



Consultation - Local government and legal responsibilities to act on climate change

Local Government Association

UK100 Submission

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Introduction

This submission is from UK100 which is a network of 116 local authorities and their leaders who have pledged to lead a rapid transition to net zero in their communities ahead of the Government's legal target.

UK100 is the only network of ambitious councils led by all political parties working together to tackle climate change. We help local leaders overcome challenges and turn innovation into solutions that work everywhere. We build the case for the powers needed to make change happen. From cities to villages, we help communities across the UK create thriving places powered by clean energy — with fresh air to breathe, warm homes to live in, and a healthy natural environment.

UK100 and our members have long advocated for a statutory climate duty, and have been pleased to be a part of the pre-consultation work with the LGA and other partners.

Q1. In a few words, please describe what one thing would assist your council to better lead climate action locally?

Climate action is often deprioritised in the face of competing statutory duties, limited budgets, and other statutory functions. Giving it equal footing through a clear statutory duty—backed by dedicated funding, the right powers, capacity and delivery frameworks—would enable councils to plan, prioritise and deliver on their climate goals.

Q2. What do you consider to be the headline advantages of your suggestion in enabling local authority delivery?

A statutory duty with dedicated funding and frameworks would elevate climate action from a discretionary to a core responsibility. This would provide greater clarity, consistency, and

accountability across all councils, helping to align local policies and plans and integrate climate priorities across services—from housing and transport to public health and economic development. It will give them the ability to plan over the long term, build the local economy, and embed climate priorities into all local decisions.

It would also give climate action a more protected place in budget and strategy discussions. Analysis by PwC and Innovate UK demonstrates that empowering local authorities to take tailored, place-based climate action would save £137 billion compared to top-down national approaches to reaching the UK's Net Zero goals¹. In our research released last year - [Local Net Zero 2.0: The moment to deliver](#) around 88% of the total respondents (34) said they would welcome an overarching statutory climate change duty if it came with the necessary powers and funding. A position recently reaffirmed in a mini-workshop we held with our new Policy Advisory Group.

Q3. What do you consider to be the risks of your suggestion in enabling local authority delivery?

Local authorities already carry significant responsibilities—over 1,300 statutory duties—so any new duty must be carefully designed not to add pressure without also providing the necessary funding, powers, support, and clarity.

- **Resource constraints:** Without additional funding, councils might struggle to meet new obligations, leading to service cuts or stretched budgets.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Local authorities may lack the expertise or staff to effectively implement new climate responsibilities.
- **Legal Challenges:** Ambiguous duties could lead to disputes or litigation, complicating enforcement.
- **Need for clarity:** The duty needs to be clear in terms of what it covers and what the monitoring would look like.
- **Lack of clear partnerships:** The scale of action required cannot be delivered by local government and wider the public sector alone. Without mechanisms to enable cross-sector partnerships, local authorities may struggle to mobilise the investment and collaboration needed. The current fragmented approach to climate responsibility also makes it harder to unlock and understand the wider co-benefits of local climate action and partnership.
- **Insufficient investment pathways:** The level of investment needed to deliver on climate ambitions is substantial. If not supported by clear funding models and routes to private finance, duties may become unachievable.
- **Poor policy alignment:** Misalignment between national and local policy frameworks could create barriers to effective delivery, causing confusion, duplication, or contradictory requirements.

¹<https://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/perspectives/accelerating-local-net-zero-investment/#:~:text=UKRI%2FPwC%20analysis%20showed%20that,engagement%20and%20consent%20for%20change>

Q4. What needs to be considered for your suggestion, for question 1, to be implemented effectively?

To implement a statutory duty for prioritising climate action effectively, several design and delivery factors must be considered to ensure that local authorities can act meaningfully and consistently:

