

Climate Change and Environment Update Report – October 2020

Purpose of report

For decision.

Summary

This report provides members with an update on the climate change work that is being carried out. It includes an update on the blueprint coalition, parliamentary activity, research and events and, the climate change improvement and support programme.

Recommendations

That members consider the future approach to engaging with national Government of the climate change agenda and the alliances we should make in that endeavour.

That members reflect and provide any comments on the issues and work raised in this update.

Actions

Officers to take forward any member comments for future policy work.

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Background

1. This report provides an update on the key LGA activity undertaken on climate change since the previous EEHT Board. It includes an update on the blueprint coalition, parliamentary activity, research and events and, the climate change improvement and support programme.

Engaging Government in the Climate Change Agenda

2. In the LGA's Comprehensive Spending Review submission we made the case that the Government should work with councils and businesses to establish a national fiscal and policy framework for addressing the climate emergency. We stated that the framework should outline responsibilities for the Government nationally – for example, aligning the regulatory system, including the planning system and national tax incentives – and the local responsibilities, together with a commitment to cooperate with local public sector bodies. There should be a process of engagement between central and local government and industry to enable councils to fulfil their role to translate a national framework into transformative local plans that deliver on this agenda and invest in solutions for a green recovery and future. In addition, we set out positions on: green jobs; retrofitting social housing; and investing in renewables.
3. Other organisations have been making complementary arguments. ADEPT (a network of local authority directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport) and other local government and environmental organisations have put together shared policy asks in '[A blueprint for accelerating climate action and a green recovery at the local level](#)'. It sets out the national leadership, policies, powers and funding needed to empower local authorities to deliver on climate action and a green recovery at scale.
4. The Blueprint has five immediate priorities for how government can accelerate a green recovery and set the foundations for longer term solutions to the climate crisis. These are outlined below and the group are looking to establish sub-groups in order to take some of the themes in the blueprint forward.
 - 4.1 Invest in low-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure
 - 4.2 Support reskilling, retraining and research for a net-zero well-adapted economy
 - 4.3 Upgrade our homes to ensure they are fit for the future
 - 4.4 Make it easy for people to walk, cycle, and work remotely
 - 4.5 Accelerate tree planting, peatland restoration, green spaces and other green infrastructure
5. This raises a question of how we can work together with other organisations to raise and discuss climate change issues with Government. The comprehensive spending review

could be a significant moment in the recognition and funding of a green recovery and if so it will be important to work with Government and other partners on the detail of policy solutions.

6. The Blueprint is a helpful document containing a range of proposals, some of which have not been discussed at any length by the LGA. We have been engaging with the group in a supportive capacity and there is an option for the LGA to formally sign-up to the five immediate priorities and/or the policy asks that support the five priorities. The benefit of doing this is dependent on it providing greater weight to the LGA's engagement with Government. However, before doing so we would need to consider the policy asks in the Blueprint in some detail and consider the longer term implications of being in a broad coalition, whose interests might not always align with those of councils. Please note that not all signatories have detailed policy positions of every issue.

7. Below is table of current signatories:

Organisations	Councils
Ashden	Havant Borough Council
LEDNet	Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Grantham Institute	Bassetlaw District Council
ADEPT	London Borough of Islington
Socitm	London Borough of Sutton
Friends of the Earth	Oxfordshire County Council
Greenpeace UK	
Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN)	
Solace	

8. **We would welcome the Board's consideration of the future approach to engaging with national government on the climate change agenda and the alliances we should make in that endeavour.**

Parliamentary Activity

9. There are a number of key milestones within the national context that we are aligning our policy activity with:
10. **Comprehensive Spending Review:** We submitted our response to the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and outlined the vital role councils play in a green economic recovery and meeting climate ambitions. Key proposals in the Environment and Climate Change chapter include our calls for a national framework to address the climate emergency, crucial investment to achieve a net zero carbon economy – including skills – and adapt to the impacts of climate change and, producer responsibilities in waste and

recycling reforms. Whilst smaller pots of grant funding for green projects have been made available, we have called for sustainable resources and funding flexibilities under local leadership to deliver low carbon solutions.

