



Climate Conversation

Delivering a Net Zero, Climate Resilient UK

June 2022

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- Birmingham City Council
- Bristol City Council
- Derry and Strabane District Council
- Dundee City Council
- Durham County Council
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- Kent County Council and District Councils
- Neath Port Talbot Council
- Somerset County Council
- Swansea City Council

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This is an independent briefing report compiled for the CCC by **Louise Marix Evans**. Louise is a sustainability consultant with over 20 years' experience of supporting city-regions, local authorities, businesses, community energy organisations and universities in tackling climate change. She supported the CCC UK Climate Conversation visits in 2022. She is the author of the CCC's report on Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget published in December 2020.

Executive Summary

The CCC visited regions across the UK to explore the practical action being taken on the ground and the barriers to delivering a Net Zero, climate resilient nation.

The visits reached over 480 people including a wide range of stakeholders from councils, businesses, universities, schools, faith and community groups.

Local authorities have a vital role to play in using their power, assets and influence to deliver a Net Zero, climate resilient nation.

Local authorities and their partners had set high ambitions on climate change.

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) held a series of climate conversations from January to May 2022 with senior council leaders, mayors and officers to discuss the action they were taking locally to deliver Net Zero and improved climate resilience.

During the visits, the CCC also engaged with climate partnerships, businesses, community groups and residents through meetings and workshops to understand the tangible 'on the ground' activities, opportunities and barriers they faced. The findings from the UK Climate Conversation will help to inform the CCC's advice to Government and its future work. The ten locations are listed below along with the themes of each visit:

- **Birmingham City Council** – business, faith and community engagement
- **Bristol City Council** – heating, partnerships and community engagement
- **Derry and Strabane District Council** – food, farming, public engagement
- **Dundee City Council** – partnerships, industry, skills, EVs and the arts
- **Durham County Council** – council decarbonisation and business support
- **Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)** – buildings and energy
- **Kent County Council*** – adaptation, nature and public engagement
- **Neath Port Talbot Council** – industrial decarbonisation and skills
- **Somerset County Council** – rural, adaptation and public engagement
- **Swansea City Council** – skills and housing

The UK Climate Conversation reinforced the CCC's opinion that local authorities have a vital role to play in leveraging all of their powers, assets and influence to deliver a Net Zero, climate resilient nation. The key common themes of the conversations were:

Ambition: The local authorities the CCC visited are ambitious in aiming to deliver Net Zero and improved resilience to climate change. This ambition is grounded in a commitment to social justice and a fair transition in which new job opportunities, affordable heat and housing, clean air and green space benefit local people. Action on the ground, however, currently falls well short of achieving the UK's statutory targets.

"Greener must be fairer" – Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester

* The visit to Kent County Council included the District Councils and some neighbouring county councils.

Strong partnerships were in place with key local stakeholders, both strategic and project-based.

Place-based investment aims to deliver systems-change and multiple benefits.

Harder to measure, but vitally important is community action, which maintains support for climate action and creates success stories.

Skilled teams are delivering tangible projects, but capacity is limited, and action varies between areas.

Trusted experts are key to delivery on the ground – making policy and funding accessible and relevant.

Skills for Net Zero and the transition are vital, but the landscape is complex.

Using language that everyone understands is vital to public engagement on climate change.

Competitive short term, short timescale, narrow funding is the number one barrier to delivering systems change and growing supply chains locally.

Partnership: The CCC met with climate change partnerships comprising anchor organisations from the public sector, local employers, Distribution Network Operators, housing providers, universities and community organisations, aiming to foster innovation, align actions on climate targets and attract funding.

Place: Every place is doing something different, and this is not just because the context varies by location. Action is being taken without a national framework for Net Zero delivery. Each authority has a different emphasis and delivery methods. This gives a fragmented national picture that is hard to aggregate into national progress. The CCC also heard that locally designed place-based interventions are needed to create a systems-wide transformation to reduce emissions in all sectors – energy, buildings, transport, industry, waste and green space - which also enables behaviours to change.

“Place is where the action happens – but how do we think about what’s happening at the national level and what’s happening in cities to create something that’s usable across all cities?” – Joanna House, University of Bristol and Co-Chair of the Bristol Advisory Committee on Climate Change

Communities: The CCC recognises the importance of the many community-based initiatives which generate the success stories, inspiration and positivity. These can start and maintain support for climate action and inform policy-making.

Capacity: Local authorities have skilled, experienced teams working on different initiatives in the building, transport, industry, business and community sectors which show the potential of local authorities in delivering Net Zero and climate resilience.

Trust: The successful schemes the CCC visited have invested in trusted experts to support the uptake of policy and funding incentives. Business, farm and retrofit advisors were key to translating opportunities into meaningful and deliverable actions.

Skills: The CCC met local organisations developing skills to support the growing pipeline of projects and reskilling workers in high carbon industries. School pupils told the CCC they wanted to learn more about climate change beyond science lessons, for example, in the citizenship curriculum and wanted to take more action.

Language: The conversations highlighted the necessity of using language and words that are meaningful to people.

“This is the first time I’ve heard the word ‘retrofit’ and when I first heard it, I thought it was something to do with furniture! You’re missing out on a whole community of people who would engage, if they understood the language.” – Manchester resident, Carbon Co-op event.

The main common barriers to delivery that the Climate Conversation heard were:

Funding: Competitive short-term funding means that local authorities cannot develop predictable programmes of low carbon investment that also support the growth of jobs and skills and local supply chains. Stop-start funding takes up excessive resource and prevents authorities from blending funding streams in coherent projects that deliver wider benefits for nature, health and air quality.

“City-scale decarbonisation needs predictable finance. It can no longer be a beauty parade, competing for little bits of money, but needs to be a 20-30-year plan developed with Government” – Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol

Local authorities want to know where they fit in with Government – what are the roles and responsibilities for delivering Net Zero?

In England, the National Planning Policy Framework is named as a key barrier; it is too difficult to get Net Zero, sustainable homes built.

Missing powers and contradictory policies act to impede the full use of local powers to deliver.

Local authorities report that they have limited capacity and resources to deliver to the extent that their ambition requires.

Local data is lacking – local authorities need to direct their interventions and see how they scale back up and contribute to progress at the national level.

Better partnership between national, regional and local government is called for to translate strategy to delivery in the coming years.

Local authorities called for a framework to organise action towards Net Zero and for a greater voice on the Net Zero Forum.

Governance: Local authorities rely on the grain of national policy, regulation and incentives, and need certainty. The lack of clear roles and responsibilities between different levels of Government causes duplication and requires additional local effort. Local authorities want to know how they fit into the national transition. The larger authorities were keen to have a seat at the Net Zero Forum which is newly formed to bring Government and local authority representatives together.

The National Planning Policy Framework: The English National Planning Policy Framework undermines local planning authorities' efforts to deliver Net Zero and climate resilience. They face a multiplicity of barriers – viability, housing land supply and affordable housing before they can require Net Zero new homes. Local authorities are frustrated that homes that will need retrofitting are still being built.

"The legislative framework really needs to get it right, otherwise we are just adding to the problem" – Roger Gough, Leader, Kent County Council

Gaps: Local authority powers are obstructed by gaps and unhelpful policies. For example, energy planning can be ad hoc and sits outside local planning authorities; grid capacity and strategic roads investment can limit Net Zero progress locally; powers are limited to enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards beyond the rental sector; rent regulations constrain investment in energy efficiency because costs cannot be recouped; VAT is charged on refurbishment and retrofit and higher business rates are applied to companies that install solar panels.