- **Co-design with local government:** The duty should be co-designed with councils and local government representatives to ensure it is practical, proportionate, and aligned with local delivery realities.
- **Foundational work before implementation:** Before a duty is introduced, the government may need to undertake preparatory work—such as establishing sector-wide targets, clarifying responsibilities, and filling data or policy gaps—to create a credible foundation for local action.
- **National-local delivery framework:** A clear overarching national framework is needed to clarify the roles of national and local government, enable collaboration across sectors, and avoid fragmentation or duplication of effort.
- **Clear purpose and outcomes:** The duty should be clearly defined, with specific outcomes, timelines, and baseline assessments so councils understand what is expected and can measure progress effectively.
- **Resourcing and support tools:** Local authorities will need access to the right tools, guidance, data, and capacity-building resources to deliver on any statutory duty, particularly smaller authorities with limited in-house expertise.
- **Dedicated funding:** A ring-fenced funding mechanism must accompany the duty to ensure it is deliverable and does not displace existing council functions or services. It should also recognise and conform to the ‘new burdens’ doctrine already agreed by the LGA and national government.
- **Minimum action threshold linked to funding:** The framework should set out a minimum level of action expected from all authorities, with corresponding access to funding streams, ensuring a fair and consistent baseline of ambition.
- **Integrated approach to mitigation and adaptation:** While mitigation is often more clearly defined with targets and timescales, adaptation must be given equal attention. The government should define what good adaptation looks like, set timelines, and outline the role councils are expected to play, to avoid it being sidelined.
- **Flexibility through devolution:** Any statutory duty should be framed within wider devolution arrangements, allowing local and combined authorities to determine how best to meet the duty based on local contexts and priorities. This approach must also recognise that many local authorities retain key roles—such as planning and housing—that are either not held or only partially held by combined authorities, yet are crucial to delivering effective climate action on the ground.

Duty

There is interest in local government having a statutory duty to act on climate change. A statutory duty could take different forms. It/they could be simple general duties to have regard to certain objectives or targets, or specific about council responsibilities, services, plans, and the way it operates.

There are also different options for having different elements within primary or secondary legislation, or in guidance. There are likely to be advantages and disadvantages of different approaches, and we would like to hear more about your views of the options.

Q6. A general duty, such as the current duty to ‘set the overall strategic direction and long-term vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being of a local area’.

A general statutory duty may offer some strategic benefits, but its broad and high-level nature risks limiting practical impact on climate action unless accompanied by clearer expectations and support. Given the government’s commitment to a ‘local growth duty’, at a minimum it could make sense to use this opportunity to bind a growth and climate duty together.

Advantages

- **Easier to secure politically and publicly:** A general duty is often more palatable to stakeholders and decision-makers, increasing the likelihood of being introduced in legislation.
- **Allows for local flexibility in delivery:** Its broad framing gives councils discretion to tailor approaches to local priorities, capacities, and contexts, aligning with the principles of devolution.
- **Creates a clear reference point:** A general duty can serve as a unifying legislative anchor for councils and partners, embedding climate action in strategic decision-making across departments.
- **Supports a staged approach to ambition:** A general duty can be a useful first step in a phased approach, helping build consensus and momentum toward stronger climate action over time.

Disadvantages

- **Too vague to drive action:** Without specifics, the duty risks being symbolic rather than effective—offering no clear direction on what should be done, by when, or how progress will be measured.
- **Lacks accountability and clarity:** General duties often do not specify who is responsible for delivery or what success looks like, making enforcement or performance monitoring difficult.
- **Oversimplifies a complex challenge:** A general duty may not capture the scale, urgency, or integration needed across housing, transport, energy, nature, mitigation and planning.
- **Risk of insufficient funding and delivery:** Without clear deliverables, general duties may not attract ring-fenced funding, and councils may struggle to prioritise them among other statutory responsibilities.
- **Burden falls on a small team:** In the absence of clear frameworks or requirements for integration, the general duty may be treated as a siloed responsibility of a single sustainability or climate team, limiting its influence.

Q7. A set of specific duties around individual responsibilities, such as the current duty to 'enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards', this might be around plan making, or retrofitting council housing.

Introducing a set of specific statutory duties can drive more direct and accountable climate action, but it also requires careful coordination and sufficient support to ensure effective delivery across diverse local authority contexts.

Advantages

- **Greater clarity and direction:** Specific duties provide clear expectations for delivery, embedded directly within individual service areas—helping local authority teams understand what's required and where responsibility lies.
- **Enables accountability across departments:** By embedding duties across core council functions (e.g. planning, housing, enforcement), this approach ensures climate action is not siloed and supports whole-council ownership of delivery.
- **Can be more proportionate and tailored:** Duties can be designed to align with different service areas' capacity and remits, allowing for a more proportionate approach that recognises the varying roles of council departments.
- **Supports stronger monitoring and accountability:** With clearer lines of responsibility and defined actions, it becomes easier to track delivery, measure progress, and hold individual departments to account.

