority's response to climate change? How else will responsibility and accountability for action be managed?
- Is there a clear plan on how staff from all departments are involved in helping the council reach its climate action goals?
- Does the scrutiny function consider the impact of climate change and the environment when reviewing council policies and strategies?

Climate action cuts across all council departments and functions, but for an effective response there has to be visible leadership and ownership – a proper understanding of the challenge and a visible and sustained pressure exercised by those in leadership positions.

There are a number of “assessment frameworks” in existence which can help councils to establish a baseline understanding of the challenge, around which political consensus and leadership can be built – one such example is “mini-Stern reviews”, mirroring the approach carried out in 2006 at a national level.

**mini-Stern reviews** can assess the cost and carbon effectiveness of a wide range of low carbon options that could be applied at the local level in households, industry, commerce and transport. It explores the scope for their deployment, the associated investment needs, financial returns and carbon savings, and the implications for the economy and employment.

Bristol City Council, 2015 [<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cabot/media/documents/bristol-low-carbon-cities-report.pdf>]

Leeds City Region, 2017 [[https://www.leedsclimate.org.uk/sites/default/files/6660%20Leeds%20mini-stern%20exec%20summary\\_v3.pdf](https://www.leedsclimate.org.uk/sites/default/files/6660%20Leeds%20mini-stern%20exec%20summary_v3.pdf)]

Every council's approach to this challenge will be different, but there are likely to be some common themes underpinning good governance, leadership, and political direction. These will include:

- A lead member acting as a “champion” for this work, and as a focus for accountability and responsibility. This may be the council Leader;
- A lead officer to perform a similar role;
- A group of key individuals, at senior level, to take forward a strategy and drive it forward across the authority. This may involve people from different professional disciplines;
- A similar range of people across the councils' partners, and other organisations in the area.

Leadership is collective – as well as key individuals at the top of the organisation, you can expect to see others in the organisation exercising their own leadership and initiative on these matters, often through ownership of particular elements of an overarching plan or strategy. Collective ownership is about ensuring that climate change action is not seen as sitting within one particular professional specialism or department of the council.

Action on climate change is long term. It will need to be consistent across successive council leaderships, involving changes in political control. Scrutiny can be seen as having a role in developing cross-party consensus over time – making climate change policy more resilient to changes in political leadership, and changes in the priorities and objectives of partners in the wider area.

Scrutiny can delve into the financial commitments being made to action on climate change. Understanding how value judgements informed by the impacts of climate change can feed into clear priorities for action, which are themselves supported by resources, is an important part of the equation. Part of this involves developing more formal partnership arrangements with partners to share and allocate resources, like in Manchester – see below.

## **Manchester City Council**

### **The Manchester Climate Change Partnership and Agency**

<http://www.manchesterclimate.com/>

This partnership and agency owns a plan which brings together a range of partners city-wide to assign responsibility for overseeing and championing climate change action in the city. The Partnership was established in February 2018 and set targets based on analysis and recommendations from expert partners in independent advisory groups. Partnership members represent key organisations and sectors from across the city and there is a growing list of organisations that have signed their ‘Commitment to Act’ to support Manchester in achieving its targets.



## Strategic planning, monitoring and reporting

### 3. How is the council adopting a clear and detailed strategic plan, and how is it mainstreaming climate change mitigation and adaptation?

#### Further questions to ask:

- How is the council ensuring that all strategic decisions, budgets and approaches to planning decisions are in line with a shift to carbon neutral/zero carbon?
- How will the council look to incorporate its climate change ambitions into existing policy?
- Do all council reports (especially those supporting executive decisions) include a section about how a project or decision will help the council reach its climate action goals?
- How is the council embedding climate action goals into staff and councillor training?
- What is the strategy for developing detailed and technical plans for each department?
- What is the system for monitoring and evaluating progress? Are all stakeholders bought into this?
- Who “owns” action in key areas? How is ownership spread between other partners in the area?
- What information will help better decision-making, or to communicate the case more effectively to potential funders?
- Are there regular updates on climate action progress to full Council and/or Cabinet?
- How are external stakeholders involved in developing departmental plans?

After primary focus areas for climate change mitigation and adaptation have been identified, you can expect that understanding to be translated into a plan of action.

Any climate action plan should be set up to accurately reflect which levers are within the council’s control and where they sit with partners. An important additional consideration for any strategy is the question – is this a strategy for the council, as an institution, or a strategy that the council is setting for climate action across the area?

“Mainstreaming” action on climate change is an important aspect of this. Mainstreaming as a policy means bringing an understanding of it into everything the council does. Doing this with climate change means considering how other aspects of councils’ (and their partners’) activities impact on climate change, and vice versa. For example, what will a changing

climate demand of us in policy on housing – and on social care for vulnerable people? Scrutiny might want to consider whether a section on “climate implications” in standard committee reports might help to tie this together at a corporate level – although there is a risk that this can become a tick box exercise. To avoid this becoming a tick box exercise, scrutiny can challenge or probe when a report states “there are no implications for climate”. For example, they may wish to ask the report author what work has been undertaken to reach that view.