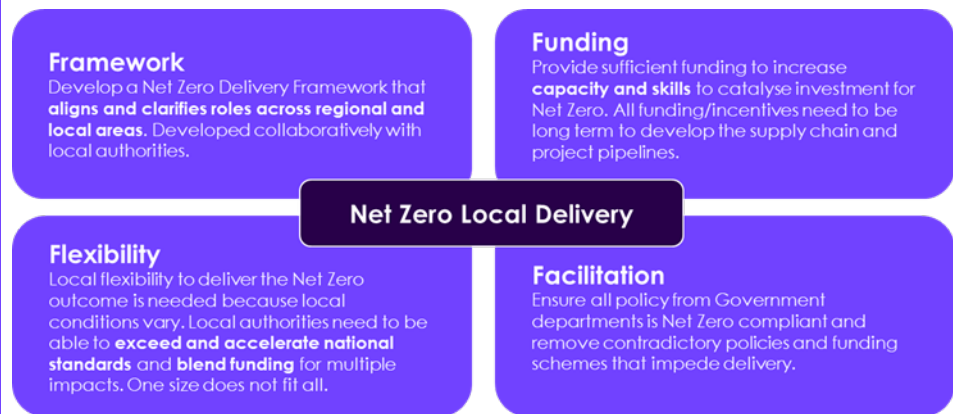
Capacity: There is currently insufficient capacity to deliver the full requirements of Net Zero and adaptation at a local level, and while climate change remains a non-statutory role for local authorities in England, it may continue to compete for resources with other more urgent issues.

Data: The CCC heard that local authorities wanted more timely and locally-relevant data to direct their efforts, and to understand their contribution to national targets. This is presumably also needed by Government to understand the contribution made by local interventions and to inform national policy design.

In **conclusion**, national, regional and local coordination is urgently called for by the local authorities the CCC visited and their partners, to ensure that local action aggregates coherently to deliver Net Zero and improved climate resilience. The Government has recognised the role of local authorities in delivering Net Zero in its Net Zero Strategy and needs to work in tandem with them.

The Climate Conversation heard that a **framework** for this relationship is required, to ensure local capacity is increased, that funding and policy are longer-term and more certain, and that policy contradictions are removed. This was recommended in the CCC's 2020 report on Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget, below.

Figure 1 Framework for Net Zero Local Delivery



Source: Louise Marix Evans (2020) *Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget*.

CCC members and Secretariat thank everyone who contributed to the visits. It was a pleasure to hear from a wide range of people.

The Climate Conversation provided a valuable insight into the activities, potential and challenges facing local authorities and their partners, businesses and communities in delivering Net Zero and climate resilience. It was a pleasure to meet over 480 people who were kind enough to engage in the discussions, and the CCC is grateful to the ten local authorities that hosted the visits.

1. Introduction

The CCC visited regions across the UK to explore the practical action being taken on the ground and the barriers to delivering a Net Zero, climate resilient nation.

Many of the urgent changes required to deliver the deep emissions reductions necessary to achieve Net Zero have a strong local dimension – from decarbonising buildings, transport, and businesses to tree planting, farming, public engagement and waste reduction. The Climate Change Committee's December 2020 report *Local Authorities and The Sixth Carbon Budget* explored the powers available, and barriers local authorities face in delivering the Sixth Carbon Budget.

In light of recent Government strategies*, **the Climate Change Committee (CCC) conducted a series of visits to regions across the UK**, exploring both on-the-ground action and the obstacles to delivering a Net Zero, climate resilient nation. The objectives were to:

- Visit major regions of the UK to better understand practical work taking place on the ground and the barriers to local delivery.
- Reflect key learnings in the 2022 Progress Report to Parliament.
- Build and strengthen the CCC's relationship with local authorities as key delivery partners on the path to Net Zero.
- Inform advice given to Government on the importance of public engagement.
- Raise awareness of the delivery challenges and opportunities of mitigation and adaptation action.

Committee and Secretariat members visited ten locations across city, rural and urban settings, with varying types of local authorities and political control. Five were in England, with one in each of the Devolved Administrations as follows:

- **Birmingham City Council** – business, faith and community engagement
- **Bristol City Council** – heating, partnerships and community engagement
- **Derry and Strabane District Council** – food, farming, public engagement
- **Dundee City Council** – partnerships, industry, skills, EVs[†] and the arts
- **Durham County Council** – council decarbonisation and business support
- **Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)** – buildings and energy
- **Kent County Council[‡]** – adaptation, nature and public engagement

* Recent strategies include: Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener, Heat and Buildings Strategy, October 2021; Decarbonising Transport: a better, greener Britain, July 2021.

[†] EVs – electric vehicles.

[‡] The visit to Kent County Council included meeting leaders and members from the District Councils: Maidstone Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Thanet District Council, Tonbridge and Malling District Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Leaders from some of the SE7 Councils, East Sussex, West Sussex and Hampshire County Councils.

- **Neath Port Talbot Council** – industrial decarbonisation and skills
- **Somerset County Council** – rural, adaptation and public engagement
- **Swansea City Council** – skills and housing

The CCC met council leaders, mayors and officers to hear what they are doing to deliver Net Zero and climate resilience, and to understand key obstacles.

Every Climate Conversation included a meeting with senior council leaders, mayors and officers to discuss the action they were taking to deliver Net Zero and climate adaptation. The conversations were then complimented by visits, meetings or workshops with local climate partnerships, businesses, community groups and residents.

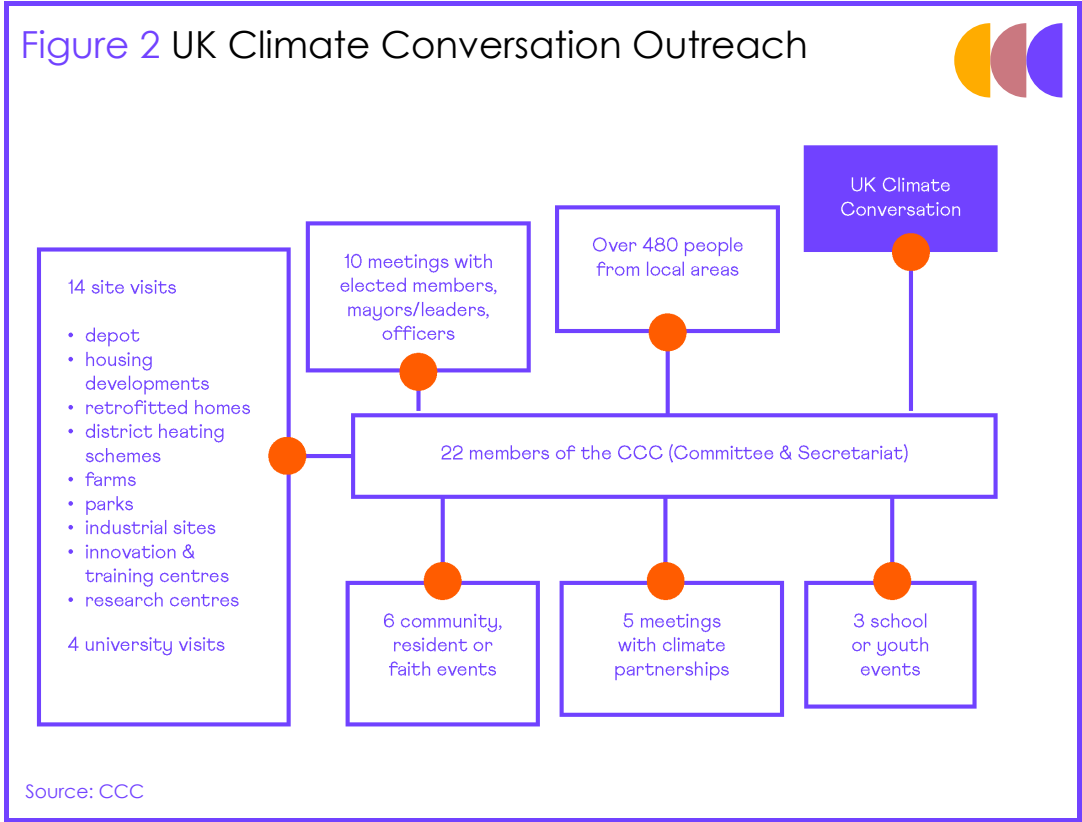
Image 1 Durham County Council visit



Notes: CCC Chair Lord Deben with Adrian Cattle-Jones, Project Manager at Durham County Council, taken at Craghead with hand-finished brick effect external wall insulation, installed on over 1,000 homes since 2013. (Image courtesy of Durham County Council)

The visits included over 480 people from local areas and a wide range of stakeholders from councils, businesses, universities, schools, faith and community groups.