Disadvantages

- **Complex to legislate:** Introducing multiple duties across diverse areas will require extensive legislative effort and coordination, potentially delaying implementation.
- **Governance and coordination challenges:** Without a joined-up governance approach, multiple duties could become fragmented or duplicative, creating confusion and inefficiencies across departments.
- **May limit local flexibility or ambition:** If duties are too prescriptive, they may constrain councils from going further or innovating, particularly those with more advanced climate strategies.
- **Capacity and expertise gaps:** Some councils may not currently have the technical skills, experience, or staffing needed to deliver on specialised climate duties—especially smaller or under-resourced authorities.
- **Challenges aligning and funding multiple duties:** Duties may fall under the remit of different Whitehall departments, complicating funding streams and creating administrative burdens in coordinating across them.
- **Risk of conflicting or overlapping duties:** Without careful design, individual duties could contradict or undermine each other. Ensuring consistency, alignment, and coherence across duties will be essential to avoid policy clashes or inefficiencies.

Q8. A set of specific duties around achieving targets or objectives, such as decarbonising the local government estate (scope 1), or deliver heat and buildings decarbonisation across an area (scope 2&3).

Statutory duties tied to specific decarbonisation targets can sharpen focus and accountability, but they must be matched with adequate support and designed to work across different local contexts.

Advantages

- **Clarity and accountability through measurable objectives:** Target-based duties provide a clear sense of purpose and direction for local authorities, helping translate ambition into concrete outcomes.
- **Whole-council embedding:** Duties around decarbonisation targets (e.g. for estates, housing, or area-wide interventions) can be embedded across different departments, encouraging joined-up working and shared ownership.
- **Greater transparency and tracking:** Measurable targets make it easier to monitor progress, assess effectiveness, and demonstrate impact to government and the public.
- **Potentially more proportionate and tailored:** When linked to specific operational areas or sectors, these duties can be designed to suit local capacity and circumstances.

Disadvantages

- **Time and complexity of legislative development:** Defining, agreeing and legislating specific duties linked to targets would require time and extensive consultation, particularly for complex areas like Scope 3 emissions.
- **Governance and coordination challenges:** Area-wide targets often cut across sectors and actors, requiring strong governance structures to ensure alignment and coordination within and beyond councils.
- **Capacity and capability gaps:** Many councils may lack the technical expertise or resources needed to deliver on ambitious decarbonisation targets—particularly for Scope 3 emissions where influence is more indirect.
- **Potential to limit ambition:** Targets may be treated as the maximum required (“floor not ceiling”), discouraging councils from going further or adapting actions to emerging local opportunities.
- **Risk of conflicting or fragmented duties:** A coherent framework is needed to ensure duties reinforce rather than undermine each other.
- **Requires strong partnerships beyond local government:** Local authorities cannot deliver system-wide targets alone—collaboration with other public bodies, the private sector, and communities is essential. Without explicit expectations for partnership working, progress may stall.

Q9. A set of specific duties around new tasks that contribute to the objectives; as an example, to create a local area energy plan, or to bring together local partners to develop an area-wide action plan.

Before we answer this question, in the context of the consultation, we would reiterate that UK100, has long advocated for a funded national framework for the delivery of LAEPs (Local Area Energy Plans).

Advantages

- **Simple and easy to communicate:** Task-based duties like developing local energy or climate action plans are easy to explain, helping to secure political and community support and get buy-in across different teams.
- **Cross-departmental engagement:** These duties can embed climate thinking across the organisation by involving planning, housing, energy, public health, and economic development teams in structured, task-led processes.
- **Clarity of responsibility:** A duty to complete a defined task, such as drafting a plan, provides clear accountability and helps focus leadership attention on strategic planning.

Disadvantages

- **No duty to act on the plans created:** A task-based duty might not result in meaningful emissions reduction or climate resilience unless there is a parallel requirement to deliver on or implement those plans.
- **No guaranteed climate impact:** Without clear links to targets or delivery expectations, plans could be completed without meaningful follow-through, undermining the climate case.
- **Risk of becoming a tick-box exercise:** Without quality standards, peer review, or independent oversight, local authorities may approach such duties as compliance exercises rather than tools for strategic action.
- **Potential for fragmented or conflicting duties:** Task-based duties must be carefully designed to align with one another and with broader climate objectives to avoid duplication or confusion.
- **Councils can't deliver in isolation:** Creating local plans often depends on external stakeholders. Without a corresponding duty or expectation on partners, local authorities may struggle to convene or coordinate action effectively.

Q10. Duties around reporting on progress, such as mandatory reporting of action taken to adapt to climate change, or to reduce emissions.