This also involves thinking about the wider relationships the council has with others in the local area, and aligning with objectives held by national bodies. The “sustainable development goals”<sup>2</sup> can be a good anchor for this work. Several councils have published a specific SDG agenda, such as the ‘Bristol One City’ plan.

## **Bristol City Council**

**The Bristol One City plan** [<https://www.bristolonecity.com/>] sets out Bristol’s key challenges up to 2050 and brings the city together around the shared vision of delivering the SDGs locally: to make Bristol a fair, healthy and sustainable city. The plan brings together a wide range of public, private, and third sector partners within Bristol.

A clear understanding of risk underpins all council strategies. Climate change is no different, and strategies here will recognise the complex and multifaceted issues in play. Questions that officers and lead members will need to grapple with – and on which scrutiny might assist, include:

- What are the biggest corporate and departmental risks around the climate agenda?
- Might you need to carry out more meaningful climate assessments on decisions the council makes, alongside an equalities assessment, to mitigate these risks?
- How will you manage these risks in the context of a subject which may not easily lend itself to traditional performance indicators and measures of success?

The answers you get to these kinds of questions should at least give you reassurance that these complex issues are recognised and understood. They can act as a foundation for the more detailed kinds of questions raised in the subsequent sections of this guide.

Action planning can be complex<sup>3</sup>, and requires a form of scrutiny that recognises this complexity. Where members are beginning to investigate plans, and their robustness, they may want to consider the following:

- The process will need to begin with the building of relationships with a range of partners – a climate change strategy “owned” exclusively by the council is likely to be less effective;

<sup>2</sup> UN, 2015, Sustainable Development Goals <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

<sup>3</sup> See Climate Change Action Planning Process - <https://www.climatejust.org.uk/what-can-be-done>, and Climate action planning and implementation <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/ARUP-Climate-Emergency-What-Next.pdf>

- Action must be evidence and data-led – the challenge may be global, but every area will have its own challenges and plans will need to be context specific. Certain parts of the local economy may have their own roles to play; the area’s demographics will have a significant impact on what actions look like;
- Prioritisation is a key part of mainstreaming action on climate change. This is a significant policy agenda and councils and their partners will have limited capacity to deliver; partners will have different views on what the most important issues are;
- Understanding costs, budget and value is crucial, because concerted action on climate change can require investment. Scrutiny can help to understand how business cases have been used, and how long-term costs have been balanced against the costs of climate change itself, to put together a better long-term sense of value;
- Monitoring progress and performance. Scrutiny might have a formal role in performance review – its contribution might be explicitly built into a climate change strategy – or more traditional approaches can be used. Whatever approach is adopted scrutiny members will need to understand who is monitoring what, and when, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication.

## Investment and finances

### 4. Has the council reviewed its investment strategy, supply chains and procurement models to give due consideration to climate change impacts?

#### Further questions to ask:

- How does the council financially invest in initiatives that reduce net emissions?
- Does the council report on the level of investment in the fossil fuel industry that the pensions plan and other investments have?
- What freedom to act does the council have on, for example, divesting from investment in fossil fuels?
- Does each procurement consider the impact on the environment?

Local authorities are central to reducing the impacts of climate change through better decisions in investment, procurement and service delivery. By understanding their responsibilities and commitments on climate change and setting their investment and commercial strategy accordingly, councils can play a powerful role.

Councils across the country are moving money out of coal, oil and gas companies whose

actions are fuelling climate change. This kind of divestment is often attractive in theory – but in practice councils will be thinking carefully about how to manage it. LGPS (Local Government Pension Scheme) investments, in particular, present a big challenge when it comes to divestment. Starting with an understanding of the level of investment in the fossil fuel industry, in pension plans or otherwise, and reviewing the climate impacts of the investment portfolio will help to understand the drivers for a refocused approach to investment.

Where councils are engaged in wider commercial activity, the strategies underpinning this activity may need to be reconsidered to ensure that they align with the authority's priorities on climate change. This is particularly the case for trading companies and joint ventures, which will as separate entities need to have their own conversations about their responses and duties on climate and associated issues. It is also the case for procurement more generally. Councillors may wish to consider how an understanding of climate impacts will influence the council's procurement strategy – including, for example, the length of contracts and the assumptions used to inform requirements set out in invitations to tender.

Councils will not be able to make the assumption that companies and other vehicles in which they hold a stake, and partners with whom they contract, will necessarily automatically fall behind their proposed actions on climate.

Not all actions will require council funding, and it is important to leverage private capital investment rather than rely solely on local government funds.