The UK Climate Conversation included:



The findings will help to inform recommendations to Government in the CCC's 2022 Progress Report and have been fed back to the CCC Secretariat to inform future work.

The CCC has limited resources to carry out in-depth visits to local areas and insights gained from the Climate Conversation have been invaluable in understanding the options and powers available to local authorities and exploring how policy is practically applied. Stronger links between the CCC and local authorities have been established, and the findings from the visits have been fed back to the CCC Secretariat team to inform future work.

This briefing outlines what the CCC saw and heard during the visits, summarising the common themes and challenges faced in delivering a Net Zero, climate resilient nation. As each visit offered only a snapshot of action underway in each region, this briefing is not a comprehensive assessment of individual local authorities' action on climate change.

The CCC's June 2022 Progress Report to Parliament has been informed by the Climate Conversation which in turn provides related recommendations to Government.

2. Key findings

The CCC visited sites ranging in size and scale covering industrial, business, building, heating and transport sectors, as well as climate adaptation and nature-based schemes.

The Climate Conversation included site visits and workshops covering a range of sectors and projects from large-scale investments in developments and flood prevention to small scale community-based initiatives and research projects.

Table 1
Projects and schemes visited

Sector	Location/Scheme	Authority
Industry	Tata Steel – decarbonising steel in a global and local context	Neath Port Talbot
Industry	Energy parks at Tyseley and Baglan Bay. Advanced manufacturing incubators and training college - Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc	Birmingham, Neath Port Talbot and Dundee
Business	Mandale Business Park, Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP) and electric vehicle try- before-you buy for businesses	Durham
Public sector	Morrison Busty low carbon depot and offices site redevelopment including 3 MW solar farm & 2 MW Tesla battery ready for electric fleet	Durham
Transport	Electric vehicle (EV) charging hub for 18 EVs at Princess Street and Ember intercity e-bus	Dundee
Buildings	Craghead regeneration through retrofit for miners' terraces with external wall insulation	Durham
Buildings	Energy efficient council housing construction site - Swansea Standard homes	Swansea
Buildings	University of Salford, Energy House I and II test and research facilities	Greater Manchester
Buildings	Social housing residents' and homeowners' views on retrofit; architects, training and apprenticeships discussions with Carbon Co-op	Greater Manchester
Energy	Energy centres and district heating (water and ground source)	Bristol and Dundee
Adaptation	Park with SUDS*, Trees (Cooler Towns) and nature-based solutions for flood risk management in the Darent Valley	Kent
Food	Acorn Farm 'I can grow' community food network	Derry and Strabane
Public engagement	Workshop with Somerset County Council, District Council and stakeholders on key elements of public engagement	Somerset

* SUDS – Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems.

Common findings: opportunities and strengths

Although each visit was different, a set of common themes emerged. These were:

- **Ambition** – stated ambition to deliver Net Zero and climate resilience
- **Partnership** – strong partnerships of anchor organisations and employers
- **Place** – unique places each taking a different approach
- **Communities** – small-scale in terms of impact, important for engagement and diversity to ensure the transition is a fair one
- **Capacity** – varying capacity and skills, but insufficient to deliver at the necessary pace and scale
- **Trust** – the role of intermediaries in delivering schemes on the ground
- **Skills** – developing the low carbon skills needed in a complex landscape of funding and supply/demand to kick-start training and re-training

Each of these is described in the sections below. The challenges and barriers faced by local authorities are outlined in Section 3.

Ambition

Despite the strong stated ambitions of local leaders there is a shortfall on delivery towards targets.

The CCC heard a strong **commitment to tackling climate change** from mayors, leaders and elected members. Many of the places the CCC visited have declared climate emergencies and set targets and plans for Net Zero between 2030 and 2050, some in line with the national target for the UK or the Devolved Administrations. Many authorities, including GMCA, Derry and Strabane and Durham have in place policies and training to embed carbon reductions into overall operations, for example, through Carbon Literacy Training or as a specific responsibility within every job description.

This was described in Derry and Strabane as: [“The Monday morning test – everyone knowing what climate change mitigation and climate adaptation means in their own job”](#) – Cathy Burns, Climate Programme Manager

Improving housing, jobs and transport and attracting investment are strong drivers for local authorities and can align with delivering Net Zero.

Many leaders expressed climate ambition in terms of social justice, and making their city, region or area a better place for residents and businesses. This was echoed by officers who want to attract investment, deliver homes that are affordable to heat, improve tenement blocks, tackle health inequalities, help people into better jobs and make travel easier.

[“Greener must be fairer”](#) – Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester

There is strategic intention and practical action to deliver Net Zero and adaptation, but it is spread too thin.

There is strategic intention and practical activity towards delivering Net Zero, however, the CCC observed that this is spread thinly across localities and emissions sectors. The challenge of delivering local ambitions is significant, and each place wanted to do more in their local area and have a bigger impact on UK-wide emissions reduction.

Partnerships

The CCC met several **strategic climate partnerships** including Dundee Climate Leadership Group, Bristol One City and Greater Manchester's GM Green City Region Challenge Group Chairs.

Climate change partnerships comprise anchor organisations from local public sector, employers, DNOs, housing, universities and community organisations, aiming to align action on climate targets.

These climate partnerships comprise key local 'anchor' organisations – public sector, major employers, Distribution Network Operators (DNOs), water utilities, housing providers, universities and community organisations. They have collectively committed to area-wide climate targets and climate change plans. Together they represent a large number of employees, spending and influence.

The CCC heard from partnership members such as the DNOs, BBC, universities and major employers about the opportunities and barriers whole areas face in delivering Net Zero and improved climate resilience. They aim to aggregate opportunities and align investment, especially from regulated businesses (DNOs and water companies), with public and private investment in housing, green infrastructure and nature recovery for a systemic approach.

In theory, partnerships enable a systemic approach and develop consortia for funding bids, understanding of the challenges and support innovation. They also take up time and create additional layers of governance.

The impact of such partnerships on delivery was hard to assess during such short visits. Although partnerships create additional governance structures and costs, they provide an opportunity to link national, regional and local agencies. They enable communications between key stakeholders and ensure that businesses and communities are engaged in policy and programme design. They provide ready-made consortia for funding bids, add skills capacity, increase understanding of the challenges and support innovation.

The CCC saw project delivery partnerships in action, in adaptation and innovation projects.

The CCC also visited **project delivery partnerships**, including:

- **Adapting the Levels - Somerset County Council**, Somerset Wildlife Trust and Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) Southwest, empowering farmers and communities at risk of flooding and drought to adapt through nature-based solutions.
- **Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc (MSIP) - Dundee City Council**, Enterprise Scotland and Michelin, redeveloping the former Michelin tyre manufacturing site into a low carbon advanced manufacturing park with innovation units and a training centre.

Image 2 Dundee City Council visit



Notes: Greig Coull, Chief Executive Officer of MSIP (left) and CCC Chief Executive, Chris Stark (centre) hear from Dr Faisal Ghani of SolarisKit, based at MSIP, Dundee.

Internal partnerships are vital to embed climate action into wider council services and schemes. the Net Zero Carbon Board in Durham County Council enables this.

External partnerships were not common to all visits. The projects the CCC visited in Durham were council-led with delivery managed in two-year climate action cycles. The team at Durham explained that in a large council, **internal partnerships are vital**, and they have established a Net Zero Carbon Board to develop cross-departmental projects and ensure that new developments are sustainable.

Place

Every place is doing something different, and this is not just because the context varies by location. There is generally no consistency between places, with each authority having a different emphasis and delivery methods.

Every place is doing something different, and this is not just because the context varies by location. There is generally no consistency between places, with each authority having a different emphasis and delivery methods – apart from common action to deliver public funding schemes such as the Public Sector and Social Housing decarbonisation funds. This gave the CCC the impression that authorities are constantly “reinventing the wheel”.