Many of our members already report on their climate targets through their own local democratic structures as well as using organisations such as CDP, a duty in this area would need to build on best practice and not undermine those already committed to transparent reporting.

Advantages

- **Clear and communicable starting point:** Reporting duties are easy to explain internally and externally, helping to initiate climate conversations and secure leadership interest and buy-in.
- **Whole-organisation visibility:** Mandatory reporting requires contributions from multiple departments, embedding climate considerations across services and encouraging collaboration.
- **Clarity of responsibility:** Reporting requirements provide clear accountability and can help identify gaps in delivery, prompting action and internal scrutiny.
- **Can stimulate learning:** Even the act of compiling and reporting data can trigger new conversations, improve internal understanding of climate risks and responsibilities, and serve as a softer capacity-building tool.
- **Initiates local thinking:** Reporting can serve as a first step in a staged approach to climate action—building knowledge and momentum before more binding targets are introduced.

Disadvantages

- **No duty to act or achieve outcomes:** A reporting requirement without a corresponding duty to reduce emissions or adapt to climate change risks becoming performative rather than transformative.
- **Unclear impact on climate outcomes:** Reporting alone doesn't guarantee emissions reduction or resilience. Its effectiveness depends on how the data is used and whether there are consequences for underperformance.
- **Risk of becoming a tick-box exercise:** Without robust expectations or scrutiny, reporting could be reduced to form-filling with limited internal challenge or learning, undermining its purpose.
- **Resource burden:** Councils may lack the staff or technical capacity to produce these reports. Without support, reporting could divert attention from delivery.
- **Cannot be delivered by councils alone:** Climate progress depends on partners and systems beyond the council's control. Reporting must acknowledge shared responsibilities and encourage wider accountability.
- **Supports a staged approach to ambition:** A general duty can be a useful first step in a phased approach, helping build consensus and momentum toward stronger climate action over time.

Q11. Integrating a responsibility to have regard to climate change into the existing statutory duties, for instance around transport, housing, energy, nature social care, either at a strategic planning level, or detailed delivery level.

Advantages

- **Simple to communicate:** This approach is easy to explain, reducing the need for significant structural change or new legislation.
- **Whole-council relevance:** Embedding climate considerations across existing duties ensures that climate thinking is not siloed in one team but spread across all functions.

- **Promotes a cultural shift:** Requiring officers and decision-makers to consider climate impacts as part of their day-to-day responsibilities can help build awareness, spark internal discussions, and normalise climate as a routine consideration.
- **Supports soft capacity building:** Even if initially light-touch, this approach can help local authorities gradually build internal understanding and skills, serving as a foundation for more ambitious action in future.

Disadvantages

- **No requirement to act or deliver outcomes:** A 'duty to have regard' does not require action or emissions reduction. Without further obligations, it risks minimal impact on actual climate performance.
- **Unclear accountability:** If not linked to measurable targets or outcomes, this duty may fail to drive meaningful change and could be deprioritised in decision-making.
- **Risk of becoming a tick-box exercise:** Without clear expectations or scrutiny, this could become a tokenistic, box-ticking exercise that is fulfilled without genuine consideration or behavioural change.
- **Requires data and monitoring to be meaningful:** To avoid vagueness, councils would need access to relevant, up-to-date data (e.g. on emissions, risks, and impacts) and a clear framework to assess whether their decisions align with climate objectives.

Q12. Please state your preferred options / preferences from questions 6 - 11.

A combination of Option 8 (specific duties around achieving targets or objectives) and Option 9 (specific duties around new tasks that contribute to objectives, such as developing area-wide plans). Together, these approaches provide clarity of purpose while encouraging local ownership and integrated delivery.

To ensure these duties are effective and manageable:

- **Establish an overarching policy framework:** Duties should be underpinned by a clear national policy statement that articulates local climate responsibilities within the broader system of climate governance.
- **Ensure coherence and avoid duplication:** Different duties must be designed to align with each other, not contradict. Alignment across sectors and levels of government is essential.
- **Embed responsibility across all departments:** Climate duties should not be seen as the sole responsibility of the climate team. Instead, they must be embedded into the functions of relevant departments (e.g. housing, transport, planning), so that delivery is mainstreamed and shared across the organisation.
- **Sequence duties to support implementation:** Duties could be introduced in phases to allow local authorities time to build capacity, access resources, and integrate new requirements without becoming overwhelmed.