## Infrastructure and the built environment (housing, energy and transportation)

### 5. How is the council integrating sustainability and resilience into its transport and energy plans?

#### Further questions to ask:

- Which modes of transport do people use to get to work, school and to the shops, and how far do people travel? How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed this? How will this change in the next few decades?
- Is there a choice of different modes of transport, or does everyone depend on access to a private car? Have changes to travel patterns during the pandemic become embedded or have behaviours returned to how they were previously?
- Is there a plan to implement more walking and cycling in your local area (recognising that the focus of those plans is likely to have shifted significantly as a response to COVID-19)? How do plans link into school/education transport policies?

- How is the council rethinking its overall energy use (both corporately, and in property managed by others – such as housing, schools and leisure facilities in light of its objectives)?
- Is the council taking action on a commercial, retail energy proposition? How might such a proposition link into climate objectives?
- How does the council manage its property portfolio so as to deliver its climate and carbon targets?
- How does the council act as a responsible custodian of the natural environment that it both owns, and has an influence over – trees, parks, open spaces and larger tracts of land? How does it work with its partners to promote climate action in these areas?

## Transport

The transport sector is the UK's single biggest source of carbon emissions, and one where quick wins can be made (CCC, 2019). Re-shaping your local transport system to reduce reliance on cars and shift towards low-carbon public transport, cycling and walking can have positive benefits including improved public health, better air quality, more hospitable public spaces and reduced economic losses from less congestion.

These kinds of measures are often as much about increasing air quality now as mitigating the impacts of climate change in the future. Scrutiny can play a role in identifying where this public pushback might exist, and in considering how changes can be communicated to local people – as well as ensuring that those changes might themselves need to be adapted based on community feedback.

The partnership context for climate action suggests the need for councils to work with other bodies – regional and sub regional transport bodies which form part of Mayoral combined authorities, bus and train operators are obvious candidates, and scrutineers might seek to understand how their councils are engaging with these bodies in meeting their climate objectives.

### London Borough of Lewisham

**The Healthy Neighbourhoods Scheme** [<https://lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/roads-and-transport/our-traffic-reduction-programme-healthy-neighbourhoods>] is a programme that aims to change local streets to encourage people to walk and cycle rather than drive. Subject to funding and public consultation, the programme is likely to include traffic management measures, road closures outside schools, contra-flow cycling, improved pedestrian crossings, street trees, benches and cycle parking. The Scheme is being rolled out following the introduction of "mini-Hollands" in other boroughs; in particular, Waltham Forest and Kingston upon Thames.

Climate change adaptation needs to be built into decisions around the location, planning, design and maintenance of infrastructure. On the railways and the roads, the major risks to infrastructure include flooding, landslides and high winds. Consideration needs to be given to the way that infrastructure is considered as part of master planning exercises for regeneration. Scrutiny should query where major redevelopment is planned around private car use, including “big box” retail and business parks. Inevitably, this will involve working with partners such as Highways England and Network Rail (in its capacity as a railway infrastructure planner).

## Energy

Energy is an area where councils have long taken action. Reduction in energy use has had a strong economic imperative despite its importance on climate action. Increasing the efficiency of corporate energy use, conversion of vehicle fleets and renewal of district heating schemes all have the potential to provide significant assistance to councils on their journey to carbon neutrality, and zero carbon.

As part of a commitment to tackling carbon emissions, the council fleet is a good starting point. Councils can also explore the transition of commissioned transport fleets to electric vehicles or electric cargo bikes and require all taxis to be electric vehicles through licensing. Updating performance requirements for public transport, waste management and other services can also result in longer-term cost savings.

Investment in LED street lighting that is better designed and better directed can significantly reduce the council’s energy usage. Through developing policy guidance and active encouragement, business and commercial organisations can also improve energy efficiency and install new renewable energy generation on their own buildings. Other benefits tied to sustainable energy production and consumption include lower risk of fuel poverty and its associated health impact.

**Solihull Council** plans to replace all its 24,000 streetlights by 2024 cutting its total energy costs in half to just £612,000 and reducing its own emissions by 43%.

<https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/InfoandIntelligence/Carbon-Report-2018-19-Street-Lighting.pdf>

## The natural environment

Councils are often custodians of large amounts of land. Councils may own:

- Road verges and central reservations, proper management of which could make a huge contribution to the creation of new habitats for life;
- Street trees, where the council may have a programme in place for planting or better management, both to improve the urban environment and contributing to emissions offsetting;
- Parks and open spaces, acting as green lungs for towns and cities and which could

be managed in such a way to enhance their ability to act as carbon sinks, while also enhancing biodiversity;

- Larger tracts of public space – woodlands, brownfield sites which may be subject to regeneration plans over which the council can place conditions around biodiversity and climate action, and even council-owned farms.

Some councils own property companies which manage these assets on their behalf. The focus and objectives of these companies may need to be looked at to understand how they align with the need to promote carbon neutral, and zero carbon policies – particularly insofar as they relate to regeneration and redevelopment.