11. **Environment Bill:** The latest amendment paper for the Environment Bill has been published and there has been an extension to the time that the Bill Committee has to report, by 1 December. We will continue to monitor progress and seek to influence accordingly. We are calling for the following amendments in the Bill to be made:
 - 11.1 Councils should be able to increase the application fee for land drainage consent as soon as possible to a level which more accurately reflects the processing costs and for future increases to the national fee to be kept in line with inflation.
 - 11.2 The Bill should set out clearly producer responsibilities for paying the full net costs of recycling and disposing of packaging to councils.
 - 11.3 Biodiversity Credits from developers should be retained by local authorities so that funding stays in the area where development takes place, and local people can have a say in how this funding can be used to improve the natural environment.
 - 11.4 Decisions on tree felling should remain a matter of local determination. The proposed duty to consult is a new burden and must be fully funded. The impact of costs must be considered in a formal consultation with councils.

12. **Carbon Budget:** The Committee on Climate Change is due to publish its recommendations on the level of the Sixth Carbon Budget (the limit on UK emissions for 2033 – 37) and present a pathway to net zero by 2050, in December. An accompanying publication on local delivery for councils and city-regions will also be produced. The Blueprint Coalition has provided input into the local delivery report and we are engaging with the Committee to understand what the key findings and recommendations for councils will be.

13. **Upcoming White Papers:** We are continuing to work with policy colleagues on upcoming white papers that will have implications for councils addressing climate issues, such as the Planning and Devolution White Papers. Progress on the Energy White Paper and the direction of government is unclear. Grant funding for energy efficiencies within buildings have been made available recently but we are looking to the CSR to provide some clarity on the direction government are taking on energy.

Climate Change Survey Headlines

14. In February 2020, officers issued a climate change survey to help us understand the activities, concerns and barriers for councils in tackling climate change. The survey was due to close at the end of March but remained open until October due to Covid-19. We received 89 responses and below are the headline findings. We are looking to publish the results.

- 14.1 Almost all councils that responded have produced or have plans to produce a climate change strategy. However, very few have fully identified the resources to implement it.
- 14.2 Funding was identified as the largest barrier to tackling climate change. Lack of workforce capacity and legislation are also large barriers.
- 14.3 Legislative changes suggested to help tackle climate change focused mainly on planning, building standards and regulations and the Environment Bill.
- 14.4 Green economic planning, low carbon procurement and changing public behaviour were the most common areas where further skills and expertise development are needed.

COP26

15. For the first time, the UK will host the 26th Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow on 1 – 12 November 2021, in partnership with Italy. This is the rescheduled date following Covid-19. The COP26 Summit will bring together over 30,000 delegates including heads of state, climate experts and campaigners to agree coordinated action to tackle climate change.
16. In the lead up to COP26, Government identified five areas of focus towards a climate-resilient, net-zero economy, namely: clean energy, clean transport, nature-based solutions, finance and, adaptation and resilience. They also announced the UK Year of Climate Action 2020 which is now being reviewed with the postponement of COP26 to 2021.
17. The LGA are in conversations with civil servants at DEFRA on their plans for COP26. The Chairman also attended the first meeting of the COP26 UK Mayors and Regions Advisory Council in September, led by BEIS and co-chaired by the COP President, Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP and the Minister for London, Paul Scully MP. This provides an opportunity to raise some of our key climate asks at Ministerial level.
18. In addition, we are working on our own 'COP26 programme of activity' in the year leading up to the Summit to demonstrate and showcase the role of councils in delivering net zero ambitions and, support our lobbying. We plan to host a series of activities according to the five COP26 themes, starting with the Green Finance webinar in December (please see below).

Research and Events

19. **Renewable Energy Good Practice Guidance:** In collaboration with Local Partnerships, we have been doing work to understand the role of renewable energy to meet carbon reduction targets. Outputs include a discussion paper and a good practice guide. Jo Wall from Local Partnerships presented some of the detail in the discussion paper at the last

EEHT Board and we have since published the [Renewable Energy Good Practice Guidance](#). It aims to help both members and officers of councils who are considering asset ownership to understand and manage the potential risks and benefits.