A statutory duty could take different forms. It/they could be simple general duties to have regard to certain objectives or targets, or specific about council responsibilities, services, plans, and the way it

operates. There are also different options for having different elements within primary or secondary legislation, or in guidance. There are likely to be advantages and disadvantages of different approaches, and we would like to hear more about your views of the options.

Q13. Related to statutory duties, would you like to see a greater level of statutory and non-statutory guidance for local authorities on tackling climate change?

Yes. Many local authorities are ambitious about climate action but face significant challenges due to limited capacity and resourcing. Instead of expecting each council to build everything from scratch, there should be clearer and more accessible guidance—both statutory and non-statutory—that provides the tools, frameworks, and delivery models they can readily adapt to local needs. Sharing exemplar case studies and innovative solutions would avoid duplication of effort and help local authorities focus on what works, rather than spending time and resource searching for ideas independently. Councils know their places and people best and can deliver effectively when they are given the right support and clarity on expectations.

In addition, councils should have timely access to expert advice to help plan projects, develop business cases, and work with delivery partners, particularly the private sector. Too often, they move from project to project, chasing fragmented and short-term funding pots that limit their ability to plan strategically or deliver at scale. As a result, the wider co-benefits of climate action—such as local economic growth, job creation, healthier communities and stronger supply chains—are often missed. To unlock these benefits, councils need long-term certainty, strategic guidance, and a supportive policy and investment environment that enables integrated, place-based delivery.

Funding

The New Burdens doctrine requires Whitehall departments to justify why new duties, powers and targets etc should be placed on local authorities, how much these policies will cost and where the funding will come from to pay for them. The New Burdens Doctrine is government guidance and is applied at ministerial discretion.

Q14. How important is it that councils receive new burdens for any new statutory duty? What deliverables would be reasonable?

It is critical that any new statutory duty related to climate action is accompanied by appropriate funding and resources. Councils are already working with extremely constrained budgets, and climate work is rarely supported by ring-fenced funding. Instead, they rely on small, short-term pots of money that are often competitive. With competing statutory responsibilities—such as social care and housing—climate action can struggle to be prioritised unless it is properly resourced.

Providing long-term, stable funding would enable councils to plan ahead, scale delivery, and realise the wider benefits of climate action—such as local economic growth, public health improvements, biodiversity enhancement, and community resilience. Clear deliverables linked to new burdens could include the ability to ensure there is specialist staff, develop

place-based strategies, access expert support, and build local partnerships. Above all, financial certainty is essential if councils are to treat climate action as a core, strategic priority rather than a short-term or optional add-on. This can also support partnership building and stimulate the local economy.

Other accountability mechanisms

Statutory duties can be viewed as a tool to hold the sector to account for action on climate. There are other options for accountability, and we are interested to hear about your views about the advantages and risks with different accountability options.

Q15. What do you see as the key advantages and risks of a statutory duty, where local authorities are under a legal requirement?

Advantages:

- **Responding to public scrutiny:** With growing public concern about climate change, a duty would demonstrate that the government recognises the multilevel action needed and responds to the demands of citizens.
- **Ensuring consistency:** A statutory duty would require all local authorities to work towards net zero emissions, ensuring a consistent approach across the country.
- **Providing a clear mandate:** A legal requirement would give councils a clear mandate to prioritise climate action and allocate resources accordingly.
- **Accelerating progress:** By making net zero a legal obligation councils would be compelled to act more quickly and decisively to reduce emissions.
- **Encouraging long-term planning:** A statutory duty would encourage councils to develop long-term strategies for achieving net zero, rather than often having to prioritise short-term initiatives.
- **Enhancing accountability:** With a legal requirement in place, councils would be more accountable to their constituents and the government for net zero progress.
- **Facilitating collaboration:** A shared legal duty could foster greater collaboration between and within local authorities, as well as external partners, allowing them to share best practice and work together on regional initiatives.
- Climate action delivery on national targets, can't be done without local authorities. They are ambitious to act, but need the certainty that this can provide.

Risks of a duty

- **Resource constraints:** Without additional funding, councils might struggle to meet new obligations, leading to service cuts or stretched budgets.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Local authorities may lack the expertise or staff to effectively implement new climate responsibilities.
- **Legal Challenges:** Ambiguous duties could lead to disputes or litigation, complicating enforcement.
- **Need for clarity:** The duty needs to be clear in terms of what it covers and what the local and national accountability and monitoring would look like.

Q16. What do you see as the key advantages and disadvantages of outcomes frameworks, where local authorities are accountable to deliver outcomes from resources or powers?