There may be public and private landholders with whom the council can work on these issues. The Forestry Commission and National Trust and Natural England will be the most obvious partners; the Environment Agency will also have a part to play.

## Planning and housing

### 6. How is the council planning to understand and act on the need to adapt existing properties and estates to address the impacts of climate change – and to plan for new housing stock which is resilient to these impacts?

#### Further questions to ask:

- How is the council building an understanding of the need for adaptation into housing and planning policy?
- How well does the council understand the opportunities to retrofit its own existing property and housing stock?
- How has the council reviewed, or how does it plan to review, the Local Plan (and other Local Development Framework documents) in light of climate change?
- How will new development and regeneration present a challenge/provide an opportunity for sustainable development?
- How has the council set out policies encouraging high levels of energy efficiency and sustainability in new buildings? If these policies exist, are they sufficiently ambitious, and how do they tie into national incentives where relevant?

#### Existing homes

A number of councils remain stockholders of social housing; many others transferred stock

to housing associations or ALMOs (arm's length management organisations) some years ago. Some councils, in two tier areas, may never have had direct responsibility for housing provision, but will find that requirements for changes to housing stock necessitated by climate change will be influenced by policy on social care, for example.

This is an area where there is significant work to be done, but where the nature of tenure and stockholding can make concerted action challenging.

Stock is likely to vary significantly – from very modern stock built at a small scale in recent years (sometimes as “infill” in existing estates) through to large-scale post-war and inter-war estates (some involving high-density blocks) to individual homes dispersed around the area purchased on an ad hoc basis over a number of decades to meet local need.

Councils which are stockholders, or who work closely alongside housing associations or ALMOs, are likely to have existing estate renewal and stock renewal plans. Common measures may include:

- Introduction of district heating schemes;
- Introduction of other heating solutions;
- Moves to on-site power generation;
- Introduction of energy efficiency measures such as double glazing, insulation and draughtproofing.

Areas will have a mix of social, private rented and private owned housing. There may be steps that councils and their partners can take to promoting better energy use in existing private stock (private housing owners will face many of the same challenges as we have identified for social housing above), but the limits to council action will be especially keenly felt in this area.

In most respects, influence on private sector housing is likely to be limited to new builds, and overall planning policy. Even here, as the next section makes clear, councils are constrained in their action by national planning policy.

### **Future homes: planning policy generally**

The role of the Local Plan in every local authority area will be vital in achieving both “carbon neutral” and “zero carbon” objectives. Currently, national legislation imposes a duty on councils to ensure that local planning policies align with emission reduction targets. There are also forthcoming Government proposals that will impact on standards such as the recent proposals for Future Homes Standards (MHCLG, 2020). Whilst standards will set a basic measure, the LGA has suggested in its response to Government’s proposals that local authorities might be encouraged to set higher energy efficiency and fabric standards for new homes to secure a greater reduction in energy demand and prevent costly retrofitting in the future (LGA, 2020).

Councils’ capacity for plan-making is limited. Planning authorities can, however, include



a requirement that new builds meet an improvement on the current national standards, like the Greater Cambridge Housing Delivery Agency, and that they contribute to a smarter energy system. For example, Stroud Council are setting an example by ensuring that all new housing built on council-owned land and council housing is built to a standard that ensures zero net carbon emissions. Not all councils may find themselves able to take action like this immediately (because not all councils may find themselves as owners of land that developers find attractive); it may be that the masterplanning that surrounds large-scale regeneration provides an opportunity to influence and work with developers.

Councils can particularly work with developers on their obligations to support climate mitigation and adaptation.

### **Cambridge City Council / Greater Cambridge Housing Delivery Agency**

The Cambridge Sustainable Housing Design Guide [<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/1503/cambridgeshire-sustainable-housing-design-guide.pdf>] uses standards which exceed national policy guidelines, and homes delivered by/for the Greater Cambridge Housing Delivery Agency will incorporate a number of sustainable design features including: green roofs on the apartment blocks, sustainable urban drainage incorporated into landscaping, denser insulation to minimise heat loss and reduce residents' energy bills, photovoltaic panels on roofs of houses and apartments.

### **Stroud District Council**

[<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/news-archive/here-is-how-stroud-district-council-is-working-towards-a-carbon-neutral-district-by-2030>]

The council became the first local council in Europe to obtain carbon neutral status in 2015 and is continuing to retrofit homes with greener energy options, provide up-to-date energy standards and work on low carbon heating to achieve a carbon neutral status through the whole district.

## **Planning policy and flooding**

When making decisions on land use and development, councils can follow Defra's guidance to reflect the level of current and future flood risk, promote greater use of natural flood management solutions and include flood risk as a feature of adaptation reporting from infrastructure (Defra, 2018). Councils already have a keen understanding of flood risk in their area in light of obligations and thinking on planning policy which have developed since the 2008 Pitt Review<sup>4</sup>. Scrutiny holds a statutory responsibility around flood risk management<sup>5</sup>, which can be used to further explore risk and mitigation in this area.