Are councils constantly 'reinventing the wheel'? The absence of a national-local framework for action could be wasting local effort.

Each place needs to tailor action to the local context, but an absence of an overarching framework or coordination between different layers of Government gives rise to an array of actions taking place across the UK, that are difficult for national actors to understand in terms of impact, and which appear to waste effort.

Councils share learning and resources, but knowledge alone does not guarantee replication.

However, the CCC heard that there are active formal and informal networks across local authorities that share lessons and resources. These are enabled by the combined authority, Local Net Zero Hubs and associations such as APSE and a range of websites including the recently launched Net Zero Go. However, as the phenomenon of famous but rarely (or never) repeated case studies show, knowledge alone does not result in action. The reason for this is that each authority must interpret good practice for itself, build its own capacity and develop processes and buy-in within its local and political context.

“We can't be in competition and have to learn from each other, and we need the funding regime to support that” – Helen Grayshan, Senior Projects Officer, Durham County Council

Place-based, system wide actions are needed to develop the demand and related supply chains for Net Zero.

The CCC also heard that system-wide transformation is key to delivering Net Zero and adaptation at scale, and isolated single-measure interventions will not be efficient or sufficient to create the economies of scale, accelerate supply chain development and expand the skills investment needed. To achieve this, local areas take a place-based approach that intersects silos and blends funding and finance.

“Place is where the action happens – but how do we think about what’s happening at the national level and what’s happening in cities to create something that’s usable across all cities?” – Joanna House, University of Bristol and Co-Chair of the Bristol Advisory Committee on Climate Change

Image 3 Bristol City Council visit



Notes: The CCC team visiting the Energy Centre at the 3MW Water Source Heat Pump, Bristol.

The CCC visited **Bristol's 3MW water source heat pump** for district heating, under construction at Castle Park. They heard that Bristol City Council's prior experience of energy projects and local energy planning had developed its confidence to go for a bold integrated approach in creating **Bristol City Leap**.¹ This is a £1bn joint venture for a carbon neutral city energy system – including heat networks, heat pumps, energy efficiency retrofit and energy for the transport system. Private sector partners will contribute capital funding, including £424m over the first five years of the 20-year partnership. It has taken four years, significant investment of £7.5m and two attempts at procurement to secure the joint venture partner.

There is not sufficient time for each place to invest years and millions of pounds in developing investment opportunities; the Cities Climate Investment Commission aims to develop commercial and investment cases for cities to use.

Given the time and cost required for a city to develop investment models, Bristol City Council, with Core Cities and London Councils, have joined the Connected Places Catapult **Cities Climate Investment Commission** (CCIC) to work collectively on the financial and commercial cases to aggregate projects in a place-based approach to attract investment and spread risk to deliver at pace and scale.

“City-scale decarbonisation needs predictable finance. It can no longer be a beauty parade, competing for little bits of money, but needs to be a 20-30-year plan developed with Government” – Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol

The CCC heard from the Mayor of **Greater Manchester**, Andy Burnham, about using devolved powers to develop an integrated London-style public transport system supported by the Bee Network for walking and cycling. GMCA focuses on issues that interact within the city-region system, spatial planning and digital infrastructure, and has subsequently returned control of the bus service through franchising, invested in the tram network, and is due to introduce a Clean Air Zone*. Consequently, GMCA welcomed the £1.07bn indicative five year “City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement” but pointed to the need to ensure National Highways collaborates with the authority so changes to the motorway network around Greater Manchester do not make individual car transport more attractive and undermine efforts towards Net Zero.

Another place-based scheme the CCC visited was a housing energy efficiency project in **Craghead near Durham**. The former miners' terraces were run down but over the last 13 years the council has been using a combination of funds, including ERDF†, to install external wall insulation on over 1,000 homes on a street-by-street basis. This now includes installing air sources heat pumps. The entire area has been regenerated and homes have increased in value. The residents the CCC met were very happy with their new-look warmer homes that are cheaper to heat. The scale of the challenge yet to come is stark, however, because a further 52,000 homes need tackling to meet Durham County Council's climate targets.

Image 4 Durham County Council visit



Notes: Craghead, Durham County – brick-finished external wall insulation at street-scale. (Image courtesy of Durham County Council)

Birmingham City Council told the CCC about the 3 Cities Retrofit project in which the council is joining with Coventry and Wolverhampton to bring together partners, including Government and the private sector, in a sizeable initiative to retrofit the combined social housing stock and catalyse a market for retrofit across the West Midlands.

* Greater Manchester is being obliged to introduce a Clean Air Zone and the authority is in talks with the Government about how to do this: with debate about charging vehicle users or providing incentives.

† European Regional Development Fund.

Communities

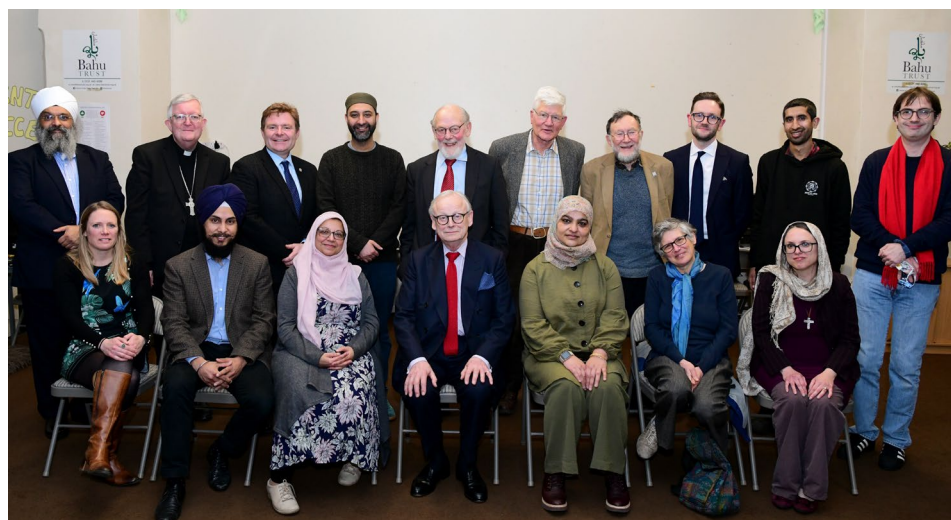
"Culture and arts offer a view from a place; science is a view from nowhere" – Gillian Easson, Executive Director, Creative Dundee

The CCC met a range of community groups and organisations, including both geographic communities, and communities of interest such as disabled people, faith groups and climate campaigners.

A range of community organisations are at work delivering a wide variety of climate, food, cycling, repair, arts and other schemes that provide inspiring examples.

The CCC heard from councils about their support for community engagement and action from diverse areas. Separately, we heard from community organisations that are pushing their local authorities and housing associations to act more decisively on climate change and hold them to account. Many are frustrated that progress is slow and that changes they want to make, or must make, are out of reach.

Image 5 Birmingham City Council visit



Notes: CCC members with faith and community group leaders in Birmingham (Image by Jas Sansi)

"Not everything that matters can be measured" – Professor Iain Gillespie, Principal, University of Dundee and Chair of Dundee Climate Leadership Group

Community action is not a replacement for large scale infrastructure, public transport and housing retrofit schemes, but should be encouraged and supported.

From the snapshot the CCC saw in just a few visits, it is evident that an enormous amount of community-based activity is underway, some publicised and supported by local authorities, but much more is taking place independently. While some of this activity is climate-focused, more community groups are delivering carbon savings as an additional benefit of projects about food, money-saving, cycling, community cohesion and mental health. These groups need to be supported and encouraged because they generate the success stories, inspiration and positivity that can instigate and maintain support for climate action. The CCC heard that their experiences should feed into climate policy and reciprocally, climate policy should facilitate community-based practical projects.

Community projects are not an alternative to large-scale investment in infrastructure, housing retrofit and public transport, but should be viewed as complementary.