Advantages:

- **Focus on impact:** Outcomes frameworks encourage local authorities to focus on tangible results rather than just activity, enabling more meaningful progress on climate goals.
- **Flexibility and local innovation:** By focusing on outcomes rather than prescribing specific actions, local authorities can design approaches that reflect local needs, opportunities, and capabilities.
- **Clarity and alignment:** Clearly defined outcomes can help align efforts across departments, partners, and tiers of government, and improve transparency for the public.
- **Improved accountability and learning:** Measuring and reporting outcomes can help identify what works, promote learning across councils, and support more effective future interventions.

Disadvantages:

- **Data and measurement challenges:** Many climate outcomes—such as long-term emissions reductions or health co-benefits—are difficult to measure at the local level or require data not readily available to councils.
- **Unclear attribution:** Outcomes often rely on a range of actors and variables outside local authority control (e.g. grid decarbonisation, private investment), making it difficult to fairly assess council performance.
- **Resource mismatch:** If not coupled with sufficient powers, funding, and capacity-building, outcomes-based accountability may place undue pressure on under-resourced councils.
- **Risk of gaming or short-termism:** There is a risk that councils prioritise easily measurable or short-term outcomes at the expense of longer-term, systemic action.

Q17. What do you see as the key advantages and risks of agreement arrangements/contracts, where local authorities are accountable to deliver outputs or actions in return for resources or powers?

Advantages:

- **Clarity of expectations:** Agreements or contracts provide a clear link between the resources or powers granted and the actions required, helping to ensure mutual accountability between local and national government.
- **Incentivised action:** Conditional funding or powers can motivate delivery and ensure resources are directed towards priority actions.
- **Greater confidence in delivery:** National government may be more willing to devolve powers and resources where there is a clear contractual basis for delivery.

Risks:

- **Administrative burden:** Contractual arrangements can increase reporting and compliance requirements, which may strain limited local capacity—especially for smaller or under-resourced authorities.
- **Short-termism:** A focus on specific, deliverable outputs may skew attention toward short-term actions (and associated short term funding) rather than longer-term, strategic investment and systemic change.
- **Limited flexibility:** Rigid agreements may reduce local discretion, stifling innovation or responsiveness to emerging needs.
- **Uneven playing field:** Local authorities with already more existing capacity or political alignment may secure more favourable contracts, entrenching inequalities between areas.
- **Risk of limiting ambition:** Agreements based on fixed outputs or minimum delivery standards can create a “floor not ceiling” effect—discouraging councils from going further than the agreed scope, especially if additional ambition is not recognised or rewarded.

Q18. What do you see as the key advantages and risks of wider legal and regulatory requirements to the whole of society / economy, including local authorities e.g. requiring old gas boilers to be replaced with heat pumps or Future Homes and Building Standard impacting homes being built by councils?

Advantages:

- **Joint goal:** Universal requirements help ensure that all sectors—public and private—are on a level playing field, contributing to national climate goals, preventing unfair pressure on any one actor and avoiding market distortion.
- **Clarity and consistency:** Clear, nationwide standards reduce ambiguity and support long-term planning and investment by councils, industry, and residents alike.
- **Drive for innovation and scale:** Regulatory certainty can stimulate supply chains, unlock investment, and drive innovation in clean technologies, making solutions like heat pumps more affordable over time.
- **Supports leadership from local authorities:** Where councils are already leading, regulation can reinforce their ambitions and provide leverage in local decision-making and delivery.

Risks:

- **Cost pressures:** Without adequate funding or support, new regulatory requirements can place additional strain on council budgets—particularly for social housing providers or retrofit obligations.
- **Delivery capacity:** Local authorities may lack the workforce, skills, or supply chains needed to meet new standards quickly, especially where timelines are tight or fragmented across departments
- **Public resistance:** If regulation is introduced without public engagement or support (e.g. for boiler changes), it may be met with confusion or backlash—affecting both national credibility and local implementation.

- **One-size-fits-all limitations:** National rules may not account for local contexts—such as rural off-grid homes or constrained urban areas—so flexibility and exemptions may be needed in some cases.

Devolution and local government reform

The English Devolution White Paper will likely impact local authorities and climate action plans. Devolution to Strategic Authorities, the creation of new Strategic Authorities, and the prospect of local government reorganisation will touch all parts of the country in one way or another. Further information about the potential impact of the devolution agenda on climate action is summarised in section 3.7 of the English Devolution White Paper. We would like to understand the issues around new statutory duties in this context.