<sup>4</sup> [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100702215619/http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/pittreview/the-pitt-review/final\\_report.html](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100702215619/http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/pittreview/the-pitt-review/final_report.html)

<sup>5</sup> Regulations are no longer in force but the basic powers in primary legislation remain active: <https://www.cfps.org.uk/flooding-scrutiny-regulations-no-longer-in-force/>

## Energy use in housing

Local councils have the potential to increase energy efficiency and reduce reliance on carbon-based energy sources. For many councils, energy saving is now a core focus and there has been a recognition that developing renewable energy projects can also provide vital revenue. Recent examples include councils forming their own energy companies in Islington and Hackney, as well as providing funding for community energy schemes and developing district heating systems. Scrutiny can seek to better understand how the objectives of these companies might align with wider council strategy on climate change.

Improving the energy performance of council buildings, social housing, schools or leisure centres can reduce the council's energy bill. This can include basic energy efficiency measures of the type taken in domestic homes to more complex retrofits to larger buildings and facilities, and combined heat and power schemes. The Local Partnerships "Re:fit" programme provides more information, support and advice to councils planning this activity<sup>6</sup>. The reduction in the generation of waste and a dramatic increase in low carbon means of dealing with waste is also an area of focus where councils can make significant carbon savings.

## Education, skills and economic development

### 7. How is the council promoting climate education, diversifying the labour market and focusing on sectors that are sustainable?

#### Further questions to ask:

- Does the council understand where the greatest economic risks around climate change lie for the council, as an institution and as a place?
- How is the council developing local industrial strategies (and economic recovery plans, post-COVID) to be in line with carbon targets?
- How will the council work with LEPs to revise and implement local industrial strategies?
- How is the council supporting local businesses and employers to understand some of the adaptive activities in which they might need to engage to be sustainable?
- What are the skills implications of a decarbonising economy at a local level?
- What is the council doing to engage with local residents surrounding climate awareness?
- How can the council work with schools to enhance the quality of climate education?

<sup>6</sup> Local Partnerships, 2019, <https://localpartnerships.org.uk/our-expertise/re-fit/>

Climate change presents an opportunity to rethink the perceived model of local growth by moving towards a cleaner, low-carbon economy. Efforts in this respect will have to be twofold: with local authorities both managing a transition and enabling green growth. Scrutiny can help to think about these shifts in expectations on growth – member buy-in to what are likely to be decisions with substantial long-term impact will be crucial, and scrutiny provides an opportunity to tease this out with a wider range of councillors, in addition to those who sit on cabinet.

Long-term planning on this matter is made much more complex because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing (June 2020) it remains unclear how the country will recover economically from this, and what this recovery will look like area by area. What seems certain is that local authorities and LEPs will have to work together to fundamentally reappraise their expectations of their collective role in economic development – and what sustainable economic development practically looks like for the area. Councils will have a task in ensuring that the economic recovery is “climate smart” – and that in doing so it does not leave people behind.

For this transformation to occur, councils can identify incentives and encourage low-carbon technologies and green industries to locate locally. At the same time, there needs to be a concerted effort to support existing local businesses in becoming more environmentally and socially responsible (e.g. green awards, climate change ambassador programme).

Furthermore, there will need to be anticipation of future skills. Forecasting occupational change and framing education and training responses is not a clear-cut exercise. Scrutiny can help to review the existing economic profile of the area – understanding where sectors of the economy might be at particular risk, and where there might be opportunities for emerging areas. This aspect of “transition” to a low carbon economy might cause economic shocks and other impacts on the local labour market – scrutiny can engage with local business, and representative bodies, to try to understand awareness of the impacts and to build insights and concerns into the way that the council is planning for the future. This may also involve the council working with further education and higher education providers in the area to understand how they are offering courses of study which engage with the emergence of these opportunities.

Local residents need and deserve to know why they might have to take different decisions or call on different or additional resources in conducting their livelihoods and planning their futures. Thus, awareness can be raised among a number of different local stakeholders, such as households, local organisations, opinion leaders and educators – scrutiny can be a part of this strategy. Knowledge and understanding are fundamental to behaviour change, and key life stages, such as childhood and young adulthood, can present ideal opportunities for influencing long-term attitudes.

**Climate action education** is being developed with councils across the country.

**Nottingham City Council** has provided environmental education resources and programmes in schools consisting of energy efficiency surveys, waste reduction, action plans and assemblies focused around climate action.

<https://committee.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/Data/Schools%20Forum/20130926/Agenda/ResourceEfficiencyFinalSlides%20-%2058300.pdf>

**Reading Borough Council** has also established green teams, pressure groups, eco-school groups or the equivalent, where students encourage their peers and staff to change their behaviour.