"We have a lower carbon footprint – it's because of poverty – not choice... How many kids here grow up wanting a job as a climatologist or in green aviation?" – Kirsty Hammond, Heart of BS13

Six of Bristol's most disadvantaged communities were supported to develop Climate Action Plans that improve local quality of life, and contribute to Bristol's 2030 carbon neutral ambition.

Community Climate Action Plans layer up into the Bristol One City Programme.

The CCC heard from **Heart of BS13** and the **Bristol Disability Equality Forum**, two of six organisations from Bristol's most disadvantaged communities. These groups had co-produced Climate Action Plans to identify their key priorities in helping deliver Bristol's 2030 carbon neutral ambition whilst improving the quality of life for residents. The plans identify projects and schemes that can be developed locally but highlight where the council, educators and Government need to act.

"We lack money and power to make changes to big infrastructure" – Emma Geen, Bristol Disability Equality Forum

These community action plans 'layer up' into the Bristol One City programme ensuring diverse voices are represented in the city's approach to climate action.

With **Creative Dundee's 'Create'** programme, the **Onion Collective** in Somerset and **Acorn Farm's 'I Can Grow'** project in Derry, the CCC discussed the importance of "meeting people where they are" in terms of their lives. This often meant not always directly speaking about climate change, but developing local schemes like repair projects, local food initiatives and cycling programmes that not only improve lives, but contribute, in a small way, to emissions reduction.

In a workshop with **Carbon Co-op** in Greater Manchester, the CCC heard from housing association residents and homeowners.

"I'd like to live in dignity and live in a warm house" – Housing Association resident

Making homes more energy efficient, warmer and affordable to heat is complex for renters and homeowners alike. Community-based support tackles this challenge.

People had been supported through community-based programmes to learn about energy generation and energy efficiency. **Oldham Energy Futures** and **People Powered Retrofit** are two schemes helping residents to act on improving their houses. This session really brought to life the implications of the energy cost rise for people living in poor quality homes. For homeowners, the complexity of insulating and installing new low carbon heating and ventilation was frequently referenced:

"This is the hardest thing to do..." – Kate, Carbon Co-op member

"In our street we have different homeowners with different interests and the same kind of house. Industry needs to reduce the hassle and make retrofit more adoptable for everybody" – Rob, Carbon Co-op member

The impact of community-based action is hard to measure and appears insignificant in terms of national emissions. But community schemes are important to support delivery and often generate innovations that can inform policymaking.

While the impact of community-based action is hard to measure in terms of national emissions, these initiatives are clearly important for building trust, creating communication channels and giving people agency locally. As policy and incentives for home energy efficiency and decarbonised heating and transport evolve, local authorities have the links in place with community groups to involve people in policy-design so that it is relevant, effective and accessible.

Capacity

Despite meeting skilled individuals and teams during the visits, it was clear that local authorities need greater resource and capacity to deliver everything that is needed to achieve Net Zero and climate resilience.

The CCC met elected members with portfolio responsibility for climate change, mayors and leaders, and spoke with a wide range of individuals from councils who have a role in delivering Net Zero and climate adaptation. It was apparent that across the local authorities there are highly skilled teams able to deliver projects that contribute towards achieving Net Zero and climate adaptation. However, resourcing and capacity issues prevent local authorities from delivering to their full potential at the local level.

Local authorities approach capacity in varying ways; while some local authorities have well-staffed and highly experienced teams, others have a single officer working on the climate agenda. Equally, some have embedded climate change across the council, breaking down the silos and integrating climate action across council departments, while others still rely on climate change officers to influence decisions across the organisation.

Places that have maintained climate action over the last decade have proven capacity to deliver projects. For example, Dundee, Durham and Bristol demonstrated that they have the technical expertise to develop complex energy projects and make significant investments. The CCC heard that GMCA has a small central environment team, supporting the ten local authorities in the city region. They share expertise across the councils and draw in specialist support from research and innovation projects. This creates umbrella projects that local authorities can benefit from and contribute to. Likewise, Kent District Councils' climate change officers have set up a Climate Change Network for mutual support and information sharing across councils in the county.

Image 6 Derry and Strabane District Council



Notes: Nicola Hughes, Executive Director of Sustainable NI which supports and coordinates sustainability activities, adding capacity and sharing good practice across Northern Ireland's local authorities and public sector bodies; with Chris Stark (left), CCC Chair Lord Deben (centre) and CCC Member Professor Keith Bell (right) at the visit to Derry and Strabane Council (Image courtesy of Derry & Strabane Council)

Trust

The importance of having trusted, expert staff to hand-hold people through funding, retrofit and business support schemes is apparent.

The importance of having trusted, expert staff to hand-hold people through funding, retrofit and business support schemes was apparent in the visits.

The CCC met various trusted experts who are working with local people and businesses to deliver landscape or community scale projects. This is especially important for nature recovery and flood risk management, where contiguous schemes across neighbouring landowners are needed. Intermediaries can also improve future policymaking by providing feedback and sharing lessons across their sector networks. Revenue funding for experts needs to be provided by funding schemes to ensure that capital grants are spent effectively.

Mapping areas suitable for nature-based solutions to flood risk and visiting farmers to walk the land to discuss options helped increase uptake of funding.

"Our experts' support provided a 'critical conduit' to help take the farmers through the process [of nature-based solutions funding] as otherwise they won't jump and there's a lot of information to process." – Nick Johannsen, Director of Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

The CCC visited an EU Interreg and Heritage Funded project, led by **Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**, delivering nature-based solutions for flood and drought management in the chalk Darent Valley. In previous years farmers had not applied for funding because the process of planning and Environment Agency consents was too complicated. To increase uptake, experts mapped the area to identify what measures would work, then showed the maps to the farmers, walking the land with them to discuss the options. They helped the farmers with scheme design and supported them in understanding the payment implications. In total, 14 farmers were given help to install nature-based solutions across 2,500 hectares, improving wildlife habitats, slowing river flow, reducing flood risk downstream and saving on hard-engineering costs.

Friendly trusted business support teams helped devise low carbon heating and energy saving solutions for small businesses in Durham.

In **Durham** the CCC team met three businesses which have been supported by the Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP) through advice on low-carbon heating appropriate for their business needs. Each has been helped by a business adviser who made it easy for them to act on the information and install new ceilings, heating systems and lighting.

"I don't have to store diesel or watch the bills" – Jimmy Rimmer, ACE Motorcycle Training

Durham County Council's 'try-before-you-buy' electric vehicle service was also popular and effective in giving local businesses a chance to use an electric van to see if it was appropriate before making the investment.

A trusted expert to act as go-between with contractors on housing retrofit is vital to taking the pain out of home energy efficiency measures being installed. On large schemes, local energy champions were the first line of communication.

In **Greater Manchester** the CCC heard from homeowners about the importance of having expert support from People Powered Retrofit/Carbon Co-op to plan the right approaches to improving home energy efficiency. The necessity of a trusted local person was also critical to the success of **Durham's** Craghead retrofit schemes where "energy friends" were recruited from each street to liaise with their neighbours, and well-known site managers were available to address any concerns. Everyone knew each other by name, and these well-established and trusted relationships meant that the schemes could be installed smoothly.

Skills

Investment in skills ahead of demand, and equipping new and existing workers with the skills they need to stay in work or become more productive, is key to the Net Zero transition.

Many of the authorities visited are aware of a need to drive up investment in skills ahead of demand, and to equip new and existing workers with the skills they will need to stay in work or become more productive throughout the Net Zero transition.

This was particularly obvious in **Neath Port Talbot** which is dominated by Tata Steel, the largest source of Welsh emissions, and which employs 8,000 people in the town. As the steel industry decarbonises, new skills are needed and it is vital that the town diversifies at the same time, to ensure jobs are resilient for the future. The CCC heard about the Swansea Bay City Deal for growth and investment, which includes a focus on developing a regional solution to training.

Local authorities are key partners in identifying the risks and opportunities for existing and new jobs locally. But the skills funding and qualifications landscape is complex and can lag behind technologies and demand.