Q20. What are the opportunities and challenges created by the English Devolution White paper in bringing forward new statutory duties on local government to act on climate change?

Opportunities:

- Funding reforms and integrated settlements would give local authorities the ability to plan for the long-term and develop programmes that are tailored to their local needs.
- Local governance can become more efficient and responsive, particularly when implementing complex, long-term projects.
- Localised control may speed up decision-making and enable local authorities to stimulate economic growth and design more comprehensive programmes that tackle interconnected challenges, enhancing both the effectiveness and efficiency of delivery.
- The potential for greater integration of services across different sectors (e.g., health, education, transport) could lead to more efficient and effective service delivery.

Challenges:

- There is limited information on when the government expects this process to be completed, which could mean various regions do not see the benefits of devolution for a long time.
- While the funding reforms are a welcome step, this alone will not be sufficient for impactful programmes. The White Paper lacks detail on strategies to empower councils with revenue-raising tools or attracting private investment.

Q21. What are the opportunities and challenges created by the prospect of local government reform in bringing forward new statutory duties on local government to act on climate change?

Advantages:

- The shift to larger unitary authorities could centralise procurement processes, achieving economies of scale and more standardised practices.
- The new authorities created could be founded with a statutory duty built into them from day one, ensuring that local climate action becomes a key part of their political,

organisational and strategic structures. This would need to be addressed by the government in what comes after the English Devolution White Paper and subsequent legislation.

- One key opportunity is the potential for centralised, consolidated funding pots. This approach could streamline resource allocation, reduce administrative burdens, and provide more predictable and substantial funding to support local authorities in effectively delivering on their climate ambitions.

Risks:

- Merging smaller councils into larger unitary authorities may improve efficiency and reduce costs but risks creating a democratic deficit. Local government's proximity to its communities is crucial for responsiveness and representation, which larger councils may struggle to maintain. This could potentially also leave rural areas and smaller towns behind.
- Although the current governance model grants districts and boroughs a seat at the table in new Combined County Authorities (CCAs), these entities often lack the same voting rights as constituent councils. Even where voting rights are extended, districts and boroughs remain in the minority, limiting their influence.
- There is limited information on when the government expects this process to be completed, which could mean various regions do not see the benefits of devolution for a long time.
- Without a clear duty or guidance, there is a risk that existing climate leadership, ambition and delivery is lost in the process of LGR, especially where district councils are abolished or merged.
- The approach could exacerbate disparities in climate action between regions with varying levels of capacity, leading to inequalities in the pace and scale of achieving net zero.
- There is an expectation of collaboration between councils and particularly taking the view of small councils, there is little to highlight how and what support could be provided to improve governance systems.

Q22. What do you consider to be the best distribution of statutory duties across Strategic Authorities and constituent authorities?

- It is not enough to rely on the narrow and vague strategic duty that falls short of what is needed to drive place-based climate action. To be effective, duties must be clearly framed, actionable, and supported by reforms to local government finance, multi-year funding settlements, and strong national-local accountability frameworks.
- Needs to be built in to all departments and local authorities. Mayors can set direction, delivery still by constituent authorities. So funding needs to flow to them.
- The targets will need to be delivered by constituent authorities. They will also need the flexibility to act. But the resources and tools to act.
- Overall responsibility with strategic authority will make it easier for national - local communication and management. Strategic authority can plan for the region, pool

resources etc. but should take care to ensure individual local authorities have the flexibility to adapt to their local needs.

- Statutory duties should reflect the distinct but complementary roles of strategic and constituent authorities. Strategic authorities (e.g. combined authorities or regional bodies) are best placed to lead on duties that require coordination across geographies—such as regional energy planning, transport infrastructure, or skills pipelines—where scale and integration are key.
- Constituent (local) authorities should retain statutory duties for place-based delivery, such as housing, local transport planning, and community engagement. These areas rely on deep knowledge of local contexts, trusted relationships, and integration with wider local services.
- Where duties are shared, clear lines of accountability and mechanisms for collaboration should be established to avoid duplication or gaps. Joint strategies or delivery plans—with input and ownership from both tiers—can help ensure that powers and responsibilities are aligned and that local priorities feed into strategic decisions.

Local partnerships

Local authorities are conveners and enablers of partnerships in places, and the response to climate change demands whole-system change and partnership. Therefore, we would be interested in the potential role for new statutory duties on climate change on other public sector partners, and how they may interrelate with new duties on local authorities.