<https://www.reading.gov.uk/media/1232/Climate-Change-Strategy/pdf/Climate-Change-Strategy.pdf>

## Health and social care

### 8. What measures are being taken to ensure that health and social care systems will be resilient with the extra pressures they will come under due to climate change?

#### Further questions to ask:

- Are there short-term public health measures (around, for example, air pollution) that the council can take?
- How will the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the resilience of local care systems be taken into account in climate change planning?
- How will demographic change impact on the sustainability of your existing health and social care activity, in the light of climate change?
- How will changes to local housing, transport and infrastructure arrangements impact on the health service?
- How will the council measure the impact of improvements in health and social care on climate change efforts?

Climate change is likely to have a significant impact on vulnerable people. Demographic shifts – with more older people in particular – may have an impact on the capacity of the sector to provide care in “normal” conditions. Extremes of weather will affect people’s health and will affect the resilience of services designed to provide care for people in their own homes. Climate, social and economic changes (for example, shifts in ownership and availability of private transport) may make it more difficult to maintain a model where the aim is to care for people in their own homes where possible. The business model of voluntary action organisations – providing respite and day care, or wraparound services which complement more formal social care arrangements – may be vulnerable to similar

economic, social and climate changes. The council will already have had to act on the significant impact on the health and care sector of the COVID-19 crisis; climate change presents additional, related challenges to resilience.

Mitigation actions may need to focus on providing support to people so that their conditions do not develop to require high-level care, or do not develop as quickly. Where active modes of travel, along with regular exercise, are promoted to younger people, the likelihood of future care needs may be lessened; the same applies for things such as smoking cessation and healthy eating/ obesity support services. But many health conditions and disabilities are not lifestyle related, and there are naturally limits to this kind of mitigation as people age. Furthermore, pressures on finances mean that early interventions, and other preventative activity, is more difficult to fund as councils focus on critical, acute need.

In terms of supporting people's health while promoting a more sustainable approach to food and lifestyle overall, local councils might develop a sustainable food policy to be delivered through schools, hospitals, nurseries, care homes and prisons. Public menus should be aligned with healthy and sustainable choices, and councils may wish to consider active promotion of plant-based diets and ensuring that meat is from non-intensive farming systems.

### **Durham County Council**

The council's Sustainable and Healthy Food Policy works across all the staff, clients, and the communities they serve to "support and promote higher quality, higher welfare meat, whilst seeking to encourage reductions in overall meat consumption"

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/23965/Healthy-and-Sustainable-Food-Policy/pdf/HealthyAndSustainableFoodPolicy.pdf>

For scrutiny, understanding the way that an awareness and understanding of climate change is built into both plans around integrated care systems (ICS) and the joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) will be important. Scrutiny can seek to understand how the significant changes currently planned in the health and social care sector can be planned with the awareness of climate change and its impacts.

Scrutiny has unique powers and rights around changes to health services (in particular, powers relating to consultation on substantial variations to local health services) and can use these to challenge on climate mitigation and adaptation by health partners when substantial variation is proposed. How might such variations be implemented to make the local health services more resilient in context of the climate emergency – what might this mean for changes to local community and acute services?

## Equitable communities

### 9. How does the council identify those who are most at risk from the impacts of climate change, and what is being done to assist the most vulnerable?

#### Further questions to ask:

- To what extent has the council subjected council plans on climate change to an equalities impact assessment or assessments?
- How might such assessments now need to be rethought or carried out again, in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Which groups or individuals are likely to be most heavily impacted? What mitigation and adaptation will the council carry out? What lessons about engaging with vulnerable people can be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How will climate impacts be incorporated within the council's general approach to equalities in the future?
- How will the council develop conversations to make informed decisions about climate change, whilst both addressing the needs of the most vulnerable individuals and groups at the same time as delivering climate change objectives?

Though climate change inevitably affects everyone, there is a widespread awareness that the impacts and effects of climate change are not distributed equally – combined with pre-existing socioeconomic challenges the consequences are likely to be far worse for those most disadvantaged and vulnerable. The concept of equity in climate change relates not just to impacts and vulnerabilities, but also uneven involvement in adaptation planning.

It is important to consider the issues of social justice that will be a certain result of climate change in local areas. The primary concern should involve equal and fair access to rights, resources and opportunities that reduce people's vulnerability – in part by increasing their capacity to adapt – to the consequences of climate change. There ought to be a focus on what can be done about the unequal consequences, guided by values that prioritise the experience of affected groups and those most at risk, as well as the inclusion of diverse voices and communities in the policy process.

Vulnerability to climate change is defined as the susceptibility of a given population, system, or place to harm from exposure to climate-related shocks and stresses<sup>7</sup>. Social factors that have been found to contribute to resilience include economic vitality and diversity; quality of housing and infrastructure; institutional and civic capacities; presence of strong social networks; and healthy lifestyle choices. Environmental factors include the presence of

<sup>7</sup> IPCC, 2012, [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/SREX\\_Full\\_Report-1.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/SREX_Full_Report-1.pdf)

natural flood buffers, availability of locally sourced food supplies, adequacy of local water supplies, and protection from toxic and hazardous pollution sources. These are all factors that local councils can help encourage and ensure access to. So, there must be a process in place to identify communities that are at highest risk to the consequences of climate change and facilitate partnerships to carry out actions to support the most vulnerable in developing resilience.