At a skills workshop facilitated by **Swansea University**, the CCC heard that there is a patchy training landscape across further and higher education. Both technology and policy change fast, and professional trainers struggle to keep up. The CCC heard about workplace modular training, which enables workers to understand the 'why' of metals, climate science and develops decision-making skills, alongside providing opportunities to learn new tasks.

"Uncertainty is the issue – we are imagining a future with many different directions. How can we be flexible and agile and transdisciplinary? We need to build in flexibility and resilience in the skills agenda" – Swansea skills workshop participant

Local authorities are linking low carbon economic development with skills and training in local areas, through partnering with colleges alongside fostering innovation and business growth.

In **Dundee** there was a similar discussion about the need to devise and deliver training courses slightly ahead of demand to secure jobs for a local workforce. However, timelines for contracts from original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) are often agreed at short notice, which makes it difficult for local suppliers to decide whether to invest in training or not. This means that some employees are sent long distances to training courses in other parts of the country. Dundee and Angus College are partnering with the Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc to develop a training college on-site, which will provide wide responsive training to support the growing enterprises across the site.

In **Manchester** the CCC learned about training enterprise B4Box which provides multi-skills training and apprenticeships for retrofit and refurbishment at a local level. We heard that the college training courses and apprenticeships focus on single trades aimed at the construction sector, rather than the retrofit workforce, which requires 'multi-skills'.

Swansea Council's Swansea Standard for building new council homes skills up its direct workforce and has created apprenticeships and career progression, providing jobs for local people while building highly energy efficient homes.

Swansea City Council's construction workforce receives training, apprenticeships and career progression. Local skills and jobs were a key driver in the council decision to develop the **Swansea Standard** for highly energy efficient homes. This has replaced the use of the Passive House standard for council housing, for which 80% of labour and materials came from out of the area or abroad. Under the new standard, 80% of the labour and materials now come from within a 30-mile radius of the city.

School pupils told the CCC that they do not learn enough about climate change, and though it is covered in geography and sciences, it seems theoretical.

"In science we cover renewables etc. – you're teaching us about the environment, but you won't let us act on it. Some schools help people get out into environment – others don't, it's talked at you but we're not enabled" – North West Ministry of Youth member, Derry and Strabane

They talked about local practical solutions, how climate change affects their local area and suggested the topic be covered in citizenship classes. However, many of the young people the CCC met were motivated, well-informed and asked searching and relevant questions.

“We need to think of effective and efficient ways to reduce our climate emissions. But instead of saying them, we actually need to do the actions and embed them into our daily lives” – Pupil at St Paul's School for Girls, Edgbaston, Birmingham

3. Challenges and barriers

Local authorities describe a combination of barriers to the effective delivery of Net Zero and climate adaptation including funding regimes, governance, planning rules, policy or regulation that disincentivises action, a lack of capacity and need for more locally relevant data.

The Climate Conversation aimed to understand better the barriers to delivering Net Zero and climate resilience at a local level. These are explored below. The CCC also heard about detailed specific regulatory, funding and policy barriers and potential solutions too numerous to summarise in this briefing, but which have been fed back to the CCC Secretariat.

This section summarises the key challenges raised across the visits:

- **Funding** – competitive, short notice, short term and narrowly defined
- **Governance** – roles and responsibilities for delivery at the national and local level and certainty for some policy decisions
- **Planning framework** – The National Planning Policy Framework in England
- **Gaps in powers and policies** – non-aligned or missing powers, contradictory policies
- **Capacity** – insufficient capacity at the local level to deliver at scale
- **Data** – a lack of locally relevant data

Funding

“Micromanaged funding through bidding wars” – Observation by a CCC member

The CCC heard that funding from Government departments is competitive, with schemes announced at short notice, with short time-periods for delivery and with narrowly defined outputs.

Every single authority visited raised the approach taken by Government to funding as a barrier to delivering coherent, cost-effective, and practical action for Net Zero and climate resilience.

Authorities do not just want more money, although that would be welcome. They want access to funding through a better process.

The CCC heard that funding from Government departments is competitive, with schemes announced at short notice, with short time-periods for delivery and with narrowly defined outputs.

Local authorities need longer-term funding that supports a place-based approach to systemic change. Funding needs to support the Net Zero transition while allowing co-benefits to be delivered through blended funding and finance schemes.

This approach prevents them from developing planned, good value schemes that enable local supply chains and skills to be developed, and means a systemic approach is very difficult to implement. It also prevents local authorities and partners from delivering cross-cutting co-benefits through blending funding with other streams, for example, private finance and health or transport funding.

A consequence of large amounts of short-term funding is to create a supply chain shortage. Thanet Council's Leader explained that due to staff resourcing pressures and a concern about a shortage of contractors, combined with a tight delivery window, the council was not able to bid for funding for schemes worth £1m from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund. The council has since taken a decision to be able to use risk management reserves for project managers in order to be able to benefit from climate funding opportunities that arise. Also in Kent, the CCC heard that multi-million-pound funding is available for large-scale flood prevention

schemes, such as the seawall in Margate, but that smaller amounts to integrate sustainable drainage systems and trees into local parks and streets is much harder to secure.

Local authorities need to make long-term infrastructure and development plans that take a logical, sequenced approach to changing whole places, where housing, business, transport and green space interact with people's behaviours. These are 20-year plans which cannot be delivered through rapidly devised 'shovel ready' projects put forward when funding is suddenly announced.

Local authorities will be able to play a part in growing the supply chain and skills if Net Zero is a requirement of longer-term funding schemes.

The Government is increasingly recognising place-based approaches in its funding schemes, Levelling Up Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund. And evidence is growing that place-based investments for Net Zero are cheaper and provide greater social benefits.²

Local authorities told the CCC that multi-year funding, with certainty over capital and revenue funding, is needed so they can plan properly and align delivery programmes with skills development and job creation activities.

Governance and policy uncertainty

The CCC saw good work being carried out by local authorities but could not see how all this comes together at the national level. Activity is taking place on heat, buildings and on transport in different ways across different areas, but at a national level there is little to no coherence.

The CCC saw good work being carried out by local authorities but could not see how all this comes together at the national level. Activity is taking place on heat, buildings and on transport in different ways across different areas, but at a national level there is little to no coherence.

There is co-ordination between Devolved Administrations (DAs) in Wales and Scotland and their local councils, but co-ordination between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations is lacking. As a result, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland's councils have a relationship with their own administrations as well as directly with the UK Government.

Local authorities do not know how they fit into the national picture for delivering Net Zero and climate resilience because they have no duties in England and Northern Ireland to act on climate change. There is also no standard reporting as there is in Scotland and Wales.

The CCC heard that there is no standard template for local climate action. Authorities are guided by a range of initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors³, ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Local authorities have no duty and no reporting obligations to Government for delivering Net Zero in England and Northern Ireland, but in Wales and Scotland they do have duties on climate change and report to their administrations.

It is not clear how local authorities and local delivery fit into national strategies for Net Zero.

This means that many local authorities are developing their own solutions. Most have climate change strategies or action plans; some have very practical plans and are just getting on with as much delivery as possible. **But they told the CCC they do not believe that Government values their role, and they do not know how they fit into the national picture.**

Climate adaptation responsibilities are complex but have statutory status.

In terms of climate adaptation, statutory civil contingency roles and flood authority responsibility are distributed across different authorities and include the Environment Agency and emergency responders. Although complicated, these roles are more clearly defined for local delivery than for climate mitigation.

The roles and responsibilities of public sector need to be clear and supported by a comprehensive framework for delivery which clearly states the legislative, regulatory and fiscal measures that will drive the fundamental changes required. National agencies need to align with local delivery plans.

Local authorities want to work in partnership with Government to deliver at pace and scale coherently. Civil servants and local authority officers need to devise policy that will be implemented effectively on the ground.

The CCC heard that greater policy certainty is needed to plan now for investment in low carbon solutions and for decisions to be taken on hydrogen which is causing delay in investments.

The CCC heard from English local authorities who said that they are being held back by the National Planning Policy Framework. Local planning authorities cannot go as far as they want in requiring Net Zero, well-adapted developments.