20. **Green Finance Practical Guide:** The LGA is working with Local Partnerships to develop support for councils to access 'green finance' for their green economic recovery and climate activity. It provides practical guidance for officers and members on different forms of finance to achieve sustainable outcomes and, draws on domestic and international notable practice. We intend to publish the report in line with our COP26 programme of activity where Local Partnerships will deliver a webinar in December.
21. **Adaptation research:** We are looking to develop some research and resources for councils in the area of adaptation to support our lobbying and councils' activities. We made a case for long-term investment to enable councils to have fully funded adaptation plans in the CSR and believe that further research will help to build on this and fill a gap in the lack of evidence that exists. This work is currently underway.
22. **Climate Action Group:** Working with colleagues in improvement, we have convened a group of senior local government climate change managers, with representation from all regions. Following an open call for participants, 27 councils put themselves forward and we had a successful first meeting in September. The group meets quarterly and will be helpful for informing our policy work and testing ideas with councils.

Climate Change Improvement and Support Programme

23. Across the country, councils are taking urgent actions in their local areas with partners and their local communities to combat the negative impacts of climate change and to deliver net zero carbon by 2050. The aim of the LGA's climate change support programme is to help councils and residents to reach their local carbon reduction targets by adapting, and mitigating the effects of climate change. An array of support offers for councils to help deliver their local climate action plans are as follows:
24. **Net Zero Innovation Programme:** Delivered through a collaboration between the LGA and University College London (UCL), the Net Zero Innovation Programme was launched in September and brings together local authorities, universities and other stakeholders to address climate challenges at the local level. Partnerships, funding support and a 'train the trainer' model are all key parts of this programme. 69 applications were received and successful partnerships have been identified.
25. **[Greenhouse gas accounting tool](#):** In collaboration between improvement colleagues and Local Partnerships, our tool to baseline carbon emissions for councils was launched in September along with a webinar on how to use it. The tool collates data to consistently measure greenhouse gas emissions across the country, in order to measure and

compare impacts in a standardised way.

26. **[Climate Change Web Hub](#)**: The hub is regularly updated with new offers of support and good practice. It currently offers 28 case studies, 48 pieces of notable practice and captures examples of climate change actions from 100 councils. Since the onset of COVID, it has received nearly 5,000 views.
27. **Green webinars series**: A series of webinars have recently been delivered including [green reset](#), [greening procurement](#), and [sustaining green behaviours from the pandemic](#). The [Spotlight on Green Reset](#) webinar provided lessons on how a renewed focus on the environment can achieve a more sustainable recovery. This session achieved an audience of 388.
28. **Procurement**: Councils can use procurement to achieve wider financial and non-financial outcomes, including improving the wellbeing of individuals and communities, social value, and improved environment. [Climate emergency social value themes, outcomes and measures](#) have been published. They provide an extra emphasis and focus on providing councils with measures specifically dedicated to reducing and mitigating the risks of climate change in our communities.
29. **Scrutiny**: In collaboration with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, the LGA has launched a [publication which covers ten questions](#), with several supplementary follow ups, to ask if you are scrutinising climate action in your council. It lays out key issues on which local scrutineers can pose to those with decision-making responsibility. Webinar slides and a blog can be found [here](#).
30. **Leadership**: The third [Leadership Essentials climate emergency programme](#) will be held on October 22 and 23. This programme will help leaders and portfolio holders explore the crucial local leadership role in responding to the climate emergency. It explores levers for councils to reduce carbon emissions and provide opportunities to learn from experiences of others.
31. **Design in the Public Sector**: The new programme was launched on 10 August for councils to gain skills in design to tackle local climate change challenges.
32. **[Climate change ebulletin](#)**: The LGA launched our climate change e-bulletin in partnership with Local Partnerships. This collates various news, support offers and good practice which council climate change leads will be interested in.

Implications for Wales

33. We will be looking to work collaboratively on any common issues and share learning with our WLGA colleagues.

Financial Implications

34. This activity is within the scope of the current work programme. No financial implications have been identified.

Next steps

35. Members to consider the options for signing up to the blueprint in paragraphs 3 – 7.

36. We will reflect on and update our climate change and environment work following comments from members.