Q23. Are there other public bodies that you think should have new duties to act on climate change? If so, which other public bodies and what might those duties look like?

Several other public bodies could have new duties to act on climate change.

- Homes England could have a statutory duty to embed net zero principles across all its investments and funding programmes, prioritising energy-efficient, low-carbon homes and supporting delivery of the Future Homes Standard.
- NHS bodies could be required to work with local authorities on initiatives that deliver housing and health co-benefits, such as reducing fuel poverty and improving indoor air quality.
- Other key bodies, including Great British Railways, National Highways, Great British Energy, and the National Energy System Operator, could have clear climate duties aligned with decarbonisation goals.
- Skills England could be tasked with supporting the development of low-carbon skills to enable a just transition.
- MHCLG and planning authorities could integrate climate responsibilities into planning frameworks to ensure sustainable development and effective climate action at the local level.

Q24. How might a statutory duty requiring partnership working between public bodies be set out to be productive, work well and achieve success?

- **Need for partnerships working:** Local authorities cannot achieve system-wide climate targets alone; successful delivery depends on strong collaboration with other public bodies, the private sector, and local communities. Explicit mandates for partnership working are crucial to maintain momentum and avoid delays.
- **Clarity of roles and expectations:** The duty should outline the specific responsibilities of different public bodies (e.g. ICSs, local authorities, transport bodies), including requirements to share data, align plans, and co-design delivery.
- **Alignment with existing structures:** It should build on existing governance arrangements rather than creating new, parallel systems.
- **Joint accountability:** The duty should be underpinned by shared performance frameworks or outcome metrics, with progress reported publicly to ensure transparency.
- **Resourcing and capacity:** Partnership working requires time, skills, and coordination, so the duty must be matched by funding for collaboration, not just delivery.
- **Central support and guidance:** National government should provide tools, templates, and convening power to support local collaboration, including model MoUs or shared frameworks.
- **Equal Priority:** The duty should elevate climate action to the same level of importance as other statutory responsibilities, ensuring it receives adequate attention and resources.
- **Proportionate Responsibility:** Responsibilities assigned to councils should be proportionate to their capacity and situated within the context of a broader network of public bodies and stakeholders.
- **Measurable and simple:** The requirements should be measurable, straightforward, and communicated clearly to enable effective understanding and implementation.

Timeframes

The Government's commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050 is now 25 years away. Many councils have set even more ambitious local targets for their council activities or the authority area to reach net zero emissions earlier than 2050. We are interested in the views on the time frames that new statutory duty or duties could be introduced.

Q25. When should new statutory duties, and the associated reforms necessary for local authorities to deliver on those duties, be introduced?

With just five years remaining until 2030 and the government's ambitious clean energy mission and growth and devolution agenda underway, now is the critical moment to introduce new statutory duties. These should be implemented through a phased approach aligned with wider reforms to funding, powers, and capacity to ensure local authorities are equipped to succeed rather than burdened with unfunded mandates.

The government must urgently take steps to remove underlying barriers to climate action. This includes reforming local government finance, providing multi-year funding settlements, and establishing clear national-local accountability frameworks. The current legislative and reform opportunities provide ample scope to embed statutory duties without delay.

Statutory duties should be introduced once:

- Local authorities have the powers and resources needed to act;
- National and regional coordination mechanisms are in place;
- Guidance and support structures are developed;
- Capacity-building and training opportunities have been scaled.

This sequencing will enable statutory duties to drive ambition, consistency, and impact—rather than create additional pressure on already overstretched councils.

If its multiple duties then in a streamlined manner and not all at once. Introduced after the plan for funding, resourcing and supportive frameworks are ready. Get consultation from relevant stakeholders and their buy-in. Build trust in the process and ensure support for positive outcomes.

Q26. What does local government need to help lead local climate action for mitigation? Please rank the following in order of importance

- Certainty of government funding
- Powers
- Statutory duty
- Resources
- Wider policy certainty
- Flexibility
- Access to technical support
- Access to workforce
- Data

Q27. What does local government need to help lead local climate action for adaptation and resilience? Please rank the following in order of importance

- Certainty of government funding
- Statutory duty
- Access to technical support
- Data
- Powers
- Resources
- Wider policy certainty
- Flexibility
- Access to workforce

Q28. What does local government need to help lead local climate action for nature restoration? Please rank the following in order of importance

- Certainty of government funding
- Statutory duty
- Access to technical support
- Data
- Powers
- Resources
- Wider policy certainty
- Flexibility
- Access to workforce