There was frustration that housing developers are still building homes that will require retrofitting later and that lock in car dependency.

The CCC heard that systemic local change relies heavily on national policy and national or regulated regional agencies. Local initiatives can only go so far beyond national policy and the grain of change being driven through regulation and the activities of national Government agencies, such as National Highways or Network Rail. The roles and responsibilities of public sector need to be clear and supported by a comprehensive framework for delivery which clearly states the legislative, regulatory and fiscal measures that will drive the fundamental changes required.

The CCC heard that local areas want to come together with Government to act in a coordinated way to deliver at the pace and scale needed. This needs clearer alignment of national and local targets, pathways and action plans for transport, housing and heat decarbonisation, supported by co-ordinated national and local behaviour change and skills programmes that help organisations and individuals to make the necessary changes to transition.

The CCC heard about a disconnect between local Government officers and civil servants in central Government, with a sense that the latter are not learning enough from local authorities and there is not a tangible sense of partnership. As a result, policies are developed centrally which are not as effective as they could be for implementation at the local level.

Furthermore, policy certainty is needed. For example, deadlines for an end to the installation of new gas boilers, and the deadline on the sale of petrol and diesel cars and vans, are helpful to inform local decisions and plans. Equally, local authorities are impatient for clarity on the role of hydrogen in the energy transition.

The CCC heard from Wessex Water how regulatory certainty has driven forward their investment in the past, and with greater certainty in place, local areas will be able to deliver far more.

A framework for local Net Zero delivery could channel action efficiently and help manage the transition. The Government would understand progress locally and local areas would appreciate how they fit into the overall pathways.

Planning

“Somerset planning guidance on Climate Change lacks teeth unless the National Planning Policy Framework changes” – Mark Fortune, Somerset County Council

The CCC heard from the English local authorities that they are being held back by the National Planning Policy Framework. Local planning authorities cannot go as far as they want in requiring Net Zero, well-adapted developments. Even where they have developed strong local plans and supplementary planning documents and guidance, they face a dilemma caused by land values and land-banking; viability arguments and housing targets trump the local planning policies that favour Net Zero and the environment, and yet homes are needed for local people. **There was frustration that housing developers are still building homes that will require retrofitting later and that lock in car dependency.**

“The legislative framework really needs to get it right, otherwise we are just adding to the problem” – Roger Gough, Leader, Kent County Council

Some local authorities feel powerless, while others have taken steps to tackle the issues. For example, Maidstone Council has become a lead promoter, working with landowners, installing infrastructure and putting in the conditions that made it possible to demand higher standards. Somerset West and Taunton Council have produced Climate Positive Planning Documents⁴, including a Net Zero Toolkit for

developers and a District Wide Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document, yet it reports that it needs stronger national policy for widespread impact, along with further training for planning staff.

Devising workarounds to deliver Net Zero is not possible for all local authorities because of resource and capacity issues. It takes significant time and expense to develop local plans. Local authorities say that **it is still too difficult for planners to get good quality, highly energy efficient, sustainable homes built in their areas.**

Local authorities want more decisive policy from Government to bring forward the date of the Future Homes Standard, commit to the end of new installation of gas boilers, and send clear signals to the house builders that deadlines for improvement will not be pushed back.

National policy is very important to enable change. The CCC heard that local authorities want more decisive policy from Government to bring forward the date of the Future Homes Standard, commit to the end of new installation of gas boilers, and send clear signals to the house builders that deadlines will not be pushed back. **The Planning system is changing, but Net Zero and adaptation need to remain a priority.**

Gaps in powers and policies

“We used to have more power as local authorities to martial the market – on housing, block treatments to get economies of scale, and do street wide improvements” – District Council officer

Gaps in powers and regulations that run counter to delivering Net Zero make action unnecessarily harder than it needs to be.

The CCC heard about an array of gaps in powers or policies that act to make delivering Net Zero and climate resilience harder than it should be. These are documented in more detail in the CCC's report on Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget and in PowerShift.⁵

They include:

The electricity grid and roads network are two areas where powers need to be aligned for local delivery; strengthening powers for local authorities to enforce energy efficiency standards, and taking away disincentives such as rent regulations on energy efficient properties, and higher business rates for companies that install solar panels are examples of changes needed.

- grid capacity limiting energy developments and installing EV charge points
- no formal relationship between infrastructure investments in the gas and electricity grids and local plans for Net Zero
- the Strategic Roads Network and National Highways investments forcing traffic into the local roads network or making car use attractive
- regulations on rent that prevent higher rents being charged for energy efficient homes in the council and social housing sector
- perverse tax incentives such as VAT on refurbishment/retrofit
- higher business rates for sites with solar panels on the roof
- levels of spending and enforcement of Minimum Energy Efficient Standards (MEES) on a wider range of buildings than the rented sector
- the automatic right to connect to the drainage/sewage system which disincentivises solutions for sustainable drainage systems on new developments

Local authorities are waiting for strong consistent national policy on retrofit, particularly for the 60% of homes not in fuel poverty which need energy efficient, low carbon heating.

Policy should be designed to be compatible with existing and new policies. Local Nature Recovery Strategies status is not clear – it needs to inform planning policy, direct biodiversity net gain and environmental land management schemes; otherwise, the potential for place-based nature recovery will be wasted.

Local authorities want to be able to get counter-productive policies and barriers changed easily. The new Local Net Zero Forum or Better Regulation Policy Committee could be the place for this.

In England, the five Net Zero Hubs provide additional technical capacity for energy projects, but are likely to need additional skills and resources to provide more support across the large areas they cover.

Local authorities need greater capacity, skills and resources to embed Net Zero and climate resilience into everything that they do.

The CCC heard that the Environment Act has some good long-term thinking but heard concerns about actual delivery:

“The Government might fumble on the implementation, meaning that we might not be able to apply the new approaches as well as we could in Greater Manchester” – Anne Selby, Chair, Natural Capital Challenge Group, GMCA

There is currently a disconnect between measures that local authorities are being asked to deliver. The CCC heard that Local Nature Recovery Strategies need to connect to both Biodiversity Net Gain, and environmental land management schemes, ensuring that the best outcomes are delivered locally, such as peat restoration. This links back to having clear roles, coherent inter-related policies, and the importance of the planning system as an enabler, not a hinderance to delivering co-benefits alongside Net Zero at the local level.

The CCC heard that coherent policy needs to be in place to allow completeness of action on Net Zero; a system to raise policy and regulation barriers, and resolve them rapidly, is needed. This may be addressed through the Local Net Zero Forum or Better Regulation Policy Committee.

Capacity

“The Net Zero Hubs have phenomenal potential but are under-resourced” – Maggie Bosanquet, Durham County Council

Much greater capacity in local government is needed to deliver. The five Net Zero Hubs (formerly Local Energy Hubs) have potential and are providing support to local authorities on energy projects but are likely to need significant further resourcing to support the level of demand from local authorities across sectors like buildings and transport.

The CCC heard that some local authorities are building their climate change, adaptation, planning and energy capacity again, and saw how some authorities already have skilled and experienced teams leading on projects. However, as this briefing has described, this is insufficient in terms of pace and scale required to deliver Net Zero. Some have one climate change officer trying to work across a whole area. Others are increasingly embedding climate change into council decisions and training wider numbers of staff. The scale of the challenge to deliver significant emissions reductions at pace before 2035 means that much greater resource will be needed locally, this includes skilling up everyone in local authorities to align their activities with Net Zero and climate resilience as well as delivering commitments to economic development, housing, social care and education.

Without sufficient capacity, climate change actions will compete with statutory duties. And unless the funding process changes, staff will inevitably be pulled into writing funding bids and managing short term projects, instead of being deployed into a systematic programme of change.

Data

“Coordinated systems change requires collection and publication of key metrics, which can be compared with desired trajectories. This is not the same as specifying top-down targets which are generally toxic for systems change initiatives” – Julian Todd, Contributor to public engagement session held with Birmingham City Council

Local authorities want to understand how they fit into the national picture for Net Zero and to have access to data to understand how their interventions contribute.