Council planning is likely to provide a local area vulnerability profile that considers climate change impacts by including factors such as exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity into account. In many cases this takes the form of climate risk vulnerability mapping and assessments. Where climate change strategy is in the planning stages, scrutiny can feed into the development of this vulnerability planning – taking advantage of the nuanced insights members are likely to have into the communities they serve.

**Hampshire County Council** initiated an assessment that aimed to gain an understanding of the relationship between social vulnerability and climate change related weather events, particularly heatwaves and flooding so they could improve the resilience of all core services and particularly in, but not limited to, Adult Services.

<https://www.climatejust.org.uk/sites/default/files/Social%20Vulnerability%20%28Hampshire%29.pdf>

Implementing strategies and interventions that will improve the capacity and resilience of vulnerable people and communities, and your local area overall is vital – especially where these groups may incorporate those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act.

In doing this, residents are likely to expect to be involved in the policy process throughout. Community engagement will facilitate a greater understanding and ownership of actions on climate change. As noted above, the unique credibility and legitimacy of elected members may mean that they are well placed to help the council to understand complex local need.

Engagement can take many forms; councils can empower and support local groups to develop community-scale climate change projects, and can partner with the community through coproduction in adaptation and resilience planning. By incorporating community expertise at the design stage, it will address the unique ways that different communities are vulnerable and will increase the capacity of planning processes to be more adaptive to local conditions and vulnerabilities.

How you decide to engage with your local community on climate action will depend on your aims, resources and commitment to outcomes. Councils need to be inclusive and avoid conflict with community interests. The council will need to take steps to proactively include diverse voices, especially the young and marginalised in your community, so that they can have a say in shaping future outcomes. However the council proceeds, the need to represent the local area as a whole must be consolidated by paying increased attention to the need for greater inclusion of affected and marginalised groups in the process.

## Working in partnership

### 10. How is the council supporting and working with all relevant private and civic actors in the area towards climate change mitigation and adaptation?

#### Further questions to ask:

- What lessons around partnership working has the council learned from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which might now be deployed to combat the climate emergency?
- What partners have the council identified who might be able to assist in tackling the climate action agenda? Where are the gaps in existing networks?
- What constraints are placed on the council by national policy, and how can you work constructively with national actors to address these constraints?
- How is the council working with neighbouring authorities (including combined authorities, where relevant) to implement joint decarbonisation and leverage additional funding?
- How can the council work with its partners to promote public awareness? Is this adequately resourced?

Not all councils have the power to directly deliver on all necessary actions, but all councils can exercise their ‘convening power’ and promote change through influence and encouragement. For the council to make significant progress in climate action there must be a clear strategy to work with a range of organisations. A purposeful effort with effective communication and excellent networking mechanisms is required from diverse stakeholders with a shared purpose. This can create opportunities and the potential to realise significant economic, social and environmental benefits as well as minimising future risks.

Your council should be working with other councils in the same area (if in a shire county area), neighbouring councils, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), developers, innovators, funders, service providers, local businesses, national agencies, and the community.

In order to work in effective partnership, and develop a strong sense of shared purpose, it will probably be necessary to establish some form of local-focused, purpose-driven governance body, and to organise initial workshops to mobilise and involve stakeholders. You can get a general sense of what might work best through review of your existing arrangements with reference to the LGA guidance on engagement, “New Conversations 2.0” (2019).



## Rutland County Council

Rutland council set up a county-wide Climate Change Partnership Group involving Councillors, residents, young people, community groups, schools, parish councils, allotment holders, farmers, landowners, businesses and climate science experts. Through consultations the aim has been to inform how land and open spaces can be used to meet their net-zero carbon footprint, and how to stimulate investment and funding into the county to put in place actions.

<https://www.rutland.gov.uk/my-council/council-news/council-sets-out-targets-to-help-fight-climate-change/>

One common theme of councils' climate emergency declarations thus far is the need for public engagement, but there is a lack of clarity on how this is to be achieved. Efforts to involve communities in climate adaptation decision-making processes include surveys, public consultations and meetings, citizen advisory panels and citizen assemblies. An increasing number of councils are establishing citizens' assemblies, alongside other deliberative methods, to gather ideas and develop policy on issues such as climate change, air quality, traffic congestion and town planning. As with all community engagement, it needs to be informed by what individual councils can achieve within their specific local contexts and constraints.