Local authorities collect and report different data, a standard method for reporting would mean Government can assess the local contribution and use it for policymaking.

Clarity on offsetting, consumption emissions and embedded emissions in construction will be needed.

Some of the authorities raised the challenge of data. They want to understand how they fit into the national picture for delivery and how their policy and programmes are contributing to national progress on Net Zero.

Local authority emissions data from the UK Government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) is limited, lags by two years, and much is extrapolated from national figures, so that interventions at the local level are not captured. It does not help local authorities to target action hence the growing desire we heard for local area energy planning. This local information on future demand also supports the case for skills development and job creation, to build up a pipeline for delivery.

Local authorities are collecting data and reporting to various initiatives, but not to Government and not consistently, despite a tool for reporting Scope 1 and 2 emissions provided by the Local Government Association. This causes duplication, confusion and means the Government cannot track the local contribution towards Net Zero and learn from local interventions to inform policymaking.

As in Scotland and Wales, the CCC heard that it would be useful to have a standardised system for gathering emissions reporting, and to track interventions, so that local performance can be compared, and national performance aggregated.

The CCC heard requests for clarity on offsetting, which will be a significant interim measure for local authorities to meet their Net Zero targets. The CCC was asked: "Should local authorities be offsetting in rainforests abroad, or 'insetting' within their own areas?" Consumption emissions and embedded emissions in construction processes were also raised as future issues local authorities will need to address.

Box 1

Getting the language right

Meeting a wide range of people highlighted how many specialist words are used to talk about climate change, training and careers. Getting the language right is key to effective public engagement. Some of the feedback we heard is below.

The word **just** used in the context of a **Just Transition** does not tend to resonate with people, but the word **fair** seems more generally understood and familiar.

The wording around training is very specialised, with the sector using terms that are opaque to others. Words like **provision** and **levels** and **progression through levels** do not inspire someone thinking about training and their career. These are process-focused rather than descriptive of what people can learn at college or in an apprenticeship, what they can do at work and achieve in their chosen career.

Net Zero also needs defining more clearly in conversations. Climate change or climate emergency are more frequently used by the public than Net Zero. Yet the CCC heard that making climate change the centre of all conversations is not always the solution. Instead, engaging with people around where they live, how they travel, and what they would like to see locally can be a better way of designing programmes to tackle climate change as well as improve communities.

The word **retrofit** is often used by the CCC and local authorities, yet to many householders it is not familiar, and does not express what it is – making homes cosier, healthier and affordable to heat through energy efficiency and low carbon heating.

"This is the first time I've heard the word 'retrofit' and when I first heard it, I thought it was something to do with furniture! You're missing out on a whole community of people who would engage, if they understood the language. It has to be more meaningful to them" – Manchester resident, Carbon Co-op event

Behaviour change is also an unpopular term, which is often used to mean 'nudging'. For example, nudging people to eat less red meat, reduce car or air miles, or to put on a jumper rather than turning up the heating. Incrementally these are small measures, although important, providing a contribution of 16% towards emissions reductions required to meet the Sixth Carbon Budget. **Behaviour change** can also appear to put blame or responsibility onto individuals who may not be able to act, because systems change, with enabling infrastructure, services and technologies at affordable prices is what is needed. This combination of low carbon technologies, combined with societal and behavioural change, contributes 43% towards the Sixth Carbon Budget. Talking about behaviour change without talking about enabling measures is not always helpful and can alienate people.

4. Summary, conclusions and next steps

Summary

The UK Climate Conversation, taking in ten different local areas, provided invaluable insights into the activity, potential for delivery, and barriers to climate action at a local level. These findings will inform the CCC's recommendations to Government and future work.

Local authorities have a vital role to play in using all their power, assets and influence to deliver Net Zero and climate adaptation.

The visits, meetings and conversations reinforced the CCC's opinion that **local authorities have a vital role to play in leveraging all their powers, assets and influence to deliver Net Zero and climate adaptation** in the coming years.

Strong partnerships are in place with key local stakeholders, both strategic and project-based.

The CCC met **strong local partnerships** for climate change and **skilled and experienced teams** working on initiatives across the building, transport, industry, business and community sectors.

Harder to measure, but vitally important, is community action, which maintains support for climate action and creates success stories.

The CCC recognised the **importance of the many community-based initiatives** which generate the success stories, inspiration and positivity that can start and maintain support for UK climate action. Their experiences should feed into climate policymaking and public engagement.

Yet these actions are all **different and un-coordinated, and this is not just because different places have different contexts**. National strategies do not provide for a devolved set of climate responsibilities and there is generally no framework to manage delivery roles between national, regional and local levels of Government. So local areas are taking action that is planned for their own area, meaning that the national picture becomes fragmented and overall action is opportunistic, limited by capacity, responsive to short term funding availability and reliant on forthcoming Government decisions. Additionally, without coordination and reporting at the national level, local impact cannot be measured to inform progress towards the national target.

Efforts need to be focused on the key emissions sectors to tackle heating, new buildings, buildings retrofit and deliver modal shift and decarbonised transport. That must be supported through funding and policy that is co-designed to deliver locally. The planning system particularly, needs to support local planning authorities to deliver Net Zero and climate resilience rather than requiring workarounds to ensure higher standards from housing developers. Systemic

change and market confidence rely on certainty to generate demand, related supply chains and skills investment, and new behaviours. This is likely to need long term planning regionally and in local areas by key stakeholders. A stop-start situation, exacerbated by competitive short-term funding, means that national and local Government are not working to develop predictable and steady end-to-end policies and programmes delivering positive outcomes for people and places.

Better partnership between national, regional and local Government is essential to help translate strategy into delivery in the coming years.

National, regional and local coordination is urgently needed to ensure that local action aggregates to deliver Net Zero emissions and improved resilience in a coherent way. The Government has recognised the role of local authorities in delivering Net Zero in its Net Zero Strategy, but needs to work in partnership with them, through a framework to ensure local capacity is increased, that funding and policy are longer-term and more certain, and that policy contradictions are removed.

Conclusions

Government and local authorities would be helped by a framework that clarifies roles and responsibilities, gives coherent long-term funding, flexibility for local areas to develop plans in their places and ensures that all policies align around Net Zero, and improved adaptation delivery.

The framework for action suggested in the CCC's Local Authorities and Sixth Carbon Budget report is still relevant. A framework further developed for UK100⁶ with key stakeholders was referenced in the Government's Net Zero Strategy, which so far has provided for the Local Net Zero Forum, due to meet for the first time in June 2022. Local authorities are calling for a wider framework for delivery beyond this.

Figure 3 Framework for Net Zero Local Delivery



Source: Louise Marix Evans (2020) *Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget*.

Next steps

The CCC will continue its focus on delivery and maintain links with local authorities and their associations. It will look at specific practical challenges, such as hydrogen production and use, and the wider planning system.

The CCC is supported by a small Secretariat team and does not have the resources to carry out in-depth engagement with over 400 local authorities. It will focus on local delivery through its annual Progress Reports on mitigation and adaptation. The CCC will continue to issue Calls for Evidence to which local authorities and climate partnership members are encouraged to contribute.

It will also investigate the practical challenges of key policy areas, such as the planning system and hydrogen production and use. Upcoming reports on carbon offsetting, workers and skills and public engagement may be of specific interest to local authorities.

Endnotes

- ¹ Bristol City Council (2022) *City Leap partner selected to accelerate Bristol's decarbonisation*.
<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/newsroom/city-leap-partner-selected-to-accelerate-bristol-s-decarbonisation>
- ² UKRI (2022) *Accelerating net zero delivery*. <https://www.ukri.org/publications/accelerating-net-zero-delivery/>
- ³ Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (2022) *City Journey*.
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- ⁴ Somerset West and Taunton (2022) *Climate positive planning*.
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- ⁶ UK100 (2021) *Research into a National - Local Net Zero Delivery Framework*.
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This is an independent briefing report compiled for the CCC by Louise Marix Evans.