Your council might have plans to support and encourage residents and partners in changing behaviours that could mitigate climate change. A key part of this will lie in managing local expectations – as part of this participation making a clear commitment with local people that what is agreed will be acted on. This may be challenging, where local appetite for significant changes may be more vocal from one subset of the population, with others more resistant.

Other partners include LEPs. These bodies are responsible for the majority of transport spending in local areas, and two-thirds of their spending is on road projects. Hence, councils need to actively influence the development of LEP strategies to ensure they are geared towards carbon emission reduction. The role of the council in working with LEPs is vital to make progress in energy, housing and transport. The Leeds LEP commissioned a report from the Carbon Trust on how to support decarbonisation across the local economy<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Carbon Trust, 2019, <https://www.carbontrust.com/our-projects/leeds-city-region-setting-science-based-targets-sbts-for-a-combined-authority-region>

## Concluding remarks

The ten scrutinising questions hopefully provide a foundation for which climate change programmes in councils can be assessed. We hope that you find them useful to improve and support local government plans to combat climate change.

The LGA is fully committed to enabling councils and residents to reach their local carbon reduction targets to adapt, prevent the onset, and mitigate the effects, of climate change. For more information and resources, please visit <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/climate-change>

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Local Government Association. (2019). New Conversations 2.0. Available at: [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/New%20Conversations%20Guide%20refresh\\_11.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/New%20Conversations%20Guide%20refresh_11.pdf)

Local Government Association. (2020). Future Homes Standard Response. Available at: [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/LGA%20submission\\_MHCLG%20Future%20Homes%20Standard%2005022020%20final.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/LGA%20submission_MHCLG%20Future%20Homes%20Standard%2005022020%20final.pdf)

## Useful links

### Tools

<https://www.climatejust.org.uk/>

The Climate Just webtool maps the relationship between social exclusion and the impacts of climate change. It offers the opportunity to identify who is likely to be most vulnerable to climate change, so equitable actions can be developed to address these needs.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/air-pollution-a-tool-to-estimate-healthcare-costs>

This tool developed by Imperial Business School and Public Health England allows local authorities to quantify the potential costs to the NHS and social care due to the health impacts of air pollution and can be used to estimate the health cost savings of low carbon transport projects.

<https://www.sduhealth.org.uk/areas-of-focus/community-resilience/health-and-wellbeing-board-toolkit.aspx>

The Sustainable Development Unit supports the NHS, public health and social care to embed and promote sustainable development. The Health and Well-being Toolkit focuses on embedding sustainable development approaches into local public health action and engaging Health and Wellbeing Boards in sustainability, resilience and climate change.

### Guides & further information

<https://www.adeptnet.org.uk/system/files/documents/Good%20Practice%20Guide%20ADEPT%202019f.pdf>

Adept – 2019, ‘Good Practice Guidance for Local Government’

<https://www.ashden.org/downloads/files/CAC-Chapters-all-FINAL.pdf>

Ashden – 2019, ‘A Toolkit for City Regions and Local Authorities: climate action co-benefits’

[https://takeclimateaction.uk/sites/files/climate/documents/2020-02/A4\\_ClimateActionPlan\\_Jan\\_2020\\_update.pdf](https://takeclimateaction.uk/sites/files/climate/documents/2020-02/A4_ClimateActionPlan_Jan_2020_update.pdf)

Friends of the Earth – 2020, ‘Climate Action Plan for Councils’

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/727252/national-adaptation-programme-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727252/national-adaptation-programme-2018.pdf)

Defra – 2018, ‘National Adaptation Programme and the Third Strategy for Climate Adaptation Reporting: Making the country resilient to a changing climate’.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/218798/adapt-localcouncilguide.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/218798/adapt-localcouncilguide.pdf)

Defra – 2010, 'Adapting to Climate Change: A guide for local councils'

<https://www.green-alliance.org.uk/resources/Is%20localism%20delivering%20for%20climate%20change.pdf>

Green Alliance – 2011, 'Is localism delivering for climate change?'

[https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Involve\\_Climate-Change-and-Open-Local-Government.pdf](https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Involve_Climate-Change-and-Open-Local-Government.pdf)

Involve – 2014, 'Can you hear me? Citizens, Climate Change & Open Local Government'

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/84146112.pdf>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation – 2015, 'Community Resilience to Climate Change: an evidence review'

<https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/environment-and-waste/climate-local>

Local Government Association's Climate Local initiative - 2014, which it launched in conjunction with the Environment Agency Climate Ready service.

[https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/2852781/TCPA%20RTPI%20planning%20for%20climate%20change%20guide\\_final.pdf](https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/2852781/TCPA%20RTPI%20planning%20for%20climate%20change%20guide_final.pdf)

TCPI & RTPI - 2018, 'Planning for Climate Change A Guide for Local Authorities'

<http://www.uk100.org>

UK100 is a network of local government leaders focused on climate and clean energy policy, to support decision-makers in UK towns, cities and rural areas in their transition to 100% clean energy by 2050.



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